



ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A multi-stakeholder perspective on the state of citizen involvement and participation in Germany, and implications for international cooperation

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Abstract: Public participation is highly sensitive to context. In Germany, numerous local frameworks exist, but institutionalization on the national level is yet to be achieved. Key considerations surrounding citizen participation include the design and implementation of processes as well as enabling conditions related to politics and culture. Based on expert interviews with stakeholders from government, administration, civil society and academia in Germany, this paper develops a set of success factors for citizen participation. In addition, it addresses the question

if such conclusions might provide input for international cooperation. A second set of interviews, conducted with GIZ staff in six African countries, offers briefings on regional characteristics of citizen participation and the involvement of civil society organizations. Matching both threads of analysis shows that political ownership, accountability, transparency, communication and a sense of community are among the key indicators for assessing citizen participation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Public participation has become a crucial factor in public planning and decision making processes to consult with citizens and stakeholders. This is a global trend, and Germany is no exception. Modes of citizen participation are supposed to make planning and political decision making processes transparent for citizens, involve them in order to consider their interests and improve plans. Through participation, the way decisions are made should receive a higher degree of legitimacy¹. As a result, planning should be designed in such a way that conflicts can be dealt with at an early stage and resolved before implementation.

However, this is easier said than done. Even the question as to when one speaks of participation and when, in turn, a process is rather considered to facilitate information and communication, cannot be answered conclusively and is assessed differently by the various stakeholder groups.

Nevertheless, more and more actors are recognizing the potential and necessity of participation processes and citizens are demanding them more and more confidently. Therefore, the diverse participation practice in Germany offers a rich pool of learnings. Although these have arisen in a specific cultural context and cannot simply be transferred to other contexts, we try to abstract them to draw generalizable learnings from them. These learnings can then serve as a basis for discussing and designing participation processes in other political, administrative and social contexts.

In the following, the existing status quo of citizen participation in Germany will be presented. The participation landscape in Germany consists of a diverse mixture of formal participation requirements and informal participation opportunities. Public and private actors use these to very different extents and with very different feedback from the participants. In a second step, previous learnings and experiences will be abstracted to such an extent that they are as independent as possible of project and context. To this purpose, an analysis of the diverse literature on civic participation will be carried out. In addition to the relevant scientific literature, guidelines and handbooks are also included in the analysis. These results from theory and

past participation processes are enriched, mirrored and discussed in interviews with experts from the diverse participation landscape in Germany. Importance was given to covering the various stakeholder groups from science, administration, politics, business and civil society. Thus, different perspectives on citizen participation from different stakeholder groups shall become clear. In this way, hints and learnings are gained that have already been tested in practice. From the analysis of the status quo in Germany, the corresponding literature and the interviews, bundled recommendations for action are derived. They are assigned to different phases of participation. In a third step, the transferability of these German experiences will be discussed with GIZ project staff in order to jointly identify those aspects that are also relevant to development cooperation in the various partner countries. On the one hand, the specific context conditions that make a 1:1 transfer of the results impossible become clear. On the other hand, it is also possible to identify those challenges and solutions that are relevant across contexts.

Although there are enormous amounts of different methods and tools for such processes, they are addressed only roughly in this paper. This is due to the overall observation that it is still unclear which of these methods may be useful in which situations and under which circumstances. As a consequence, many stakeholders who wish to implement participation processes are prompted to conduct scoping exercises such as conducting research projects on matching substance and method, or establishing guidelines to determine which methods to use in certain scenarios.²

In this paper, however, methods are considered secondary. Rather, willingness, openness and commitment to participation on the part of all relevant actors are key. If this is the case, formats become secondary and can be developed much better from local conditions than from manuals. So the focus here is on the aspects that should and can be achieved in citizen participation in order to provide added value for all actors. In addition, the methods by which this can be achieved are manifold and have already been presented and discussed in various publications³.

1 Geißel, B. (2008). Wozu Demokratisierung der Demokratie? Kriterien zur Bewertung partizipativer Arrangements. In Vetter, A. (Ed.), *Erfolgsbedingungen lokaler Bürgerbeteiligung*, Wiesbaden, 29-48.

2 See e.g. Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI) (2014). *Handbuch für eine gute Bürgerbeteiligung*, Berlin. As for guideline processes, see, e.g., the case of Berlin: <https://www.stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/planen/leitlinien-buergerbeteiligung/>

3 Exemplifying the wide array of publications, see for academic accounts: Bherer, L./ Dufour, P./ Montambeault, F. (2016). The participatory democracy turn: an introduction. *Journal of Civil Society*, 12(3), 225-230; Fung, A. (2003). Recipes for public spheres: Eight institutional design choices and their consequences. *Journal of political philosophy*, 11(3), 338-367. Also, for compilations of modes of citizen participation, see e.g.: OECD (2009). *Focus on Citizens: Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services – OECD Studies on Public Engagement*. Paris; Nanz, P./ Fritsche, M. (2012). *Handbuch Bürgerbeteiligung. Verfahren und Akteure, Chancen und Grenzen*. Bonn; Sommer, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Kursbuch Bürgerbeteiligung #2*. Berlin.

So, in the following we try to answer three questions:

1. What is the status quo of citizen participation in Germany?
2. What lessons can be learned from the experiences in Germany?
3. What conclusions can be drawn from this for participation processes in other contexts?

This, too, is easier said than done. There is no set of criteria as to what a successful or effective participation process is. In the following, we will therefore only approach criteria that nevertheless have to be checked and adapted time and again for specific projects and contexts.

GLOSSARY

Citizen/civic participation:

Processes labelled citizen participation or civic participation explicitly refer to citizens as an important target group and as stakeholders in deliberations, collaborations and/or decision making (see “public participation”).

Civil Society Organization (CSO):

The term CSO is being used as a label for third-sector, non-governmental organizations who advocate for certain groups or causes and, in one way or another, collect and channel input from civil society vis-à-vis public administration or decision makers (see stakeholder communication). While such organizations may be rooted in, or closely linked to, social movements or citizens of a certain region, this is not always the case. The key characteristics which differentiates CSOs from grassroots movements is the level of organization.

Claimed participation:

A participatory process which was demanded by civil society and would not have taken place otherwise.

Collaboration:

While the term participation involves a wide range of modes of interaction, ranging from passive involvement of citizens as consumers of information all the way to an active role in the decision process (see “public participation”), collaboration more narrowly describes formats in which citizens play an active role. While they still might not be part of the formal decision-making (and in some cases they are), they actively contribute to the process and work together with public authorities.

Formal participation:

Legally prescribed forms of participation that are mandatory for certain projects in order to obtain authorization.

Informal participation:

All forms of participation that go beyond the formal forms. They can be carried out independently of formal requirements, but can also supplement them.

Invited participation:

All those forms of participation to which the project manager invites and which are consciously regarded as an offer.

Participation contract:

A participation contract does not refer to a formal written ruleset but rather to a mutual agreement of all parties involved on the What and How of the process. This should serve as a common basis for the process in order to define expectations, goals and the process together.

Participation dilemma:

At the beginning of planning, when the scope for decision-making is greatest, the interest of citizens is low. The further the project progresses, the less freedom there is to influence it, the greater is the demand for participation opportunities.

Project organizer:

Project organizers are all those who are responsible for the project in question. They can be the decision-makers, but also those who carry them out and implement measures. They can come from both the public and private sectors. In most cases, they try to implement a project, but can also take on a more neutral management function.

Public participation:

The term “public participation” is defined more broadly here than that of citizen/civic participation. Public participation includes the involvement of all actors who are not directly linked to the decision on a project. In addition to citizens, these can also be residents, organized groups, actors from the private sector, NGOs and other actors. Participation is not synonymous with co-determination, but can take place at various levels, starting with information.

Stakeholder participation:

Even though the population is also a stakeholder for the vast majority of projects, a more specific definition of the term should be used here. Stakeholder participation is understood here as distinct from public participation, since it is intended to address explicitly affected actors who, for example, have a special role due to their expertise, the degree to which they are affected, their social position or their position of power. Their influence on the project is thus much greater than that of an individual citizen. Due to the different requirements of the target group, stakeholder participation should take place in a separate process.

2. STATUS QUO OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN GERMANY

2.1 Political, legal and social significance of early public participation in Germany

After the experiences of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era, the young Federal Republic had great reservations about all forms of direct democracy and participation. Referendums, as the first Federal President Theodor Heuss once said, would produce a “reward for demagogues” (Prämie für Demagogen)⁴. Based on the historical experience, there were considerable doubts about the population’s ability to judge. Representative democracy appeared to be a sufficient means of involving the population in political and social processes. While there were significant improvements in the area of civil rights in the Federal Republic (e.g. until the 1960s, women did not enjoy the same rights as men), there was no progress in the area of participation⁵. It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall that there was a noticeable increase in participatory procedures in Germany. Citizens started to use their possibilities to participate and engage. Electing representatives was not sufficient anymore for many of them. With the reunification and accession of the East German states and constitutional reforms in the West German states, the opportunities for participation increased on the municipal and federal state level. Here, the constitutions consistently offer popular legislation as an alternative to parliamentary legislation⁶. However, the differences between the federal states is huge. This is not least because there is no central institution in Germany to bundle the various experiences and findings from the procedures.

At the national level, citizens in Germany can turn to the Petitions Committee of the Bundestag. If citizens see a problem which they think should be dealt with (differently) by politics, petitions can be submitted which, with

the appropriate quorum, can become a draft resolution for parliament. Participation procedures in infrastructure projects were finally anchored at national level, when Germany ratified the Aarhus Conventions in 2007. Each person is thus entitled to certain rights in the field of environmental protection. According to this, public participation is mandatory for certain infrastructure and industrial projects⁷. In the coalition agreement of the current government, an expert commission with the aim to link representative democracy with participation procedures is announced but has not yet been set up.

At state, regional and municipal level as well as in the private sector, informal participation procedures are often offered where they are not legally prescribed. This is due to the trend that citizens demand more participation and are willing to resist if they do not accept a project⁸. Resistance is happening through protests, but also the legal possibilities to sue against a project have increased. Especially for directly affected persons and environmental associations. These developments have led to a rethinking on the part of those responsible for projects. The awareness that contested projects in Germany cannot simply be pushed through from above is increasing in business and politics. Major national efforts, such as the energy system transformation, also benefit if their concrete design is decided on locally with the involvement of the population⁹. Public participation is regarded as a decisive element for generating acceptance and legitimacy as well as qualitative improvements in planning. A clear indication of this is, for example, the appointment of a State Councillor for Civil Society and Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg or the large number of guidelines for “good” public participation by political and economic actors^{10 11 12}.

4 Schmidt, M. (2010). *Demokratiethorien*, Wiesbaden, p. 349.

5 Merkel, W. (2011). *Volksabstimmungen – Illusion und Realität*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 44-45/2011, 47-55.

6 Weixner, B. (2006). *Direkte Demokratie in den Bundesländern*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 10/2006, 18-24.

7 Gesetz über die Öffentlichkeitsbeteiligung in Umweltangelegenheiten nach der EG-Richtlinie 2003/35/EG (Öffentlichkeitsbeteiligungsgesetz), §9.

8 Bertelsmann-Stiftung (Ed.) (2011). *Politik beleben, Bürger beteiligen, Charakteristika neuer Beteiligungsformen*.

9 Leggewie, C. (2013). *Neue Formen der Teilhabe am Beispiel der Zukunftskammern*. In: Töpfer, K./ Volkert, D./ Mans, U. (Eds.), *Verändern durch Wissen: Chancen und Herausforderungen demokratischer Beteiligung: von „Stuttgart 21“ bis zur Energiewende*. München, 41-51.

10 A detailed collection of guidelines of local actors can be found at: <https://www.netzwerk-buergerbeteiligung.de/kommunale-beteiligungs politik-gestalten/kommunale-leitlinien-buergerbeteiligung/sammlung-kommunale-leitlinien/>

11 As an example, at national level the Federal Environment Agency has published the “3x3 of good public participation in major projects” and the Ministry of Transport issued a “Handbook for good public participation”.

12 In the business sector, for example, there are “Guidelines of German Commercial Airports for Good Citizen Participation in Expansion Projects” issued by the Airport Association; the VDI 7000 guideline issued by the Association of German Engineers; or institutions such as the “DialogGesellschaft” think-tank, which “develops participation approaches for solving acceptance problems from the perspective of project sponsors”.

So, on the one hand, citizens are increasingly demanding to be involved in decisions and on the other hand, there is also a slow cultural change in business and politics. Many project organizers regard citizen participation no longer as a fundamental obstacle, but rather as an opportunity. Despite of this trend, citizen participation, however, has not yet established itself in all sectors and procedures in Germany. But politicians and the business community are increasingly realizing that large projects can hardly be realized if the population is not involved.

2.2 Formal and informal participation in Germany

Public participation in Germany is divided into formal and informal participation procedures. While law regulates formal participation processes, those responsible for a project can flexibly design informal processes. Informal participation processes therefore often offer more opportunities and go beyond the prescribed levels.

Formal participation procedures apply in building and planning law, while there are no comparable binding regulations for other areas. They are intended to inform and consult with citizens. The concrete design of a formal participation procedure depends on the relevant regulations. For example, whether it is a regional planning procedure (“Raumordnungsverfahren”) or an approval procedure (“Genehmigungsverfahren”). Depending on the type of procedure, there may be requirements as to when participation has to take place or who must be involved. In contrast to informal participation, formal participation offers legal certainty. The legal provisions are designed to define which minimum standards and requirements must be met for a project to be implemented. All specifications that go beyond this necessary measure must be created by informal processes.

For larger construction projects, the formal participation procedure requires that local residents must be informed and involved within the boundaries of clearly defined procedures¹³. Only then, can the project plans be specified and presented in a form ready for decision. In this phase, citizens can inspect and comment on the plans for four

weeks. Afterwards, the decision lies with the local council. Participants then can submit an objection through a petition (not in all federal states and they cannot question the project as such) or sue against the decision. Formal participation procedures are subject to some criticism and the opportunity for participation is hardly used by citizens¹⁴. This is mainly due to the lack of transparency and publicity of the planning processes, the incomprehensibility of the information and the lack of opportunities for dialogue and co-determination¹⁵.

Various experts have recently pointed out that citizens protesting projects which have already undergone formal approval procedures, must be accepted as a reality. Such approval procedures might be administratively adequate yet politically insufficient. The acceptance of large-scale infrastructure projects no longer results only from their formal legitimacy, but also from the response of the public concerned¹⁶. Informal participation procedures can achieve much more in terms of citizen participation. They often take place in the run-up to or during formal processes in order to promote exchange, clarify critical points at an early stage and make use of greater flexibility. They can start earlier, include more stakeholders, can be adjusted to the project-specific requirements and address problems that are not intended for formal participation. Thus, informal participation procedures as a supplement can support formal participation procedures¹⁷.

A current example of such an interlocking of procedures is the new construction of the A-40 Rhine bridge in Duisburg. Before the draft planning was completed, the project organizer involved the local population comprehensively. Early drafts were already discussed with the population at events and a preferred option was developed based on feedback from those involved. After comprehensive information on the preferred option, a workshop was organized to give interested citizens an opportunity to participate. Prior to submitting the planning documents to the approval authority, it was thus possible to present central aspects of the current planning, explain details, answer questions and obtain information from the public. So, when the formal participation procedure began, the population was already informed and has had extensive opportunities for informal participation. These opportunities went far beyond environmental protection, which would have been

13 Römmele, A./ Schober, H. (2013). *The Governance of Large-Scale Projects – Linking Citizens and the State*. Baden-Baden.

14 Universität Leipzig (2013). *Optionen moderner Bürgerbeteiligung bei Infrastrukturprojekten – Ableitungen für eine verbesserte Beteiligung auf Basis von Erfahrungen und Einstellungen von Bürgern, Kommunen und Unternehmen*.

15 Kamlage, J./ Richter, I./ Nanz, P. (2016). *An den Grenzen der Bürgerbeteiligung: Informelle dialogorientierte Bürgerbeteiligung im Netzausbau der Energiewende*. In: Holstenkamp, L.; Radtke, J. (Eds.): *Sammelband Energiewende und Partizipation – Transformationen von Gesellschaft und Technik*, Wiesbaden, 627 – 642.

16 RWE AG (2012). *Akzeptanz für Großprojekte – Eine Standortbestimmung über Chancen und Grenzen der Bürgerbeteiligung in Deutschland*.

17 Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) (2017). *Beteiligungsverfahren bei umweltrelevanten Vorhaben – Abschlussbericht*, Berlin.

the only topic in a strictly formal process. There would have been no room for questions from residents worried about noise, or from businesspeople whose employees would no longer have been able to use the bridge. Thus, if all issues relevant to the stakeholders are to be addressed, informal procedures need to be added. All steps of the formal participation procedure were still carried out, but also supplemented by the informal procedure.

Cases such as this show that project organizers recognize the importance of participation processes and go beyond what is legally required in order to increase acceptance for their projects, reduce complaints and objections and obtain knowledge from the population. Effective early public participation can only be achieved by interlinking formal with informal procedures.

2.3 Public Participation and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

This is even more the case as oftentimes claims and requirements for participation go beyond legal frameworks and may even relate to international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In such cases, it is more crucial to inform citizens about options to participate and the issues at stake as well as about limitations of the impact of participation. Experience from Germany shows that the 17 SDGs, and even more so the related 169 targets, are hard to grasp for experts as well as citizens. This might be considered a contradiction in itself, as the SDGs also promote accessibility and active involvement of citizens. Promising initiatives for the involvement of citizens are conducted at the city level where local living conditions may serve as a framework for reference.¹⁸ This notwithstanding, progress in regard to sustainable development as such, and the goals and targets established in the SDG framework, is assessed in very different ways by different stakeholders.¹⁹

Public participation regarding the SDGs, thus, exemplifies key issues of participation processes as well as additional challenges that derive from attempts to relate an international framework to everyday life.

First of all, awareness is key, and it is the very challenge the SDGs face as both, a means and an ends. For the most part, the SDGs describe an agenda rather than pre-defined targets. However, in order to translate the meaning and importance of the SDGs to citizens, both components – the process and its goals – need to be made visible. In doing so, a very common problem in public participation arises: how to make sure that people are aware of possible scenarios and their implications while, at the same time, ensure that the process is truly open in terms of both, input and output?

Secondly, one key question is how to involve citizens, as well as civil society, in the process, and how to make sure, that the people and organizations involved represent (and speak for) the wider public. It has been argued by many that local governance needs to provide a framework for participation so respective procedures can be implemented in a meaningful way.²⁰ Hence, a line of action regarding SDGs is to bring deliberations to the local level and, for example, conduct on-site events. At the same time however, given the global perspective of the SDGs, connectedness and variety of input are considered essential, which is why online tools also play an important role.

Thirdly, and closely connected to the first two issues mentioned, another main challenge is to generate impact through public participation and, at best, even set up a system to follow-up on action plans and evaluate outcomes. This, again, might require a different set of expertise and, thus, a different format of interaction. Yet still, showcasing effects of SDG-related participation will bolster both, the process itself as well as the causes connected to the SDGs.

These three issues – awareness, mode and impact – represent key questions to public participation, and deliberations regarding the SDGs face extra challenges as they aim to bring an international framework to life in local contexts. In Germany, thus, various modes of participation – reaching from online to on-site, and from information to interaction, and involving different levels of government as well as a wide range of agencies and organizations – are part of efforts to make the SDGs a public cause.²¹

18 Schwegmann, C. (2017): How do we involve the public in implementing the SDGs? This German initiative is looking to cities. <http://archive.citiscopes.org/commentary/2017/01/how-do-we-involve-public-implementing-sdgs>

19 See <https://www.2030-watch.de/>

20 Baiocchi, G./ Heller, P./ Silva, M. K./ Silva, M. (2011). Bootstrapping democracy: Transforming local governance and civil society in Brazil. Stanford University Press.

21 Federal Government (2018): German Sustainable Development Strategy, 2018 update. Berlin.

3. DIMENSIONS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation can look very differently in practice. It therefore makes sense to encounter the subject at a high level of abstraction when dealing with it. In this way, public participation can be viewed independently of concrete formats, contexts and cases. In the following we approach civic participation from the beginning of such a process. This paper first and foremost addresses participatory projects initiated by public institutions or organized groups (“invited participation”). After all, the awareness on behalf of organizations and institutions for including citizens early on in the design and planning of certain measures is what constitutes the format of early public participation.²² But there is also a vast amount of participation which roots in citizens’ demand (“claimed participation”)²³ and which would not exist, if citizens would not increasingly self-confidently demand participation rights.

The participants – which may include citizens as well as representatives from the public and private sector as well as civil society groups and academia – also have various goals and expectations of such a process. They use it to polarize and mobilize for their own purposes, they seek for sharing their knowledge and influencing the process at different stages accordingly, and they might even want to bring a project to a complete halt. And, of course, oftentimes participants might simply want to inform themselves and learn. On the other hand, those who champion a given issue and bear responsibility for the project to succeed generally, can expect various outcomes from a participation process: higher acceptance, legitimacy, the acquisition of local knowledge and expertise and/or the acceleration of the project, for example by reducing complaints.

3.1 Functions of public participation

The different expectations, promises and ideals associated with civic participation can be abstracted into four different functions. There is the democratic function of citizen participation. It increases the legitimacy of decisions, makes processes transparent for citizens and increases their democratic participation. Secondly, there is a social function. Participation strengthens the social cohesion of communities. The acceptance of decisions can be increased, and the participants develop social compe-

tences. Depending on the project, economic functions of participation may also become relevant. If it is possible to identify conflicts at an early stage and solve them in such a way that long legal disputes are not necessary, projects can be carried out faster than without a participation process. There is also an empowerment function which can be described as self-efficacy. The participants experience themselves as a relevant part of society. They become audible and empowered with regard to a problem.

Accordingly, Webler and Tuler²⁴ created a matrix of criteria, in which they distinguish between four different participation perspectives. In this way, they take account of the many objectives that can be achieved with public participation. The different perspectives highlight different possible functions without completely ignoring the other functions. They are to be understood as ideal types that are not mutually exclusive in practice and can also occur in combination with each other.

Knowledge-based stakeholder consultation: Here, participation is very problem-oriented and aims at obtaining the information needed to solve the problem. The participants have no direct influence on the decision.

Egalitarian Approach: No prominent position of the project manager in relation to the participants. Everything that increases the level of participation has a high priority. The final decision moves into the background in favor of participation.

Efficient cooperation: Participants can contribute their own ideas, but only act as “advisors” to those responsible for the project and have no decision-making authority.

Informed co-operation: The project manager tries to establish a particularly high degree of trust among the participants and therefore communicates openly and transparently with them.

While knowledge-based stakeholder consultation and efficient cooperation are particularly relevant for the economic function, the egalitarian approach and informed cooperation can be assigned to the social, democratic and empowering function. It is not so much about choosing a function and/or perspective, since they can all be thought

22 Webler, T. (1999). The craft and theory of public participation: a dialectical process. *Journal of Risk Research*, 2(1), 55-71.

23 Gaventa, J. (2004). Towards Participatory Local Governance: Assessing the Transformative Possibilities. In Hickey, S., and Mohan, G. (Eds.) “Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation”, London, 25-41.

24 Webler, T./ Tuler, S. (2006). Four Perspectives on Public Participation Process in Environmental assessment and Decision Making. Combined Results from 10 Case Studies. *The Policy Studies Journal*, 34(4), 699-722.

together. But they illustrate the different possibilities of public participation. In addition, each project has its own individual hurdles which influence the outcome of the procedure: The extent of the conflict surrounding an issue influences the process as much as the resources available. How much time can one allow for participation? How difficult is it to reach the target group? Can online and offline procedures be meaningfully combined with each other? How complex is the topic? Is one-off participation sufficient, or should the participants be activated several times? These are just some of the questions, which can become relevant, before the beginning of a participatory process.

3.2 Three crucial questions for participation process design

But as different as participation processes may be, **three fundamental questions** regarding the setup of the process must be clarified in advance: **when, how and who?** These are key features which will be reflected in many further decisions which need to be taken along the way. Decisions on the When, How and who create path dependencies and, thus, determine the further course of the procedure. Although slight adjustments are possible in the course of the procedure, fundamental changes are difficult to implement in practice. These decisions must therefore always be made with specific reference to the context and the project- and at the same time determine large parts of the entire participation process. The large number of guidelines issued by a wide variety of actors can be partly explained by the fact that they all work under different conditions and therefore pursue their own approaches.

There are also distinct patterns of motivation and expectation of initiators of participation processes such as public institutions²⁵ and addressees such as citizens and grass-roots organizations.²⁶ In most cases, these motivations and expectations are a given and therefore are one determining factor for the development of the participation process.

The design of the participation process is one of the key decisions to make before such a process.²⁷ It needs to take into account the variety of actors and groups involved as well as their differences in terms of goals, organization and leverage. If the process is well-designed and pays attention to the specifics of the issue at hand, the participation

procedure itself will gain legitimacy. What is important here is that all parties involved buy into the process and form a “participation contract”, i.e. a mutual agreement on how to interact and on which grounds, and how to apply the chosen mode of participation.

The most obvious but also the most important aspect is the context in which a participation process takes place. Here, one is dependent on the institutional framework. Which requirements and regulations are in place, which resources are provided, but also questions about who supports such a process. In the same way, political interests differ in every participation process. Are there critics who want to stop the project completely, how great is the willingness of the relevant actors to compromise? How much scope for participation is available, what is the time frame, who is involved?

When to start participation?

Participation processes can be applied in all phases of a public planning and implementation process. In the design phase of the respective project, proposals from various actors can be collected via participation processes. In the planning phase, the developed goals can be discussed in concrete terms and developed. In the implementation phase, stakeholders can be involved in the process and/or informed about the current status. In the end, the results achieved can be evaluated in an evaluation phase and insights gained for future procedures. While these features do present choices for participation, the legal dimension might also determine if and when to introduce participation. Ideally, the participation process starts as early as possible and continues through all project phases. However, the initiation of participation is still possible at a later stage or can only be applied in certain phases.

Which level of involvement in a participation process?

Depending on the objective of the participation process, different levels of the so-called participation ladder can be applied. The different stages enable the participants to (1) inform themselves about a certain project, (2) express their opinion on certain points, (3) contribute their own ideas or (4) be able to make binding co-decisions on a particular issue. The different levels are hierarchically structured. Without stages 1-3, stage 4 is not possible. The lowest stage, “informing”, is therefore necessary for all other stages. However, the assessment of the quality of

25 Van der Wal, Z. (2017). *The 21st Century Public Manager. Challenges, People and Strategies*. London.

26 Hanson, R. (2018). Deepening Distrust: Why Participatory Experiments Are Not Always Good for Democracy. *The Sociological Quarterly* 59(1), 145–67.

27 Fung, A. (2015). Putting the Public Back into Governance: The Challenges of Citizen Participation and Its Future. *Public Administration Review* 75(4), 513–22.

a participation format depends on the specific case and not generally on the level of participation. You can create an excellent participation process at the lowest level, but you can also create a terrible participation process at the highest level. The participation ladder therefore does not make it possible to make a statement as to whether one participation procedure is better or worse than another one is. Nevertheless, this aspect often represents a source of conflict. While citizens want to be involved in decisions as comprehensively and concretely as possible, those responsible for projects often, strive for a lower degree of participation. This applies particularly to the discussion about whether a project is necessary at all. In principle, however, it can be said that those actors who are not prepared to leave their starting position should not participate in participation procedures. A participation process makes no sense without a fundamental willingness to approach conflicting positions. This applies equally to actors from all groups. Only if there is room for maneuver from all sides is it possible to find a solution that ultimately provides a satisfactory solution for all actors.

Who should be included?

The question of mobilizing participants in participation processes is essential. The problem which often arises is the so-called “participation dilemma”: at the beginning of planning, when the scope for decision-making is greatest, the interest of citizens is low. The further the project progresses, the less freedom there is to influence it, the greater is the demand for participation opportunities. It is therefore important for the project organizers to activate their target groups as early as possible and mobilize them actively. First, however, the question arises as to who should be involved.

Here, a distinction between two categories is useful. Either, the aim is to mobilize as many citizens and organizations as possible. Or, importance is given to specific target groups, who are of special interest for or carry special knowledge regarding the project. For example, residents are often of special importance when aiming at project legitimacy. However, if technical knowledge is needed, then local public stakeholders have specific expertise and specialized local knowledge. Additionally, it must always be borne in mind that stakeholders may change during a procedure. The further the project progresses, the more stakeholders will emerge who should also be involved in the process.

All these factors determine the design of the process format. It is not possible to develop a perfect participation tool, but it is always a matter of developing the format that best suits the existing conditions. Only by including all these aspects is it possible to define a process that fits the existing framework conditions. Ideally, the participation process begins before the format is chosen. In this way, the process design can take place together with the participants and a format can be found that best meets the various needs. Of course, this is not possible in all projects, but should always be kept in mind as an ideal case.

4. EVIDENCE FROM PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN GERMANY

This chapter provides information on how evidence on public participation in Germany was gathered in the context of this study. Moreover, key outcomes of the interviews conducted will be showcased. Building on that, the next chapter will derive key success factors of public participation which are rooted in the original work conducted under the framework of this study.

4.1 Methodology

Participation is a process in which different opinions and actors meet, and results are often not foreseeable. Participation is therefore an iterative learning process that must be adapted to changing conditions and target groups. For some of them, participation relates to the promise of democratization and aims at mobilizing people and making them aware of issues, which either do or should matter to them in a very direct manner. We have therefore conducted interviews with actors from all areas of the “participation landscape” in Germany, including government and administration, civil society and academia, and have integrated as many relevant organizational levels as possible. Hence, the set, which followed case-by-case selection and does not claim representation of any sort, is supposed to present a comprehensive picture of the participation landscape in Germany.

Given the varieties of modes of interaction and of stakeholders, as well as respective interests, involved, it is sure difficult to derive generalized learnings and assess the success of a procedure. Moreover, it is usually not comprehensible afterwards whether the planning was qualitatively improved by the participation. A more manageable criterion is the satisfaction of the organizers and the participants with the procedure, which, however, is hardly ever ascertained and difficult to generalize. Depending on the participants, an exchange of positions and meeting at eye level can already be a success, because it broadens the perspectives of all actors.

Hence this study employs a framework for interviews which was informed by research and comprehensive literature analysis on success factors²⁸ as well as considerations regarding the scope and aims of the study itself.

Table 2: Scope of interview questions

- **culture of participation**
- **frameworks, guidelines and scoping**
- **actors, institutions, interest groups, sponsors**
- **role(s) of citizens and civil society**
- **mobilization and inclusion strategies**
- **formal and informal participation, incl. specifics of policy areas**
- **evaluation and learning**
- **the value of crises for progress**

Table 1: List of German interview partners

- **Parliament (national)**
 - **German Bundestag: Petitions Committee**
 - **German Bundestag: SPD Working Group on Democracy**
- **Public Administration (regional and local)**
 - **Land Baden-Württemberg: Office of State Minister on Civil Society and Participation**
 - **Land Berlin: Senate Administration for Urban Development: Unit on Participation**
 - **Land Berlin: Senate Administration for Urban Development: Unit on Urban Development and Housing**
 - **Administrative Department Berlin-Lichtenberg: Unit on Public Participation**
- **Civil Society and think-tanks (national and local)**
 - **Berlin Institute for Participation**
 - **Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies**
 - **Technical University Darmstadt: Darmstadt Citizen Panel**
 - **100% Tempelhof e.V.**

28 Hartje, V./ Muro, M./ Klaphake, A./ Scheumann, W./ Fisahn, A./ Ober, I./ Pile, K. (2006). Pilothafte Ermittlung und Analyse von Zielgruppen für die Information und Anhörung nach Art. 14 der EG Wasserrahmenrichtlinie in einer Flussgebietseinheit. Umweltbundesamt.

4.2 Key messages

In order to summarize key messages from the interviews conducted, we employ a framework of public participation called the “democracy cube”.²⁹ This model combines three dimensions describing characteristics and qualities of participative arrangements:

1. Authority and Power of a process: do participants decide or collaborate in a given process, or is the goal rather to inform the audience?
2. Communication and decision mode: do participants listen in, or are they asked to provide expertise?
3. Participants: does the process involve a very specific set of participants, defined, e.g. through their level of expertise, or is it targeted toward the general public?

Responses given by interviewees are presented along these dimensions. The lists below, provide significant and recurring themes regarding the dimensions mentioned. Key words are presented in an alphabetical order, so the order of the list does not reflect the importance or frequency of the aspects mentioned.

Authority and power

With regard to authority and power, interviewees referred to a lot of key features covering the whole range from information to (co-)decision. Among other things, they stressed the importance of:

- Accountability: public participation as a means for citizens to exert democratic control
- Budget transparency: knowing about financial limitations of a given project supports expectation management
- Formalization: foster clear mutual understanding of proceedings and ways, as well as limitations, for everybody involved to contribute to the process
- Information: information may be an end of a process, or a means; if the latter is the case, informing participants, and granting continuous access to information sources may help level the playing field
- Openness: even though most participatory processes relate to predetermined projects, authorities should be open to not only discussing the “how?”, but also the “if?” of a project.

- Participation contract: a mutual agreement on how the process is being conducted enables all parties involved to contribute to the process in the best possible way
- Path-dependency: the impact of decisions made prior to the process needs should be acknowledged and taken into account when scoping the process
- Regulations: public administration requires a clear regulatory framework so they can support the process at hand and provide information and resource to the parties involved
- Transparency: keeping formal and informal restrictions of a process in mind, it is all the more important to be transparent about the scope of a process.

Communication and decision mode

When discussing the role and input citizens and civil society may have in a given project, interviewees pointed out that there are key elements to consider at every level of interaction:

- Authenticity: participation brings together plans set up by authorities and input by citizens; to facilitate for deliberation, perspectives should be shared openly and technical language should be avoided
- Communication: communication is a means as well as an end in itself, and should always be conducted thoroughly
- Credibility: public participation oftentimes adds legitimacy to a process; to do so, however, it is essential that all parties involved act credibly and build trust among each other
- Culture of participation: regarding communication and decision mode, the term refers to the way interaction takes place within the process, and calls for mutual understanding and respect
- Expertise: citizens certainly bring expertise to a participatory process, and this should be acknowledged and taken into consideration adequately
- Feedback: the decision mode of a given process notwithstanding, each process should offer channels for participants to provide feedback; establishing a feedback culture may be understood as a soft form of accountability and, thus, is essential to a process

29 Fung, A. (2015). Putting the Public Back into Governance: The Challenges of Citizen Participation and Its Future. *Public Administration Review* 75(4), 513-522.

- Matching mode and purpose: participatory processes may employ many different modes of interaction ranging from on-site events to online deliberation; choosing adequate modes is essential since the mode and purpose of deliberation are closely linked
- Participation contract: see above, also essential in terms of the role of citizens and other stakeholders
- Political ownership: while public participation may contribute to a given process on a very large scale, politics should still take ownership – and, thus, accountability – of a process, and not outsource responsibility to citizens
- Scoping: the practice of designing a process in terms of goals, expectations and forms of participation is key to the success of the process
- Sense of achievement: each party involved, including those who are considered facilitators (including public administration), should be given the opportunity to feel rewarded for their contributions
- Sense of self-efficacy: participants may contribute to the common good and may benefit personally from the experience; this notwithstanding it is of greatest importance to recognize their contributions; upsetting participants through non-responsiveness may lead to frustration, which may put the process itself in question.

Participants

While some participatory processes are targeted rather narrowly to certain groups, others are designed to be open to the general public. With regard to involving experts as well as citizens, the interviewees note:

- Accessibility: it is essential to ensure physical accessibility and provide support if needed
- Culture of participation: with regard to participants, “culture” refers to the context of the democratic system which values participation and, following that, to the question of the significance of public participation
- Diversity and inclusion: participatory processes without provisions for participant selection oftentimes do not represent the general population targeted, and issues of diversity and inclusion should thus be taken into consideration when selecting participants as well as modes of interaction
- Education: this refers to prior formal education of participants as well as to the fact that participating may be an educative experience for itself
- Representation: representation may take on many forms and is not always related to the statistical representation of a given population; however, as long as representation of any kind is built into the process, maintaining opportunities for representatives is essential

5. SUCCESS FACTORS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESSES

On the basis of the analysis of the literature and the evaluation of the interviews with actors from Germany, we suggest that the following factors can be used for orientation. They can help to decide which features are most important and how a process should be designed to meet these requirements.

Depending on the project, oftentimes not all identified requirements and factors can be met. For example, the scope for participation might be limited or certain information is subject to confidentiality. The success factors for public participation identified here therefore describe an ideal process that cannot always be achieved, but should be approximated.

5.1 Pre-Participation

Participation Culture I: There are two layers to the complex issue of cultural context in participation. Firstly, participation culture is referred to as the overarching framework in which interaction in a society takes place. Many interview partners acknowledged that cultural habits as well as fundamental orientations of society can lead to citizens being more or less prone to actively participate. This includes questions of tradition of participation and according experiences as well as the issue of education addressing issues of democracy and citizenship.

Participation Culture II: In addition, one of the most important prerequisites described by all interviewees is a shared participation culture between participants and decision-makers. This requires efforts on both sides. Without the will for mutual exchange and cooperation participation makes no sense. This willingness must be present in advance. If it does not exist, any participation process, no matter how well designed, is doomed to failure. A culture of participation cannot be created by formats, but has to be developed politically.

The participants must become aware of where participation is offered, how they can participate and, above all, that they are a relevant voice in this process. Citizens cannot simply be expected to be willing to participate. As rational individuals, they require personal incentives to participate, and these incentives may root in knowing about potential impacts such processes might have. Especially when such formats are relatively new, those who are supposed to participate must also learn their new role. Depending on existing experience with public participation, it is therefore not sufficient to simply provide information on the project in question. Then basic information on the significance and aims of participation formats must also be provided.

Citizens need to get used to their new role and, if necessary, be introduced to it. This role also includes realistic expectation management. Participation does not mean that decision-making power is simply transferred, but that decisions are sought together. Therefore, there must also be a fundamental willingness on the part of those involved to accept results that do not correspond to their own ideal solution.

For decision-makers it is essential to accept that participation is not exclusively a technical decision, but a political one. In addition to the willingness to open scope for participatory decision-making, they must also be part of the process themselves and not completely outsource it to other actors. Those who engage in such a participatory process must, to a certain extent, see participation as a value in itself, in order to have the necessary openness to the results.

Institutional framework: Decision-makers and stakeholders benefit greatly when there is an institutional framework. These are not the legal requirements that we find, for example, in formal participation in Germany, but specific guidelines set by a municipality, a city or a region itself. In order to obtain as much legitimacy as possible, the guidelines should be jointly developed in a participation process. Such guidelines define what is meant by public participation and which goals and requirements are expected of oneself. They offer orientation to all actors in the process and serve as a common basis to fall back on. Based on them project-specific framework conditions can be developed. Ideally, the surrounding institutional framework serves as a basis on which a so-called “participation contract” (s.below) can be developed together with the participants.

Diversity and inclusion: similar to the considerations regarding culture of participation, the issue of diversity and inclusiveness has different layers. Acknowledging that distinctions are difficult to draw, we refer to diversity especially in the sense of being aware of diverse backgrounds, orientations and opinions in a given constituency. Interview partners emphasized that diversity is important to recognize even if, ultimately, a participatory design is chosen which is not primarily interested in representation of constituents. At least, openness and accessibility of a process needs to be ensured, and a potential lack of certain perspectives in a given group of participants should not go unnoticed. Complementing such considerations is the issue of inclusiveness within a format which, e.g., might refer to balancing certain predominant patterns of interaction among the group (see below).

Timing: All interview partners agreed on the question of the right time to participate. The earlier you start, the better. The decisive question is rather what should already be available at the beginning. While without concrete plans one often encounters a lack of understanding among those involved because there is no basis for discussion, existing plans can lead to frustration because the impression is created that everything is already set in stone. So, the public must be involved at a time when there is still room for development. The earlier participation begins, the greater the scope for adjustment.

Interviewees often mentioned, that decision-makers are also considering involving citizens more in the question „if” a project should be implemented³⁰ especially when it comes to projects in the public sector. The sooner the decision-makers and the parties concerned sit opposite each other, the more transparent the procedure and the decision become for the parties concerned³¹. The experience of interview partners who are intensively involved in the evaluation of participation procedures shows that participatory procedures cannot generate acceptance for projects that have already been decided, but often achieve the opposite effect. The procedures must therefore begin as early as possible so that there is still room for maneuver, at least in some areas. If there is nothing to decide, there is nothing to participate in.

Scoping: In order to make the process useful, it is essential to carry out scoping in advance. There is no project for which there are no opinions in advance. The different interests can be determined in advance in order to draw conclusions for the further process and its design. If this succeeds well, the participation process can also be used to resolve conflicts as early as possible, before fronts harden or only a court case seems possible.

Resources: scoping efforts also relate to the question of resources, and cost-benefit considerations respectively. Participation procedures require resources -as well in persons, as in money and time. They must be equipped with at least enough resources to ensure that the procedure can run without errors. In addition, resources may also be necessary to provide incentives for participants to participate or to engage mediators.

5.2 Participation

A **“participation contract”**: building on the issue of participation culture within a process, the term participation contract does not refer to a formal written ruleset but rather to a mutual agreement of all parties involved on the What and How of the process. This should serve as a common basis for the process in order to define expectations, goals and the process together. Obligations can be created that are both part of the expectation management, but also serve to mobilize participants and avoid frustration. Various interviewees have described the ideal approach in such a way that the participation process is also subject of participation. That it is not the project organizer who determines the thematic focal points and methods alone, but that all this is worked out together with the participants and bindingly determined at the beginning of the project-specific participation. This also increases the legitimacy of the process, since the process as such is no longer contestable. While this can be based on guidelines, the essence is a notion of self-efficacy in a given process. Citizens quickly notice when participation is only a facade that consolidates existing power structures, so it is key to establish a partnership among everybody involved even though this might lead to uncomfortable fundamental questions about not only the “How?”, but also the “If?” of a given project proposal.

In this regard, a democratic approach in the very sense of the word might even be used to prevent issues from being politically instrumentalized by certain interest groups by directly putting the issue to citizens. In that sense, participation as raising awareness among demographics affected might apply a public management frame rather than a notion of pre-negotiated politics to the process. This, in turn, relates to the idea of generating acceptance among citizens and stakeholder groups.

In a similar way, participation might just as well offer ways to use it as a tool to stop projects from happening. Here, again, a case can be made for limiting options to further pursue a project through either invoking a democratic, all-encompassing process or pointing out constraints in a pragmatic, de-politicized manner rooted in administrative rather than political questions. Irrespective of the goals that are pursued with participation, it highlights the participants’ own ability to act in shaping their environment and closes the gap between decision-makers and participants. Social cohesion across differences is also much more likely in participatory processes than in decisions taken solely by politicians. Therefore, interviewees also noted that experi-

30 For example, the comprehensive participation in the adoption of the Federal Transport Infrastructure Plan of the Ministry of Transport (“Bundesverkehrswegeplan”), which was already discussed in 2012 in the context of a handbook of the Ministry.

31 Benighaus, C./ Wachinger, G./ Renn, O. (2016). Bürgerbeteiligung: Konzepte und Lösungswege für die Praxis, Frankfurt am Main.

encing self-efficacy, in the sense that one notices that one's own ideas, concerns and remarks have been acknowledged and dealt with, is more important than the end result of a process. Those who experience such self-efficacy are much more likely to be able to accept a result that is not congruent with their actual ideas. This is the best way to avoid frustration on the part of those involved.

Activation and mobilization: There is agreement among the interview partners on the importance of mobilizing participants. The offer of a participation is not enough to activate participants. But one must prevent the so-called participation dilemma. Because it is often the case that there is hardly any interest at the beginning of a process. The further the process progresses, the greater the interest, but at the same time the scope for participation decreases. Therefore, it requires an active approach that shows why the project in question is relevant. Participation processes mostly become interesting for citizens when they are personally affected by them. However, this involvement is often not directly apparent, which is why activation by the project responsible is necessary. In Germany, however, activation often happens late and through channels that are only used by a small part of the population³². Experience from various participation processes has shown that citizens who must sacrifice their leisure time for such processes are particularly willing to do so if they see that they can at least partly influence the project and achieve changes. In contrast to those responsible for the project, it is usually the improvement of the participants' own life situation that is decisive for them to participate in such processes. So, the processes must be designed in such a way that it is interesting to take part in them.

Participant selection: As far as the selection of participants is concerned, the experiences of the interview partners differ considerably. This is not least due to the great variance between the projects they are involved with. While some want to activate certain stakeholders as knowledge carriers or because they identified them as highly relevant for the project, others want to achieve the most representative mix possible.

Different mobilization measures are recommended to activate the different target groups. It is important to contact the specific groups, where they move in their everyday life. In addition, a general civic participation should be methodically separated from the participation of very specific stakeholders. It is important to adapt the participation formats to the corresponding target groups, as they differ not only in their interests, but also in their knowledge base, degree of professionalization and expertise. In order to meet all demands and expectations and still be able to conduct a dialogue at eye level, it can make sense to separate the processes from each other.

Inclusiveness: All participating perspectives and interests are to be involved and treated equally for a procedure to meet the criterion of fairness. Inequalities are based on different characteristics like political, resources, technical (power to know how to get things done), epistemological (power to decide which knowledge is acceptable) and gender^{33,34}. So from a democracy-theoretical perspective, the increase in participation processes cannot be viewed positively without reservations. It can be seen, for example, that particularly educationally disadvantaged sections of the population stay away from the political participation process. Interviewees also reported that migrants are always a lower presented group in participation processes. This could lead to the dilemma, that a further increase in participation processes, could further consolidate the unequal participation of different groups. But only by bringing together different perspectives can solutions be created that were not recognizable in advance. In addition, the needs of the various actors become visible and thus improve the basis for decision-making³⁵. Furthermore, a high degree of representativeness is one of the central criteria for formal legitimation. Although every form of participation is to some extent exclusive due to the different resources of the participants, this can at least be counteracted by procedures with barriers to entry as low as possible. Nevertheless, participation procedures often reproduce the non-representation of certain groups³⁶. This can be counteracted in part by combining different recruitment modes. In addition to self-selection, in which anyone who wishes can participate, a lottery procedure can be used to

32 Schnelle, K./ Voigt, M. (2012). Energiewende und Bürgerbeteiligung: Öffentliche Akzeptanz von Infrastruktur-Projekten am Beispiel der „Thüringer Strombrücke“.

33 Cornwall, A. (2003). Whose voices? Whose choices? Reflections on gender and participatory development. In: *World Development* 31(8), 1325 – 1342.

34 White, D./ Rudy, A./ Gareau, B. (2015). *Environments, Natures and Social Theory. Towards a Critical Hybridity*. London.

35 Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) (2019). *Bundesrepublik 3.0. Ein Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung und Stärkung der parlamentarisch-repräsentativen Demokratie durch mehr Partizipation auf Bundesebene. Abschlussbericht*, Berlin.

36 Rohr, J./ Ehlert, H./ Möller, B./ Hörster, S./ Hoppe, M. (2017). *Impulse zur Bürgerbeteiligung vor allem unter Inklusionsaspekten – empirische Befragungen, dialogische Auswertungen, Synthese praxistauglicher Empfehlungen zu Beteiligungsprozessen*. Dessau-Roßlau.

shape the composition of the participants³⁷. But representativeness is a secondary criterion. Much more important than the fact that the people who participate unite all social groups is the fact that there is a dialogue between the elected representatives and the participants. Citizen participation cannot eliminate the under-representation of certain groups in political discourse. Decision-makers propose to further open formal procedures, for example to also enable citizens who are not directly affected by a project to participate³⁸. Then again, this also requires attention for certain patterns which participants might bring to the table. A participation process should have provisions in place to level the playing field and balance out tacit rules or patterns of conscious or unconscious biases which might, for example, occur in relation to gender (e.g. “male dominance” in discussions), age or language skills.

Transparency: There must be a common knowledge base on which discussion can take place. Information must be made available for those participating. It is important to ensure that the information is prepared in such a way that it can be understood with as little effort as possible. This begins with an explanation of the reasons and advantages of the project and continues to the presentation and justification of the planned implementation. If already known, the negative effects of a project must also be made available to citizens in a transparent manner, if already known. In the information society it is illusory to assume that critical points can be excluded. In the end, this only has the effect that trust is lastingly disturbed. The time and work that must be invested by project organizers in order to create a common knowledge base with those involved should not be underestimated.

Additionally, the possibilities and limits of participation must be clearly communicated. Citizens need to understand that their comments are seriously weighed and discussed in the decision-making process. The project organizer can show citizens that their arguments and opinions are taken seriously by a high transparency in the planning process. To avoid frustration, the outcome of a participation process must either be implemented, or decision makers must explain very precisely why it is not being implemented. But transparency must also have an external effect. Not everyone who is fundamentally interested in a project can and/or wants to get involved in a participation process. In addition, it is also possible to get involved in a process at a later point in time.

Choice of formats: Ideally, the participation process begins before the format is chosen. In this way, the process

design can take place together with the participants and a format can be found that best meets the various needs. Of course, this is not possible in all projects, but should always be kept in mind as an ideal case.

Even though all interviewees acknowledge that the actual choice of a specific format of participation is extremely context- and issue-sensitive, there was agreement on some guiding principles for making this choice. Primarily, it was pointed out that every issue probably has a “participation history”, meaning that one might find existing formats on site which can be used for information, recruitment, multiplication or dissemination. For example, a community might have a history of regular townhall meetings or informal, locally anchored forums organized by schools, business associations, civil society organizations, or indigenous communities. Such existing formats may offer options for citizens to participate and, thus, citizens might be aware that they might have a say in public matters. As existing formats oftentimes go along with a specific set of stakeholders already involved, they may be adapted or, at best, (further) co-developed. It was highlighted that a sense of self-efficacy among participants may be created through a wide range of activities, and that a participation process should remain open to incorporating such formats.

Moreover, it was pointed out that e-participation (s. below) may support processes but cannot carry them. Online interaction and social media might be great tool to gather and share information and to get input, but usually do not serve as a means of deliberation. That being said, it was also mentioned that continuous communication is key – even and especially in times of no participation on the ground. “Staying connected”, again, is a strength of all things “e-”.

Support by public administration: much thought was given by interviewees to enabling conditions of participation as well as its wider impact. The role of public administration was mentioned several times. Public administration might serve as a gatekeeper or as an enabler, and it was pointed out that constructive interaction with administration can make a real difference. This, however, requires formal rules and regulations for public administration which they can refer to so as to be able to respond and support processes. Otherwise, informal action on part of civil servants could mean touching upon legal gray areas, and they, hence, oftentimes refuse to take such risks. On part of political and administrative decision-makers, it is therefore advisable to have such regulation in place and also make necessary resources (financial, personnel,

37 Federal Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt) (2019). Bundesrepublik 3.0. Ein Beitrag zur Weiterentwicklung und Stärkung der parlamentarisch-repräsentativen Demokratie durch mehr Partizipation auf Bundesebene. Abschlussbericht, Berlin.

38 Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure (BMVI) (2014). Handbuch für eine gute Bürgerbeteiligung, Berlin.

networks) available. Involving administration may gain mutual understanding and trust. What is crucial in this regard, however, is that administration is given the opportunity for achievements. Ideally, public administration might consider supporting participatory processes as a win on their own part. It is worth noticing, however, that here, again, each case is different. A framework for enabling collaboration among administration and other stakeholders might work in one scenario but may fail in another. As a consequence, for example, one interview partner estimates that there are currently some 60 to 70 processes to establish local guidelines for participation ongoing in Germany. So, the transferability of practices clearly seems limited. But it also shows that additional efforts will be necessary in the future to intensify the exchange between the municipalities. Although transferability is limited, there are a number of experiences and learnings which might be beneficial to other municipalities and could even be integrated into these communities' own guideline processes.

Political ownership: the role of public administration was noted by many interview partners, and it was mentioned that strong involvement of (local) administration might even help to de-politicise certain issues and help those involved to focus on substance rather than political relations. However, it became very clear that political will is the main driver of each process, and that processes that lack political ownership are likely to not generate as much impact. After all, many decisions regarding specific projects require legislation to move ahead, and elected politicians are supposed to take ownership of the results of a participation process, and to be responsive and held accountable for implementation or non-implementation of results.

5.3 Post-Participation

Continuity: Continuous participation processes increase the trust and understanding of those involved. This also includes establishing a discursive and above all direct exchange between project organizers and participants, which cannot be guaranteed in formal procedures³⁹. Many processes lead to frustration and thus to decreasing mobilization, because the flow of information between the project organizer and those involved is interrupted. It therefore makes sense to establish a continuous exchange, throughout all phases of a procedure. Especially after the end of a public participation it is important to inform the

participants how their input was used in the further course of the project or to explain why it could not be used.

But continuity cannot only be thought of on a project-by-project basis. It emerged from the interviews that the more often the participants take part in such procedures, the better they can handle their role. The more established participation processes are, the more successful they usually are. This could be one of the reasons, why interviewees notice that many citizens are overwhelmed by their role as participants and must first get used to such a degree of decision-making power.

Evaluation: For a review of the goals and improvement of future processes, participation procedures are to be evaluated. There are no uniform methods for this. Although there are different analytical approaches to evaluating procedures, they are rarely used in practice and it is difficult to measure the impact of the procedure. It is therefore advisable to define objectives in advance together with the participants, which can then be reviewed. Jörg Sommer, founding director of the Berlin Institute for Participation, has established four dimensions that a process must fulfil in order to be considered successful⁴⁰:

1. Increasing the legitimacy of a procedure through the agreement of the parties concerned
2. Increasing acceptance through aiming for the highest possible level of participation and approval
3. Increasing the quality of decisions by integrating as many knowledge carriers as possible
4. Increasing emancipation through the transformation of citizens from the object of political elite action to the subject of political processes

In addition, there are individual criteria such as the willingness of all participants to approach each other and find compromises⁴¹. They can serve as an orientation aid for evaluation processes. However, many of the interviewees noted that a common process evaluation of project organizers and participants is far too seldom carried out. This is particularly valid in view of the extent to which future participation processes can benefit from this.

39 Schnelle, K./ Voigt, M. (2012). *Energiewende und Bürgerbeteiligung: Öffentliche Akzeptanz von Infrastruktur-Projekten am Beispiel der „Thüringer Strombrücke“*.

40 Sommer, J. (2015). *Die vier Dimensionen gelingender Bürgerbeteiligung*.

41 Beierle, T./ Cayford, J. (2002). *Democracy in Practice – Public Participation in Environmental Decisions*, London.

5.4 Addendum: online participation

The possibilities and limits of online participation have been discussed for a long time in Germany. As with other participation formats, the evaluation of online formats depends on the previously defined objectives. We have therefore also asked about experiences with online participation. In principle, it can be said that online formats have so far proved particularly useful as a means of informing and consulting citizens. The formats also differ considerably. They range from pure information provision to portals with opportunities for users to create their own content. Online participation combines the increased public interest and the desire of the population to be involved early and comprehensively in decision-making

processes with increasing digitalization. You can provide an infinite amount of information, which can be prepared in different ways for different target groups. Users can access this information anywhere, anytime. It is possible for users to give comments or ask questions to the project organizers round the clock and from any location. This increases the legitimacy of a participation procedure. Further advantages are the provision of a continuous stream of information to interested parties and, of course, the possibility of activating stakeholders or target groups who cannot be mobilized via offline formats. In order to activate as many people as possible, a dual approach is always recommended. Anyone wishing to involve certain groups, such as public interest organizations, should also do so via an offline approach.

Table 3: Summary of success factors in public participation by stage of the process

Pre-participation							
<i>Participation culture</i>	<i>Institutional framework</i>	<i>Diversity and inclusion</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Scoping</i>	<i>Resources</i>		
Cultural habits may promote participation; specific to a given process, culture may contribute to a shared understanding	Legitimate guidelines on public participation set by a municipality, a city or a region itself	Being aware of diverse backgrounds, orientations and opinions	Participation must begin when there is still room for development.	Awareness of different interests and audiences may inform process design	Sufficient resources to carry out the process; adjust if necessary		
Participation							
<i>Particip. contract</i>	<i>Activation, mobilization</i>	<i>Participant selection</i>	<i>Inclusiveness</i>	<i>Transparency</i>	<i>Choice of formats</i>	<i>Support by pub. admin</i>	<i>Political ownership</i>
A mutual agreement on the What and How of the process	Conduct target group specific activation	Chose selection mode according to goals and audiences	Equalities within the target group, as well as the group of participants, must be ensured	Make necessary information available and present it in an easily digestible way	Build on existing formats if possible; match process and purpose	Public Admin. requires formal rules and regulations to share information	Government needs to own process and be held accountable
Post-participation							
<i>Continuity</i>				<i>Evaluation</i>			
Continuous flow of information between the project responsible and those involved. Continuous application of public participation to develop a culture of participation				In order to create learnings, processes should be evaluated by project responsible and participants			
Online participation							
<i>Connection</i>				<i>Information</i>			
Online participation might be limited regarding representation, but offers a channel for many to provide input and take part; at best, features on online participation complement offline procedures				Key information to be made available online in an easily accessible manner			

On the other hand, there are also limits to online participation. It cannot substitute dialogue, but can serve as a useful complement. Especially in the case of projects which particularly concern a certain location, participation cannot be completely outsourced to the Internet. Deliberative effects can only be achieved through direct dialogue. So it is hardly possible online to generate commitment on the part of the users. For example, there can be no collaborative effects, because users often use an online forum exclusively to vent their anger without seeking a dialogue.

In the interviews with participation experts, it became clear that online participations can be used as optional addition that can support specific dimension, but must be linked to offline procedures. In addition, there are innovative online tools that are now also used at offline events, but originate from the online sector. Maps on which participants can directly place their notes and questions “on the spot” are very popular. For example, if residents of a city see a need to install a traffic light at a certain location, or if they notice broken devices on a playground, they can note this directly on a map. Other users can also see the comments and track the status of the process. This and similar offers

often enjoy great popularity due to their thematic openness and their low-threshold access. Such tools are also particularly suitable for large-scale infrastructure projects. For example, in the planning of power lines.

In Germany, a number of providers have now specialized in the technical implementation of online participations. This makes it relatively easy to set up an appropriate portal. As a result, it also happens that the same technical framework is used by the Chancellor as by Siemens, Stuttgart 21 or Airbus. Many stakeholders who regularly conduct online participation have also developed their own formats, the basic structure of which can easily be adapted to specific projects. This not only enables processes to be implemented promptly, but also reduces the amount of resources required.

Online participation procedures can be an extremely useful addition, even if they cannot replace offline processes. However, they still have specific aspects that have to be included in the planning. Particularly noteworthy are the changed discussion culture, the low level of commitment and the importance of design.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

There are clear limits to the transferability of conclusions from German cases to other countries and, more specifically, regarding the implications of the considerations presented above for international cooperation. However, research suggests that there are key features for participation valid for a variety of contexts.⁴² Hence, this section is dedicated to showcasing specific features and conditions for participation in selected African countries and determining recurring themes, also vis-à-vis experiences from Germany.

Case selection of African countries was conducted with representatives of GIZ, who identified countries which currently conduct efforts to set up and conduct public participation. Public participation, in this context, follows a broad definition (see glossary) and may include grassroots movements involving citizens, initiatives coordinated by civil society organizations (CSOs) as well as processes by local authorities targeted at including both citizens and advocacy groups. In all cases, interviews were conducted with GIZ representatives, and guidelines for semi-standardized interviews followed the list of success factors identified through research and evidence from Germany.

Table 4: List of African countries included in the study

- Republic of Benin
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Republic of South Africa
- Republic of Uganda
- Republic of Zambia
- Republic of Zimbabwe

Hence, interviews were designed to inquire about both, the specifics of each country context and the participation efforts ongoing in this country as well as the potential and limitations of applying success factors derived from one context to another.

Compared to the first set of interviews with German stakeholders, conversations with GIZ representatives put much more emphasis on the general context and environment in which civil society operates in a given country. Many countries within the sample are currently working on agendas to decentralize and, thus, develop institutions on the local level. Thus a first set of key takeaways from

conversations center around context. So, this study will use success factors identified in previous conversations as well as in research as a framework for input from African countries – following the same sequence of pre-participation, participation, post-participation and online participation, see table 3. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the context and conditions for participation deserve special attention as part of the “pre-participation” stage.

6.1 Pre-Participation

Participation Culture I: Experience from interviewees shows that in many cases a culture of participation is prevalent in society. In some cases, such cultural habits might be connected to traditional institutions whereas other cases have a culture of protest and raising voices. The opposite, however, is also quite visible in the case examples. Repression by government or a general fear thereof has significant impact of the readiness of people to voice concerns.

Participation Culture II: Most cases showed that the impact of participation may suffer if participants and authorities lack of a common culture and common understanding of what participation, and the processes at hand, entail. Hence, establishing a sense of valuing participation, especially among authorities, is crucial. However, as long as it is not in place, other forms and means of participation such as protest will be employed.

Institutional framework: Especially in countries where provisions as well as a general notion of public participation are further developed, transparency and accountability are considered essential. Also, in countries where participation is not yet institutionalized, authorities are called to do so by various stakeholders such as CSOs, business associations or the international community.

Diversity and inclusion: There are many components highly relevant to diversity and inclusion since many countries entail a variety of different groups. Also, social divides can be steep, e.g. regarding urban vis-à-vis rural areas. However, in many countries even likeminded groups do not always manage to coordinate and share information, in part due to the lack of channels to do so, so public participation is often-times carried more by special interests than by coalitions.

⁴² Carothers, T./ Brechenmacher, S. (2014). Accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusion: A new development consensus?, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Jones, S./ Kardan, A. (2013). A Framework for Analysing Participation in Development. Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

Timing: The matter of timing public participation, similar to other features discussed, should be defined more broadly in the context of listed sample countries. While in the German context “timing” refers to a given stage of a given project (“early public participation”), the sample shows that “opportunity” might be the better word. Due to the lack of institutionalization, oftentimes concrete developments such as protests against government action or causes of public concern such as security or health issues make for opportunities for citizens and CSOs to raise voices and, sometimes, shift from protest to participation.

Scoping: Scoping, also should be understood differently as it does not refer so much to matching a given set of tools for participation to a given context. Rather, scoping would relate to creating opportunities by bringing together different groups and stakeholders, coordinating among them and building on existing, oftentimes informal, institutions.

Resources: The issue of resources is often closely related to the existence of external, international donors. So, while funding might be available, sustainability might not be ensured, and self-sustainability much less so. However, case examples show that civil society organizations can find ways to reduce dependency from funding by donors.

6.2 Participation

A “**participation contract**”: building consensus and mutual understanding of provisions and proceedings, including the terms of involvement of various stakeholders, experts, citizens, moderators, etc., is a key to carrying out public participation. Given that many issues relate to pre-existing social divides, and may thus aim at bringing together different groups of citizens and stakeholders to avoid sense of exclusion, such agreement on the proceedings is all the more essential.

Activation and mobilization: The issue of mobilization is highly relevant and covers multiple layers. In some interviews, it was pointed out that there is a need to build capacities so civil society has the resources available to take an active role in the process. At the same time, in many contexts it is challenging to convince citizens of taking part due to security and other concerns. Again, however, mobilization might draw upon existing, mostly informal forms of participation.

Participant selection: Many participatory processes are not least designed to inform citizens. Hence, participant selection is oftentimes secondary vis-à-vis turnout. This notwithstanding, some country cases showed efforts by authorities to engage in continuous participation as well as moves towards professionalization on behalf of CSOs which might also entail bringing selected stakeholders from civil society to eye level with authorities.

Inclusiveness: Inclusiveness is deemed a key component in the sense that efforts towards public participation should be low key and easily accessible to many. However, it was also noted that, while experiencing participation may sure be beneficial to citizens, one should also keep in mind that a process should deliver results in order to be regarded successful by citizens.

Transparency: Since many participatory processes started out as opposition or protest, not collaboration, transparency is a key concern. At the same time, though, it seems given to many citizens and CSOs that full transparency will be difficult to achieve.

Choice of formats: Many interviews point toward preexisting modes of participation. Some might be rooted in faith-based organizations or traditional institutions, others draw upon more recent social movements, and some are closely related to the everyday life of citizens. Given the constraints in terms of resources as well as, sometimes, information and concerns regarding security, health or use of force by authorities, it is all the more important to build on existing, practical and applicable formats of public interaction and participation.

Support by public administration: Most support, in terms of knowledge and funding, for grassroots movements as well as civil society organizations comes from either international donors or from well-established peer organizations or from local communities. Support by public administration on either the national or regional or local level is rare, which corresponds with the aforementioned issue of a lack of institutionalization. Hence, interview partners did not report on a distinct sense of achievement among public administration.

Political ownership: Whereas interviews with German stakeholders have shown that ownership by government is essential as it means that the government will not outsource a process, but will stand to be held accountable, the situation is very different in many African contexts. Here, processes are indeed owned by government, and options to take part in the process are oftentimes limited. Hence, civil society strives to claim ownership. In essence, while case examples from Germany showed strong willingness of CSOs to collaborate with governments and local authorities, in many of the cases observed in African contexts, civil society would rather like to claim spaces for participation which are currently owned by government.

6.3 Post-Participation

Continuity: Given that many calls for public participation are based on concrete issues and concerns, continuity is not always a given. For those processes which are part of an institutional arrangement of various stakeholders as well as authorities, civil society oftentimes depend on outside resources and infor-

mation. Making participation sustainable is a key interest, also with regards of broad processes of decentralization, but will require additional efforts, not least vis-à-vis citizens who participate because of issues rather than institutions.

Evaluation: Some participatory arrangements include provisions for evaluations, and in some cases such evaluations may even have an impact on local authorities as there might be a connection to eligibility for funding. This notwithstanding, impact measurement still needs to be further developed.

6.4 Addendum: online participation

Connection: Online communication is a key element of organizing civil society in many of the cases of the sample. Social media, especially messenger services, may play a critical role in organizing grassroots movements or even

large-scale communication which may lead to recognition by authorities. At the same time, however, governments are aware of the power of social media, and some restrictive regimes may limit access for their citizens. Online interaction, thus, might be crucial in establishing a culture of participation and exchange.

Information: Since many civil society movements have only limited resources and might, thus, struggle to acquire information, the access to information online can be essential. Even more so since this is also a way to gather information from traditional media.

Table 5 shows that half of the considerations, which have been identified as key success factors for public participation in Germany, are also highly relevant to participation in the context of African countries. Other features might unfold relevance as well but are not yet fully developed.

Table 5: Relevance of success factors in the context of selected African countries*

Pre-participation							
<i>Participation culture</i>	<i>Institutional framework</i>	<i>Diversity and inclusion</i>	<i>Timing (or: opportunity)</i>	<i>Scoping</i>	<i>Resources</i>		
High	High	High	High	Medium	Medium		
Participation							
<i>Particip. contract</i>	<i>Activation, mobilization</i>	<i>Participant selection</i>	<i>Inclusiveness</i>	<i>Transparency</i>	<i>Choice of formats</i>	<i>Support by pub. admin</i>	<i>Political ownership</i>
High	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Post-participation							
<i>Continuity</i>				<i>Evaluation</i>			
Medium				Medium			
Online participation							
<i>Connection</i>				<i>Information</i>			
High				High			

*scaled high to low; for definitions see chapter 5.

7. CONCLUSION

A major argument for public participation is that it might contribute to perceptions of fairness on part of citizens, and there is empirical evidence supporting this claim.⁴³ So if participation enhances democratic performance, that how so? Our observations from Germany as well as selected African countries suggest that a couple of features might contribute in one way or another:

Institutionalization of participation enhances the predictability of a process. It is oftentimes rooted in and enabled through a **culture of participation**. As each case is context-sensitive, however, all parties involved should **agree on ground rules** specific to the process at hand.

In order to have a wide range of stakeholders as well as an adequate number of citizens, depending on the design and goals, take part in the process, close consideration must be given to **demographic effects**. Certain groups need to be addressed adequately. In order to do so, it is oftentimes worthwhile to draw on **existing formats** of participation such as **traditional structures**.

While **social media and online formats** might not be adequate for conducting in-depth deliberation, they should never be underestimated as a means of collecting a variety of perspectives and even forming opposing opinions through alternative channels.

Participation can be a strong instrument for exercising **accountability and democratic control**. This, however, might require expert knowledge on part of elected representatives and citizens alike. Hence, **building capacities** for and through participation could lead to imbalances in terms of expertise and, thus, ability to take part in further processes. This is often unavoidable, but should always be kept in mind in order to create opportunities that allow people with less expertise to participate, if possible.

In case a given issue is being handled by means of citizen participation, this might lead to some degree of **de-politicization** of the issue. At the same time, however, **political ownership** of the process is just as important since it helps ensure that **results are being taken seriously**.

Moreover, there is much benefit to **coordination** among different processes. Oftentimes, sharing experience might improve the quality of both the procedure and the outcome. After all, a local community might be better off when taking into account preferences and resources of neighboring communities.

In this regard, support and facilitation by **public administration** are substantial. As part of the executive, public administration must be subject to democratic control. However, in many cases authorities might even be willing to go beyond what is expected from them if there is a way – in the sense of regulation – to do so.

Last but not least, participants will almost always **personally benefit** from the experience. Many interview partners mentioned the value of **democracy education**, and it is, in fact, self-enhancing as education enables participation, and participation enables education.

Based on such insights which are rooted in both scientific research and original interviews with stakeholders in Germany and selected African countries, and minding clear limitations to the generalization of observations, some basic guidelines for participatory processes may be derived:

1. Create a sense of ownership and achievement among all parties and groups involved. This might improve the quality and continuity of the process, and might lead to (either formal or informal) institutionalization. However, it will require authenticity, transparency, accountability and maybe even a certain degree of collaboration/co-decision.
2. Draw upon pre-existing modes of participation and participant selection, and try to make the format meet the purpose by carefully adjusting the process in a context-sensitive manner.
3. Causes may attract attention, and issue-driven participation may lead the way to institutionalized participation. However, when conducting participation in relation to a concrete public cause, it is all the more important to make sure that participants will find the outcome acceptable.
4. Participation among people directly affected might help to depoliticize the issue at hand and, thus, open new avenues for collaboration in, e.g. a community context. Including everybody affected, however, may come at the cost of gathering a group representing the wider population.
5. Participation might root in a given cause, and the groups involved might stand in opposition to each other. Nevertheless, scoping the situation, as well as the social and political context, for possible modes of

⁴³ Herian, M. N./ Hamm, J. A./ Tomkins, A. J./ Pytlik Zillig, L. M. (2012). Public participation, procedural fairness, and evaluations of local governance: The moderating role of uncertainty. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(4), 815-840.

interaction (which might come from past experience or might be brokered by third parties) can help to avoid deadlock.

6. Never underestimate online participation. Never overestimate online participation. Communication via social media is here to stay and should be considered thoroughly as a means to inform and connect people. That being said, online participation should complement on-site participation which might be more substantial and have long-lasting effects in a community.

Citizen participation is context-sensitive as well as it is case-sensitive. Transferability of learnings is very limited. This notwithstanding the study did show that there are key features regarding design and implementation of participatory processes as well as enabling conditions related to politics and culture which deserve consideration on almost every occasion.

In fact, features as those presented in this study should be considered whenever possible. Public participation is a key element to democratic progress, but modes of participation may be of little use, or even counterproductive, if they are not designed adequately.⁴⁴ Societies in progress cannot afford to let that happen.

⁴⁴ Baiocchi, G./ Ganuza, E. (2014). Participatory budgeting as if emancipation mattered. *Politics & Society*, 42(1), 29-50.

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