PROCESSING CITIZEN INPUT

A Case Study on Citizen-Involvement in Political Decision-Making

Processes in Aschaffenburg and Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock, Germany

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Table of Contents

Table of Illustrations

A. INTRODUCTION

> I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education. This is the true corrective of abuses of constitutional power.
> (Jefferson, *Letter to William Charles Jarvis*; 28 September 1820; Mayer, 2000)

That way, Thomas Jefferson, a main drafter of the Declaration of Independence, third US President, and a famous advocate of Republicanism, expressed his understanding of ideal representative democracy: Sovereignty lies with the people. Moreover, the elected elite shall not act independently – unless required to for specific reasons. That was in 1820, roughly two millenniums after the downfall of Greek (direct) democracy as means of governance.

With the signing of the AGENDA 21 in 1992, 178 governments obligated themselves to bring, again, political decision-making processes closer to their citizens: "As the level of governance closest to the people, they [local authorities] play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development" (cf. UN, 2004, 28.1). But why should legitimate governments, at least on the local level, bear such a burden?

> The suggestion here, therefore, is that there is an important category of policy processes, concerned with constituent policy, that may tend to be handled rather differently in the policy process than policy whose public impact is more direct […]. This sort of policy has been called meta-policy. (Hill, 2005, p. 133)

Albeit explanations might differ, it can be stated that a great deal of attempts has been made to engage the people (more) actively. Among many, the cities of Aschaffenburg and Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock, Germany, have started to involve their citizens in political decision-making processes. Both projects dealt with the consequences and chances arising from demographic changes. These selected projects are analyzed because they seem to constitute suitable examples of how to deal with "meta-policy" innovatively, i.e. without a referendum or a public debate. In both cases, a fraction of citizens devoted themselves, under professional guidance, to tackle the political issues.

The projects on citizen-involvement are studied in the context of the classical policy-cycle. Thereby, this paper tries to answer the question who may be regarded as the driving force behind these initiatives, and second, how complementary these processes are to the political decision-making structures in place – both in theory and practice. Furthermore, the selected examples are elaborated upon in light of the hypothesis that citizens are most likely

to get involved when problems remain ill-solved.

To depart from an equal footing, a short introduction into the theoretical framework, i.e. the policy-cycle and theories of power, choices, and motivation, is provided for. Subsequently, the analysis follows. The case of Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock precedes the case of Aschaffenburg. In the end, some considerations are made as regards potential pitfalls of both 'samples'. Although those processes cannot be understood as means of direct democracy, they constitute a valuable example of how to 'activate' the people.

B.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ACCOUNTING FOR CITIZENS

The two cases scrutinized in this paper are quite complex. A clear-cut framework is thus required in order to draw proportionally valid and useful conclusions. Still, this paper faces limitations too; it will be beyond the scope of the analysis to focus on the actual contents of both policies and policy proposals.

The subsequent section introduces the theoretical assumptions that may constitute a basis for the analysis to follow.

1.   The Classical Policy Cycle: Are Citizens Included?

In this paper, a sole policy is focused upon. That is to say that a division of the analysis into stages seems to be the most appropriate way to go about scrutinizing both projects on citizen-involvement.[2] The figure below visualizes the main components that are usually thought of to be part of a policy-cycle.

Theoretically, every initiative is put on the agenda at first – either intentionally or as a necessity that has to be dealt with. Obviously, that applies to the selected cases too. It will become apparent that the argument 'intention' vs. 'necessity' tended towards an 'intentional' agenda setting in both cities, justified as a necessity.

Next, the formulation phase takes place. One might assume that the citizens' input is of sincere interest to policy-makers during this stage. If, on basis on the input, an agreement has been reached (or a respective majority generated), a decision can be taken. It is crucial to

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[2] Hill (2005) suggests (and favors) to approach a policy analysis by means of "typologies" alternatively, i.e. making a distinction between high and low politics (p. 113).

study whether the citizens enjoy an actual degree of power in the respective projects. Hence, the official, institutional set-up and the informal power structures require careful scrutiny.

Subsequently, policies have to be implemented. Depending on the issue at stake, this might be the responsibility of the civil service. Lastly, all policies are subject to scrutiny, either intentionally, i.e. on a regular basis, or casually as a reaction to a complaint for instance. Although the latter sequences will probably apply to the policies at stake too, the implementation and evaluation phase are primarily neglected. That is due to the reason that both policies are very recent and not yet fully implemented, nor evaluated. Howsoever, the fact that policy issues may reappear on the agenda
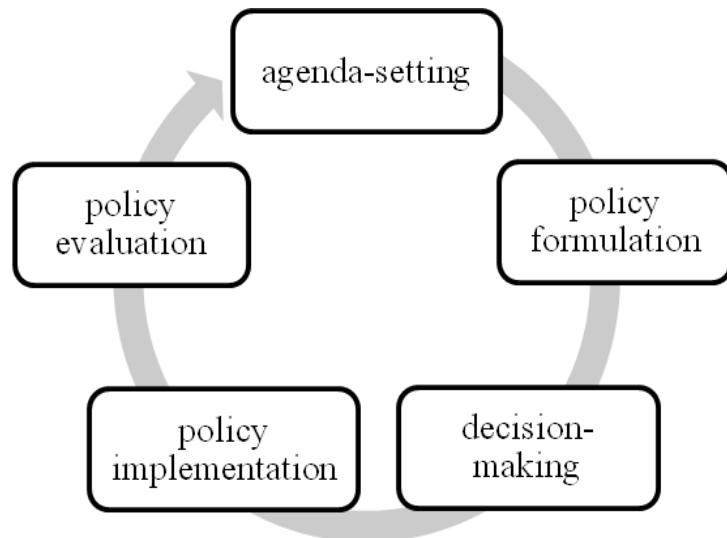
Figure 1: The Stages of a Policy Cycle (according to Hill, 2005)

makes the policy cycle a *real* cycle after all (Hill, 2005, pp. 134ff).

All the same, potential limitations should be mentioned too: The division of the policy-cycle into stages automatically implies that any problem is, at least partially, simplified in order to deal with its complexity (ibid., p.136). For instance, compromises are an essential part of the formulation phase whereas they might also be accounted for as decisions. Moreover, it is justified to wonder whether the policy cycle is only applicable to decisions taken by official actors after all. This paper suggests that citizen-involvement is best situated in the policy formulation phase.

2.   Elements of Political Interplays: Power, Choices, and Motivation

Since all stages of the policy-cycle contain a great deal of complexity and a variety of actors might be involved, further guidance is required. The following theories may best explain the political interplays:

- Power theory sets its focus on the degree of distribution and concentration of power. Hence, the question arises whether power rests with a political regime, i.e. a small number of actors (*elitist*), or whether power is widely, though not necessarily equally,

distributed among a variety of actors (*pluralist*; Hill, 2005, pp. 25-50). In this paper, it is appropriate to categorize decisions made by the mayor or even the city council as *elitist*. The *pluralist* interpretation, on the contrary, is best thought of as to categorize the citizens as political actors too. Since it is tempting to conclude that official power may only rest with politicians, the analysis will highlight unofficial power structures as well as official ones.

- Rational choice theory usually departs from the (economist) notion of 'self-interest'. Hence, analyzing (public) policies from a rational choice point of view is to find out in how far self-interest might be a more suitable explanation for policy proposals, agenda items, or (faulty) implementations than the pursuit of the common welfare (Hill, 2005, pp. 51-62).[3] Rational choice theory may be applied to anyone's behavior; yet, the analysis will treat the city council as one, i.e. a group of politicians, and citizens as another unit. Consequently, these clusters cannot account for individual wishes or ambitions. However, this is less problematic than one might think. Citizens can be expected to yield most influence if they provide politicians with a consensus-based proposal. A consensus thus accounts for general preferences and might automatically be expected to favor the common welfare.

In addition to the above, Gallagher, Laver, and Mair (2005) offer two extreme positions on a politician's motivation:

- Politicians may be office-seeking, which implies that they look for ways to be elected or rewarded with a political office in the first, and to stay in charge in the second place. Apparently, being obsessed with power might entail less of an ideological connection between potential coalition-partners, less consensus-seeking, and a high probability of rational choice applicability (pp. 384f). In conclusion, there is not much of a reason for politicians of this kind to favor a project of citizen-involvement unless they await positive externalities such as a valuable publicity or increased electoral support.

- The second extreme denounces politicians to be primarily policy-oriented. Here, the focus is set on efficiency, effectiveness, and 'good' politics for the public. Put differently, this sort of politician is there "to make a difference" (p. 385). This is also the kind of politician who is more likely to favor citizen-involvement.

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[3] Rational choice theories should not be confused with the rational model of policy decision-making, where decision-makers try to settle issues after having considered advantages and disadvantages of each option carefully (Hill, 2005, pp. 145ff).

Obviously, none of those theories provide a solid explanation by themselves; a combination of factors and motivations are more likely to provide a concrete reasoning (Hill, 2005, p. 90; Gallagher et al., 2005, pp. 385ff). As regards a politician's motivation for instance, he can be expected – on average – to lean towards the policy-oriented bias. This tendency is in line with electoral promises that are being made and the (ever) increased intensity of public scrutiny in search of the 'best' candidate. For the purpose of the analysis, this perspective seems to be most suitable to depart from.

3.   Civil Servants as Connecting Link *or* The Need for Bureaucracy

Next to politicians and citizens, a third set of actors is involved in the policy process: the civil service. In this respect, Gallagher et al. (2005) refer to a level of governance where bureaucrats make "practical policy decisions that give expression to the general principles that might have been contested and eventually settled in the arenas of representative politics" (p.154). It goes without saying that the bureaucratic apparatus is a necessity; politicians simply have to delegate (administrative) work to others in order to cope with the number of responsibilities and tasks (p. 155). In turn, the head of executive – i.e. the mayor on the local level – bears responsibility for the correct functioning of this apparatus.[4] According to Gallagher et al. (2005) the respective "civil service tradition" or "culture" needs to be considered too (pp. 156f). The main tendencies identified for Germany are (a) a technical ethos - the majority of civil servants have a particular expertise and work neutrally, even in spite of potential party affiliations; (b) a high propensity among civil servants to pursue a bureaucratic career (ibid.).

As a matter of fact, most people expect their bureaucracy to function just like that; yet in practice, a high degree of divergence can be observed throughout Europe.[5] Only a few general tendencies seem applicable to all countries, that is to human beings in general, or to people that happen to be civil servants in particular: "[O]ther things being equal, there is a general tendency for bureaucracies to resist political change that runs counter to bureaucratic interests" (ibid.). On top of that, the process of 'politicization' of officials has taken root in the last years – a rather common practice in continental Europe (ibid., pp. 159-161; Peters &

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[4] In practice, the individual responsibility is increasingly uploaded to the individual servant himself (Gallagher et al., 2005, p. 156).
[5] Next to Gallagher et al. (2005, pp. 154-163), Wilson & Barker (2003) provide an introductory, yet valuable account of civil service cultures in their comparative analysis of 'Bureaucrats and Politicians in Britain'.

Pierre, 2004). 'Politicization' refers to the promotion of party friends or trustees to (senior) posts in the respective administration. The rationale is to ensure a proper functioning, which obviously requires mutual trust (Gallagher et al., 2005, p. 160). Consequently, this lesson has to be taken into account for a successful analysis: Working as a civil servant might be, depending upon the rank, trust, and responsibility given, just as political as a public office can be (ibid., p. 163; Peters & Pierre, 2004, pp. 6f).

In Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock and Aschaffenburg, civil servants have been entrusted to guide and organize the projects of citizen-involvement from scratch. So, what is a bureaucrat's motivation? Is a bureaucrat making a rational choice if he wishes to support his fellow citizens instead of his mayor? These questions will have to reoccur, but for now, it may be suggested that citizens and politicians alike want their ideas to be well preserved – and that the bureaucrats function as connecting link in between. Howsoever, the role of the bureaucrats involved in the projects of citizen-involvement requires careful scrutiny.

C.   EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS: ANALYZING PROJECTS OF CITIZEN-INVOLVEMENT

In light of the theories introduced, it is worth looking into who has been available for the politicians to consult as an initial starting point. Thus, the analysis will follow after the populations of Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock (SHS) and Aschaffenburg (AB) have been shortly introduced. The section is rounded off with a discussion of findings.

1.   Contextualizing One Challenge in Two Settings[6]

To begin with, AB is located in Bavaria while SHS is situated in North-Rhine-Westphalia. SHS is currently a home for a little more than 26,000 inhabitants whereas AB has almost 70,000 inhabitants. Accordingly, the infrastructural patterns differ: The people of SHS live in a number of villages that belong to the town whereas AB should be regarded as a middle-sized city with a higher degree of centric concentration. In addition, the family structures vary.

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[6] The numbers have been collected and provided for by the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* (2009). All numbers refer to the status quo of 2007; projections to the future indicate possible trends towards 2025.
The *Bertelsmann Stiftung* is a donation that was set up and is financed by the *Bertelsmann AG*. It provides essential input to the political debate surrounding the demographic changes; www.wegweiser-kommune.de.

In 2007, the fertility index[7] of SHS amounted to 13.3% in comparison to only 1.7% for AB. Similarly, SHS has been more attractive to families, a supposition that is also supported by SHS' youth ratio[8] of 40.7% in comparison to 31.5% in AB. The comparative popularity among families is further resembled in the accommodation of inhabitants. Whereas the living space per person amounts to roughly 42 m² in both cities, almost 70% of SHS' accommodations are detached and duplex houses (31.7% in AB).

In comparison, AB has a comparative advantage in high-skilled labor. According to the numbers of 2007, the growth rate of the share of highly qualified people is positive compared to the one of SHS being negative. This difference, which also brings about economic benefits, attracts a higher number of foreign nationalities too. 15% of AB's population does not have a German passport; in SHS, the ratio amounts to 5% only.[9]

It becomes apparent that two differently composed populations live in these cities: On the one hand, family structures dominate in SHS, where citizens seem to spend most of their life in the region, while, on the other hand, a more diverse population is to be found in AB. In light of the analysis, that is to say that two sets of citizens – or more appropriately, two different groups of potential actors – had to be activated to take part in their cities' respective projects. In addition, the communication patterns differ. In the more village-like structure of SHS, citizens might even inform another while the politicians of AB are probably more dependent on institutionalized forms of communication such as a citizens' newspaper.

Nevertheless, both projects have had the same intention. The cities of SHS and AB decided to be prepared for the consequences that demographic changes will bring along. Those changes follow, generally speaking, three main trends. First, as a consequence of relatively low birth rates in almost all of Western Europe, and Germany in particular, the total number of inhabitants is expected to shrink. There will simply be less people around in the future. Second, the trends of migration are projected to increase in the future – following established and recent trends. The population will thus be ever more multi-ethnic. Third, in parallel to a decreasing youth ratio, people will grow older and the median age is expected to rise (Kösters, 2006). Naturally, academics expect the intensity of these factors to vary locally.

With an eye on 2025, the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2009) expects SHS and AB to experience different degrees of changes, provided that the current trends hold true for the

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[7] The fertility index indicates the divergence of the respective commune from the national (i.e. German) average birth rate as a percentage. The numbers are based on the previous four years (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009).
[8] The youth ratio reveals the number of children and teenagers in relation to the number of twenty to sixty-four year olds, per hundred (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009).
[9] N.B.: Next to these 'ratios', both cities are home to a number of citizens with a German passport and a migration background that cannot – statistically – be accounted for precisely (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009).

future. With regard to the number of inhabitants, AB and SHS are expected to enjoy a similar degree of stability. However, due to the different family and migration structures, the compilation of their respective populations will certainly differ. In line with the trends, the effects of migration will outweigh the impacts that family friendliness and popularity bring about: AB can be expected to be much more multi-ethnic and somewhat older, yet almost equal in terms of inhabitants by 2025 whereas SHS will be dominated by elderly in the first place.

Despite these differences, both cities have one specific commonality. AB and SHS are aware of the challenges and opportunities that come along with demographic changes. Thus, both municipalities have initiated projects to actively shape these processes.

2.   Gathering 'A Bunch of Care-Takers' in Schloss Holte-Stukenbrock

In March 2007, the two most-read dailies in and around SHS began reporting with a sincere interest on the new initiative in place to face the demographic trends (cf. Kubendorff, 2007; Schönfeld, 2007). A balanced mix of newspaper articles and official records presents the chronology of the involvement of citizens into the respective decision-making processes at best. On the city's side, an overview of activities has been completed by the respective appointee, i.e. the hub of the entire (policy) process (Sykora, 2008b).

The first decision to deal with the complexity of demography was made in June 2003 by the Christian Democrats (CDU), holding approximately 62% of the seats in the city council at that point of time (Kubendorff, 2007; NRW, 1999). It is interesting to note that Kubendorff (2007) accredits the early focus to a second actor as well: The CDU was strongly supported by the bureaucracy. In turn, a new agenda item was agreed upon. However, both the journalistic and the official accounts do not report on policies to follow. Instead, it is stated that SHS tried to gain more information in the first place, which only took root in 2005 though (Sykora, 2008b). With the support of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, a first prediction of the demographic development of SHS rendered to be available. This information (from June 2005; Sykora, 2008b) and another academic statement (made in October 2005; Kubendorff, 2007) drew a rather alarming picture of the future. They seemed to sensitize SHS' political elite, i.e. the city council. In 2006, a cross-departmental task force was installed in order to gain insight into the internal problems that might be caused by demographic changes (Sykora, 2008b).

Thitherto, the political zigzag patch took place between institutional actors primarily. In 2007, this was about to change: The *Land* of North-Rhine-Westphalia offered – in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Stiftung – to finance a pilot project that would offer trainings on demography, customized for politicians, almost free of charge (Kubendorff, 2007; Sykora, 2008b). Thus, the task force that may be considered to have been within the actual implementation phase of the policy cycle, albeit for investigation, can be said to have been interrupted. In March, it was decided that the mayor, together with members of the city council and highly-ranked civil servants, would attend the training (ibid.). In the aftermath, the deputies forwarded a cross-fractional proposal to the council in order to deal with the issue immediately. In September of the same year, it was further agreed upon that the primary goal would be to stabilize the number of inhabitants for the upcoming two decades (ibid.).

Except for this mission statement, the deputies decided not to settle further guidelines or policies. Instead, a policy expert in the field of demographic changes was asked to support SHS' attempt to involve citizens in a different format than by hosting public discussion forums for instance. At the town's New Year's reception in January 2008, a clear signal was set: The focus was set on demographic trends, supported by the expert, who then sensitized citizens and politicians alike. His tenor might be paraphrased as follows: Only when politicians and citizens work together, the greatest successes will be made (Lahr, 2008). Hence, with demography back on the political agenda and a goal agreed upon, the actual policy formulation phase was 'outsourced'. In January and February 2008, 750 randomly selected citizens were asked how to cope with the demographic changes by means of a questionnaire (ibid.). This process was handled by the town's respective appointee. In parallel, a *Zukunfskonferenz* was organized in cooperation with the policy expert (ibid.).

As a matter of fact, the *Zukunfskonferez* or 'Future Search' is a sophisticated tool of Change Management (Holman & Devane, 2002). As with most of those tools, Future Search brings along multiple advantages as well as some dangers. Getting a complex, yet manageable group of people allows for manifold conceptual input: People exchange ideas and whishes that might otherwise not have been discussed as extensively, if at all (p. 8). This automatically implies that the inclusion of citizens contributes to a more thorough perspective (p. 29). Furthermore, a group feeling is created and dynamism is set off (ibid.). With regard to dangers, this approach clearly limits the possibilities to check and counterbalance the given input (p. 9).[10]

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[10] These are selected characteristics. The success of almost all group-tools of Change Management relies on a proficient organization and moderation (Holman & Devane, 2002). As it has been explained before, guidance

On 11 February 2008, approximately 60 *Promotoren* were invited to get acquainted with the initiative and the policy domain(s) to be dealt with. The term *Promotoren* refers to people that hold key positions in the realms of business, education, or church, as well as to people who engage in associations (voluntarily). In other words, *Promotoren* can be said to be key figures of all parts of the life cycle (Tienes, 2008). In that respect, it is noteworthy that even high school students showed interest in having a say (ibid.). The follow-up event, a two day workshop devoted to demographic changes at SHS, was presented as a way to arrive at suggestions for both guiding (policy) principles and actual policy domains to be tackled (ibid.; Schönfeld, 2008a). The majority of attendees decided to take part in the actual *Zukunfskonferenz* on 22 and 23 February 2008, while a few, alternatively, suggested other suitable candidates (SHS, 2008). Arguably, the village-like structures of SHS might have had a cumulative effect too (i.e. short and quick communication channels). The expert's idea behind this preparatory meeting was to inform and prepare the fraction of citizens in order for the *Zukunfskonferenz* to be a real success, preferentially marked by motivation and dedication to the topic.

Second, the conference was held. For two days, 43 citizens became "a bunch of care-takers", identifying future domains of political action and policy guidelines (Prignitz, 2008; Schönfeld, 2008b). Thus, having conferred power upon the fraction of citizens implied that a certain degree of institutionally vested power was surrendered. To the surprise of the administration, roughly half of the participants would have wanted to be involved in the implementation phase as well (Schönfeld, 2008b).

Finally, the citizen's input, processed by the experts, was complemented with the questionnaire's evaluation and the administration's input that was generated in parallel (Sykora, 2008). In an extraordinary session, these results were communicated back to the city council. Again, the same expert moderated this meeting in June 2008. Later that month, all of the guiding principles as well as policy domains were officially adopted by the city council (i.e. on 14 June 2008; ibid.). In conclusion, a lengthy process finally left behind the policy formulation and decision-making phase of the policy cycle.

At first sight, this lengthy process does not seem to be best described within the framework of the policy cycle. Instead, it seems as if the policy decision has been to run through the formulation phase repeatedly. Yet, if one is to take a more pragmatic approach, this observation requires re-interpretation. Officially, the deputies and the mayor enjoy

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was provided for by external professionals – one expert for the preparatory meeting(s) and two for the Future Search. With regard to the methodology, more information is to be found on page 16.

legitimate powers only. According to the doctrine of individual responsibility, the elected (or appointed) politician is formally in charge whereas the administration may, practically speaking, pursue (slightly) different ideals. As the example of SHS has shown, it seems to be an institutionalized practice to consider the opinions of civil servants and to ensure their support (such as for the first attempts in 2003). Although, this set of actors does not have a legitimate claim to power, policy-oriented deputies (and the mayor) pay careful attention to their opinions for two possible reasons. First, civil servants might be a valuable source of inspiration, and second, they usually sit in the driver's seat once a policy reaches the implementation phase. Thus, involving the administration pro-actively seemed to be a smart, if not a rational choice.

If the same line of argumentation is applied to the involvement of citizens, a total of three explanations are thinkable. First, the citizens function as an extended advisory organ that is professionally organized in order to gain the most out of it and to channel ideas in a way that they might actually be implemented. Second, the nature of the demographic changes requires everyone to pull on the same side of the rope – especially when it comes to implementing policies. Third, the role of communications should not be forgotten. Citizens that spread the word are probably the most efficient and sophisticated way to gain public support and even to transmit delicate issues. Apparently, that might go in parallel to the second reason: When the policy implementation requires sacrifices from citizens, the support of citizens is most certainly of advantage.

If one assumes a hierarchy among these explanations, the advisory role ranks first. The fact that 'expertise' is called upon in order to organize the citizens' input seems to be a very clear indicator for the policy-orientation of the decision-maker(s) and their interest in valuable input.

3.   Mobilizing 'Lateral Thinkers' of Aschaffenburg

For AB, the demographic challenge is not the first project of citizen-involvement. To the contrary, the topic of integration has already been dealt with in a similar format to the way that demographic changes were faced in AB (AB, 2008a; 2008b). Moreover, the respective appointee is, among others, in charge of both of those projects. In short, the situation in AB appears to be more complex.

Both the procedure of citizen-involvement and the idea to seek external (professional) support have already been experienced once in AB prior to the project in question. Consequently, the course of actions was different to the one of SHS. Moreover, it was AB's mayor who had a particular interest to tackle the issue of demographic changes in 2008. Thus, the issue came before the city council due to his initiative. With the support of an external policy expert (as in the case of SHS), the mayor's office drafted a policy proposal (Kessler & Theiss, 2008). The internal documentation and the regional newspaper (*Main Echo*) reveal that the actual procedure took place in accordance to that proposal.

First, the mayor presented his idea to the so-called council of elders. This council is convened only upon the mayor's request and it functions as a forum to communicate and to discuss political agenda items or contested policy proposals (AB, 2009a). In January 2008, the mayor informed the council of elders about his ambitions (Kessler & Theiss, 2008). In line with the estimation made before the council, the project is still in progress, construed to cover a time frame of 1.5 years in total (ibid.; AB, 2009c).

Next, the city published a four-paged special edition of its own newspaper with a total devotion to demography (AB, 2008b). The purpose was twofold: to mark the beginning of the demography project and to sensitize the citizens as regards the challenges to cope with. In parallel, the planning for the central event, a *Zukunfskonferenz* (i.e. Future Search), named *Demographiewerkstatt 2030*, continued. Unlike the case of SHS, the participants for this event have been carefully selected. It appears from the newspaper articles that this selection has actually caused the most heated discussions of all (Raab, 2008a). In April 2008, the expert was asked to introduce the topic to the caucus on planning and urban development. His brief keynote speech was meant to sensitize the caucus and he succeeded as to make EUR 30,000 available for the project to be launched. The same source also indicates that all fractions of the city council (only) wanted to have a closer look at the candidates suggested for the *Demographiewerkstatt 2030* (ibid.).

A second article, published prior to the event itself, stated that agreement was reached (Raab, 2008b). Hence, 35 decision-makers from virtually every realm of (city) life were enlisted to take part in the two-day Future Search. Among those 35 participants, only eight hold a political mandate and another seven can be said to be either employed in the civil service or closely linked to the bureaucracy (ibid.). As regards commonalities, all of AB's *Promotoren* hold a leadership position within their respective realm (ibid.). Although the set of participants has been fixed upon mutual agreement, the city of AB still hosted a 'kick-off' event; just as it was the case in SHS, the attendees were sensitized and motivated for the

Future Search to take place in October 2008 (Kessler & Theiss, 2008). This 'kick-off' event took place in early July 2008. Thus, a further difference between the cases of SHS and AB becomes apparent: It seems as if the size of the city and the complexity, as well as the random (vs. selected) set of participants has a bearing on timing. In SHS, both events took place within one month only.

The actual *Demographiewerkstatt 2030* was hosted on 28 and 29 October 2008. Here, too, the aim was to create a vision that would function as a basis for policy guidelines. Furthermore, the ranking of policy domains in order of importance was foreseen (Raab, 2009c). The tenor seems best summarized in a few keywords: "commonality", "solidarity", "equality", and "equal chances" (ibid.). It is interesting to note that the entire session took place behind closed doors. Unlike the session in SHS, which was held in the town hall, AB's *Zukunfskonferenz* took place in a convention center without the direct involvement of other citizens or journalists (Raab, 2009b; 2009c). This setting has apparently been chosen for as a way to allow all participants to think laterally, i.e. 'outside the box' (Raab, 2009b).

Despite all commonalities to the procedure followed in SHS, AB's *Demographiewerkstatt 2030* was not thought to end yet. As has been stated earlier, the process is still in progress simply because a second meeting has taken place on 14 March 2009 (AB, 2009b). This follow-up convention among the same people was planned to concretize the suggestions made in 2008. Although all progress made in the meantime has been reported to the city council, the final report including all suggestions still requires official approval by AB's deputies (ibid.).

Even if the outcome is not yet public, the process itself can already been analyzed. In the case of AB, the circumstances have differed. The mayor used his official powers to initiate the process that lead to the involvement of a selected fraction of citizens. Thus, if one assumes both cities in general, i.e. the respective politicians in particular, to be driven by similar motivations, the hypothesis is further approved that selective citizen-involvement constitutes an advisory function primarily. That is the case because the fraction of citizens involved in the process have been selected very carefully while in addition, enough room for maneuver was given as to enable all participants to brainstorm behind closed doors. Surprisingly, the bureaucracy did not play too much of an apparent role; yet, it goes without saying that all processes have been managed and organized by an appointee who may have had a particular interest in initiating these processes himself. However, any conclusion in that regard would be based on speculation at best.

With respect to the policy cycle, the procedure is similar to that of SHS. Arguably, the process started out with the mayor's initiative that was quickly approved by the respective caucus. Taking it from there, one could argue that the actual implementation equaled the renewed progression of both the policy formulation and decision-making phases, involving the legitimated deputies in the stage of (renewed) approval only.

4.   Discussion of Findings

Despite the difference in chronology, it is always the elected politician who is officially in charge in the end. In theory, only the mayor and the city council – depending on the issue at stake – share the power to somewhat equal parts. Nevertheless, if we assume those politicians to be rational actors, none of them would substantially depart from the citizens' suggestions. Such a move would not only distort trust, but it would also limit the credibility invested into politicians. Thus, a combination of power and rational choice theory seems to explain the interplay of legitimate representatives and (randomly) selected citizens at best. Moreover, if we assume the actors to behave as just stated, the citizens involved can be said to enjoy a small share of power – although not officially vested into them – simply because it is unlikely that the politicians are going to diverge from their proposals substantially.

However, this relationship will only hold true if both sets of actors can be said to be primarily policy-oriented. A policy-oriented mayor and/or a policy-oriented majority in the city council are the initial basis for such a project to take root in the very first place. As it has been explained above, the cities of SHS and AB can be said to have had a particular interest in their citizens' input. On the other hand, policy-oriented citizens are probably more likely to enlist for such a project. Even if this would not hold true, it could still be argued that the fraction of inhabitants that is involved will, as regards the final output, forward policy-oriented ideas simply because they would want their ideas to be accepted. Consequently, for a policy proposal to be adopted, it is most likely to be dominated by policy-oriented ambitions.

In addition to the above, it has also been shown that Change Management is not limited to the business realm where it enjoys the highest degree of popularity. Instead, the tool introduced in both SHS and AB has proven to be an effective way to complement the political arena. Strictly speaking, the tool 'Appreciative inquiry' has been applied within the framework of the Future Search. The tool Appreciative Inquiry is usually considered to be a "positive" methodology, working with four "D's": Citizens "discover" which possibilities and

which potential is already at their disposal before they go on to "dream" (i.e. create a vision). The moderation mediates between different poles and allows participants to think laterally. Then, the creation phase begins ("design"), ultimately leading to the "destiny", involving hands on planning (Holman, Devane, & Cady, 2007; Holman & Devane, 2002). Thus, as long as enough professional support is guaranteed, citizens may be stimulated to provide extraordinary outputs as a consequence of successful application of group-based tools of Change Management (Holman, Devane, & Cady, 2007).

At the same time, a word of warning is needed. Thitherto, the processes have been presented as pure successes. It may be concluded that the functioning of an external expert as well as the relationship between bureaucracy and politicians, i.e. the mayor, are of utmost importance to the success of such a project. In the cases of SHS and AB, both factors seemed to have been satisfied. Furthermore, the citizens of SHS and AB seem to have provided input that was welcomed thankfully. Nevertheless, insufficient communication, poor moderation skills, and a lack of motivation in any combination might easily jeopardize the outcome of a project on citizen-involvement similar to the ones presented.

In addition, the sample of volunteers is important. No matter whether attendees have been chosen to take part or have subscribed; if the participants are not representative of the city's inhabitants, the overall picture is likely to get blurry. SHS's documentation reveals that only one citizen with a migration background participated in the *Zukunfskonferenz*; yet, if he would not have been present, the topic 'integration' might have been neglected (SHS, 2008, pp. 9, 20). This very fact approves of the importance that a 'balanced' set of *Promotoren* plays. On the other hand, judging 'one-sidedness' is a subjective decision and therefore rather unpractical in application. Probably, some intuition and commitment are the ingredients that make a project as successful as the ones of SHS and AB.

Lastly, the evidence suggests that citizens have been willing to involve in policy-processes simply because they care. As stated in the introduction, a meta policy's impact is more direct – and the topic of demographic changes is certainly of sincere interest to citizens who care about a sustainable development of their ultimate surrounding. Hence, it might also have been due to the topic itself that such a smooth functioning has been possible. To reverse that conclusion, different topics – including issues of meta-policy – might not trigger as much enthusiasm and public support. After all, it very much depends on the interplay of all actors in general and the expert's talent to motivate people in particular.

D.   CONCLUSION

In short, this analysis has shown how to adopt the means to an end. As has been argued, politicians are most likely to agree to or even to initiative the involvement of citizens when they are explicitly policy-oriented. Two reasons may be thought of: Either politicians acknowledge that problems have remained ill-solved, or they simply know that a larger group of citizens will necessarily provide a more coherent and realistic picture of the whole. In this analysis, both arguments can be said to hold true. In SHS, the steps taken at first did not seem to trigger sufficient results, which changed in 2007 with the initiative to involve citizens. In AB, it was planned to involve *Promotoren* from scratch.

 Second, it has been explained that these forums functioned as advisory organs primarily. That is to say that citizens provide political input whereas their representatives officially decide. Arguably, the powers are shared among politicians and citizens in practice. Yet again, it has been shown that the citizens' power of initiative yields most effect when their proposals have a policy-oriented bias. Negative externalities are thus automatically minimized.

 All the same, there is not sufficient evidence to approve, nor to disapprove of the hypothesis that citizens get involved when problems remain ill-solved. It is most appropriate to consider the nature of the political topic as well. For instance, it is likely that issues of meta-policy will trigger a higher degree of commitment than less 'catchy' policy domains. The political debate on demographic changes virtually affects everyone in society. That is certainly of advantage when it comes to motivating citizens. Generally speaking, it is quite obvious that policy-oriented inhabitants of any town would exploit the respective opportunity in any of those two scenarios. However, a questionnaire in SHS has revealed that roughly 83% of the respondents do not want to be "bothered" again despite the fact that they (i.e. actually a total of 94%) favor the involvement of citizens by means of a such a questionnaire for instance (Sykora, 2008b). Similarly, one may interpret the fact that AB scheduled its project for 1.5 years as a way to avoid overstretching the obligations which arise for the participants.

 The analysis has further shown that the eventual outcome very much depends on the quality and devotion of the external professional. Furthermore, it can be derived from common policy theories that politicians and bureaucrats should ideally come along for any policy to be managed and administered successfully – a circumstance that was treated as

given in this paper. In conclusion, the external, professional guidance complemented the structures in place – it seems to have been the proper means to make ends.

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