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## **Inspiring Democracy**

New Forms of Public Participation



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# Inspiring Democracy

New Forms of Participation

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## 1. Introduction: Broad Diversity of Participation

Political participation can adopt many forms and encompasses a broad spectrum of activities. It may include classic participatory activities of direct democracy, such as referendums, citizens' surveys, and voting in elections. It can adopt other forms, such as political party formation or joining in demonstrations. And sometimes it is simply a requirement of building law in connection with construction work.

While these activities all play an important role in political systems, they are not enough. Another key form of political participation, gaining in prominence and importance, is deliberation. When citizens engage in deliberation, they exchange ideas with the goal of forming a common opinion. Deliberation entails weighing alternative positions and requires that citizens are willing to accept the better argument. Such practices are not entirely new. Since the 1990s, dialogue-oriented forms of citizens' participation have been used to promote differentiated opinion-formation. More recently, a variety of new citizens' participation procedures, centered on dialogue and deliberation, have been developed and implemented.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung has played a key role in promoting the use of deliberation techniques. Together with the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung developed a program called the Citizens' Forum. The Citizens' Forum is a participative procedure that extends beyond traditional channels of political participation. It offers randomly selected citizens of widely varying political persuasions the possibility to experience and help shape democracy. It fuses on-site attendance events with online elements, making it an innovative development in the political participation landscape.

In developing new processes and further refining existing ones, it is crucial to analyze and systematize existing methods, particularly with the skyrocketing number and variety of new citizens' participation procedures in recent years. In some cases the procedures cannot easily be distinguished from one another; they may overlap, or they may be further refined and have new elements added to them. The Internet has played a pivotal role in the development of these new procedures, although we remain a long way off from "e-democracy."



Given the importance of these new forms of political participation and their continued growth, this study seeks to establish an orderly framework of existing and diverse procedures and participatory processes. By establishing such a framework, this study aims to contribute to the further development and optimization of participatory processes. The procedures and processes examined are only those which offer citizens the possibility for direct participation. A discussion with Heiner Geißler, Christian-Democratic politician and former Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, shows what new forms of civic participation might look like and what their limits are. Geißler emphasizes that the self-staging of civil society is a valuable and necessary development to which policy-makers should listen and be responsive.

Under the supervision of Patrizia Nanz, participatory procedures have been described and catalogued by the European Institute for Public Participation (EIPP). In the chapter “Involving Citizens: Challenges for the Political Debate,” citizens’ participation models will be placed in the broader context of the debate on democracy. Furthermore, recommendations are offered for further developing citizens’ participation. Through this analysis, it is evident that despite the plethora of citizen participation frameworks developed to date, the participation debate remains in a nascent stage.

The concluding section “Public Participation in International Review”—a discussion with Archon Fung and Yves Sintomer, both leading researchers on civic engagement and democracy—compares civic participation in the United States and Europe and gives an outlook into the future. Will participation processes have an influence on representative democracy, and how will democracy itself change over the next ten years?



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## 2. New Forms of Civic Participation and the Self-staging of Civil Society: A Conversation with Heiner Geißler

led by Dominik Hierlemann

**Dominik Hierlemann:** *Mister Geißler, civic participation is the talk of the town. Notably Stuttgart 21<sup>1</sup> has led to changed perceptions, including in the media. Are we currently observing media hype, or is this really a substantial evolution of democracy in Germany?*

**Heiner Geißler:** Strictly speaking, we do not have well-regulated civic participation at this point. In that sense, we find ourselves amidst a necessary process, and this is no instantaneous picture: We are bound to shipwreck if civic participation is not made possible.

*In the German debate, like in many other debates, the buzzword of disenchantment with politics is not very new. What is different today as compared to 20 or 30 years ago?*

In the late 1970s, when I served as the German Christian Democrats' (CDU) secretary general, I ordered an opinion poll from the Allensbach Institute. The question was: "When the economy is doing well, then I am also well off! Is that correct?" Back then, over 80 percent of the people said: "Sure, that's correct!" Nowadays, there are only 17 percent left who say so. That means that the current economic system is no longer accepted by 83 percent of the people, and they transfer this mistrust to politics. And politics is rightly held responsible for not having prevented the current crises, events like Fukushima, climate destruction or the loss of millions of people's money in the financial crisis. Nowadays, people witness these situations at a frequency that is unprecedented.



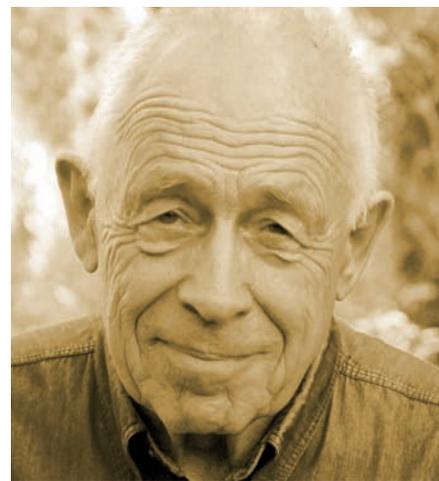
## Authorization procedures need to be replaced by new forms of participation

*But all this has little to do with civic participation.*

No, that is not true. People can see that there are totally different interests behind all these developments and decisions, globally but also here at home, nationally, that their security is put at risk. And they start to ask themselves: Are politicians in the position to do something against these eccentric economic processes? Are democratically elected parliaments stronger than international markets? And when the answer to these questions must be no, then people are unsettled and no longer willing to accept a construction site in the community in their backyard, since they do not know what interests there are behind this major project. This is also a consequence of non-participation, of the “non-transparency” of these decisions that are taken behind closed doors. This has changed as compared to before.

*Critics of the new forms of civic participation say that the hitherto-existing authorization procedures also include various possibilities for participation.*

Plan-approval procedures and regional-planning procedures do not foresee civic participation, but merely consultation. People get a verdict from above, and they have no chance to oppose it with the exception of a lawsuit. And then they again get a verdict from above. For Stuttgart 21, there were 10,000 appeals! It is entirely unrealistic to think that administrative courts can deal properly with these appeals. The new procedure must be participation, not just information from above.



Dr. Heiner Geißler

## Consultation is not participation

*And what should that look like, concretely?*

Plan-approval procedures must not be modified, but abolished and replaced by entirely new forms of civic participation: communication, discussion on an equal footing, fact checks. And clearly no simple consultation, where planners merely present their long-approved plans and people are then allowed to formulate their objections. Consultation is not participation. You can also implement this at the local level. We need to use modern forms of communication in order to make civic participation possible.

*But much of this is rather bottom-up and not top-down.*

Yes, civil society's self-staging is an extremely valuable development, which politicians need to listen to and take seriously. But we need much more in addition to that—transparency above all. Everybody can have a good plan or a good idea, but this plan must be put up for discussion following an appropriate procedure and, of course, publicly. In other words, there must be no more collusiveness. Moreover, those who want to contribute other ideas must be able to finance these. This cannot happen at the exclusively private level. Otherwise, we would get citizens' action committees and civic participation where only rich people can participate, since expertise or experts are expensive. Funding must also come from public authorities.

## People are much more informed than politicians believe

*But is a referendum or a non-binding consultative referendum always and automatically the last step, or, put differently, when are procedures of civic participation successful?*

When things happen in a specific procedure in which all interested parties have equal rights and where nothing is kept secret. In essence, it is always a procedure of public administrations or larger companies, on the one side, and affected citizens, on the other. Normally, a situation of conflict arises and such conflicts need to become humanized, democratized and transparent—that is what is decisive. We live in a media society. People are much more informed than politicians or the political press think. They do not let themselves be led up the garden path.



*We can often read that revitalizing democracy does not reach the less educated societal strata. How can we change that?*

By ensuring that society's self-staging takes place on a broad basis and not excluding anybody. When observing demonstrations or conflicts, for instance, concerning the construction of a major road, I do not have the impression that the people there are only university graduates. Many of them are of course well educated, but they are not automatically academically trained middle-class people in the traditional sense.

It is a prejudice by the alleged journalistic and political elites that they are the only ones to be really informed. They are totally wrong. Thanks to modern ways of information and communication, "ordinary" people can also become competent experts.

*And, finally, what are the limits of all these new procedures of participation?*

There are decisions that cannot be developed within the framework of new participation procedures, taxation laws, foreign policy, the deployment of the military. All this cannot be done with a citizens' action committee. But most other political or civilizational processes can be designed in a citizen-friendly way, including the decision-making processes.

*Dr. Geißler, thank you very much indeed for this conversation!*

## 3. Citizens' Participation: Procedures and Methods

Under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Patrizia Nanz, in collaboration with Dr. Miriam Fritsche, Antje Isaak, Mathias Hofmann and Martin Lüdemann (European Institute for Public Participation)

The focus of this study is 16 selected procedures and methods of citizens' participation. Procedures were selected based upon their compatibility with the Citizens' Forum, a participation procedure developed and practiced by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in collaboration with the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation. Using the Citizens' Forum as a reference point, the study explores similarities and differences with other participatory procedures, such as the Appreciative Inquiry or the World Café.

To facilitate a systematic comparison of the various approaches to participation, each description is based on a similar scheme: First, the most important features of the participation process, the history of its inception, its dissemination and key actors involved in its implementation, are discussed. Next, the area of application and the initiators who typically opt for its application are examined for each procedure. Finally, selected examples of how the procedures have been implemented are presented. Wherever appropriate, information is provided on similar or related procedures and methods.

A key element of the Citizen's Forum is an online phase lasting several weeks. For this reason, the study includes an excursus on Internet-supported strategies for citizens' participation.

### 3.1 Citizens' Forum

The Citizens' Forum is a relatively new participation procedure developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in collaboration with the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation. It serves two key purposes. First, participants develop their democratic-participation skills, including deliberation and problem-solving techniques. Second, a Citizens' Forum enriches public policy debates and improves the quality of policy decisions.

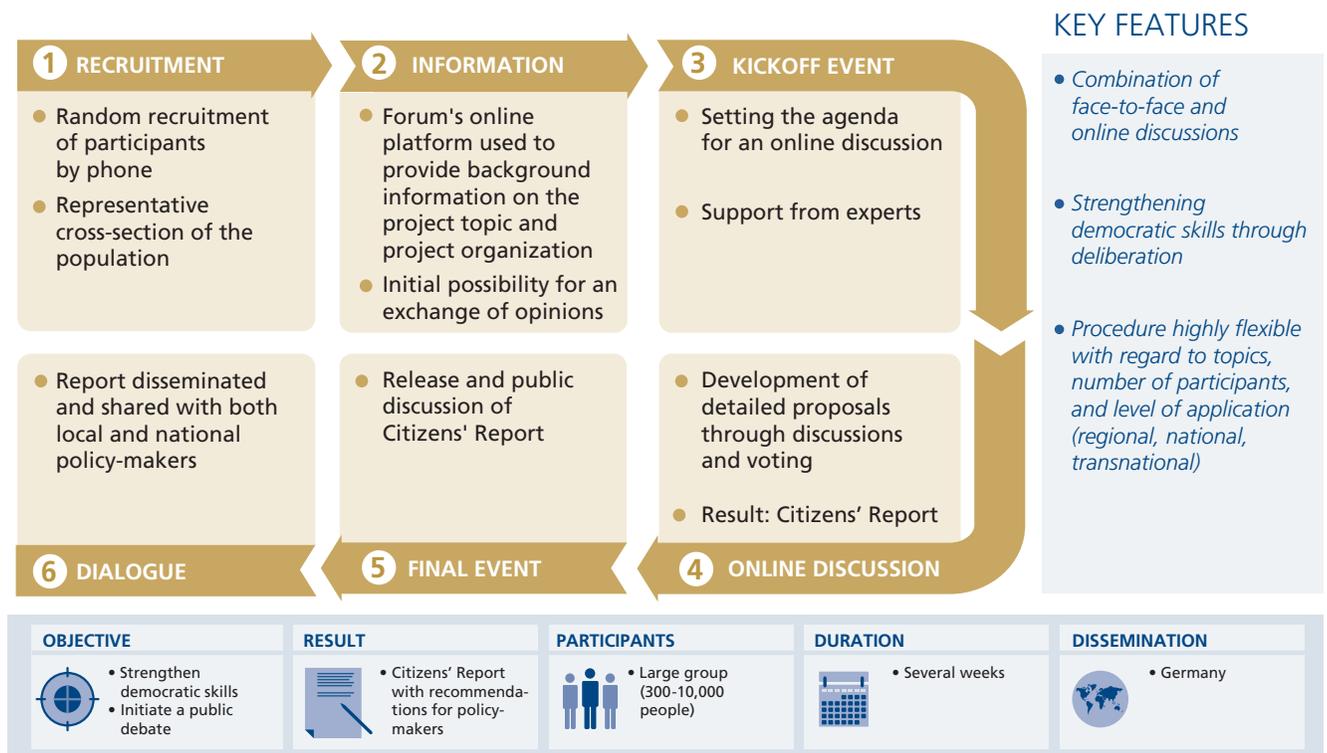
The procedure has thus far only been implemented in Germany, and on three occasions: in 2008, 2009, and 2011. The format is suitable not only at the regional and national levels, but also for transnational purposes.

In its current form, this method lasts 6–8 weeks and includes a combination of online discussion and in-person attendance events. In particular, a Citizens' Forum is composed of the following phases:



1. **Preparatory phase:** Prior to the event, participants acquaint themselves with the forum's procedures and the substance of the forum's topic. Participants utilize an online-platform established specifically for this purpose. The platform provides exposure to the topic through articles, comics, photographs, graphics, and videos. If participants have questions, they can contact various experts via e-mail.
2. **Kickoff event:** During a one- or two-day event, the participants get to know each other and formulate their ideas, thoughts, and suggestions in various committees.
3. **Online phase:** The online phase lasts several weeks and allows participants to engage in deeper discussion. Participants assess various political proposals through an interactive website. If questions arise, they may contact experts for assistance. Policy-makers may also participate as guests in the discussion.
4. **Final event:** In a two-day meeting at the end of the process, the results of the committee work are presented, voted on, and adopted in the form of a Citizens' Report.

## Citizens' Forum



Participants in a Citizens' Forum comprise a representative cross-section of the population, ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives. They are randomly selected and contacted by telephone, with special consideration of socio-demographic features, such as age, gender, level of education, and place of residence. In order to participate, participants must have computer and Internet access, and the required skills to engage fully in online discussions.

Generally, 300–400 people participate in a Citizens' Forum. The number of participants is limited primarily for logistical considerations, especially with respect to the two in-person attendance events at the beginning and end of the process. However, the process can also take place online with larger groups of up to 10,000 people.

Professional moderators support both the online and face-to-face discussions during the events. In addition, participants in the individual committees select “citizens' editors,” who facilitate the process. Notably, they are responsible for compiling commentary, opinions, and policy recommendations within their committees, and producing a report reflecting the committee's work.

#### Typical clients and areas of application

The Citizens' Forum is suited for discussion and opinion formation across a broad spectrum of socially relevant topics. Rather than addressing abstract topics, Citizens' Forums should connect to participants' everyday lives. To date, Citizens' Forums have addressed topics such as the “Social Market Economy,”<sup>2</sup> “Europe,”<sup>3</sup> and “Social Cohesion in Germany.”<sup>4</sup> Foundations and regional administrations have both implemented Citizens' Forums, but the procedure is also suited for political institutions and parties interested in ascertaining the preferences of a representative cross-section of the population.

#### Example

In 2011, a Citizens' Forum was held in Germany through the collaborative efforts of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Heinz Nixdorf Foundation, and the German Federal President. In all, 25 regional forums were held in conjunction with 25 online platforms. Forums were implemented and monitored by regional administrations, and each produced its own Citizens' Report. Following the regional forums, results were collected on a national online platform, and regional divisions and differences were discussed. Ultimately, a national Citizens' Report was produced. With 10,000 participants, this was the largest citizen-participation procedure in Germany to date.

### 3.2 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting is a modern form of the classic citizens' meeting. The procedure is based on traditional New England Town Meetings, in which all citizens in a town or a region assemble to address matters of common interest (Sliwka 2008). The concept was developed by *AmericaSpeaks* and is primarily implemented in American towns and communities. It has also been utilized in Australia and Great Britain.



21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings may include up to 5,000 citizens (generally at different sites or in different cities), who assemble in groups of 10–12 people to engage in discussion. The discussion groups are supported by independent moderators, who collect each group's most important ideas and enter these in a networked computer system. The information from all the rounds of discussion is sent to a central "Theme Team", which summarizes the individual comments and sends the summaries back to all the participants for them to comment and vote on. Every participant has an electronic keypad with which to vote individually. The results of the voting are shown immediately on a large screen, ensuring that participants receive direct, real-time feedback.

Participants should reflect the diversity of the population. They are selected in a targeted manner based on socio-demographic criteria, generally in consultation with the respective initiators.

### Typical initiators and areas of application

A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting is a useful tool to involve many citizens in political decisions or planning. Between 500 and 5,000 people can take part. Due to technological requirements and the large number of participants, the costs of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting are relatively high. Consequently, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings are only worthwhile if their results are actually meant for implementation.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings are generally carried out upon request by administrative institutions (e.g., municipalities and ministries). The one-day events can be used in order to formulate binding decisions on local issues. They can also be organized, however, so that political representatives can receive general feedback and suggestions regarding local, regional, or national topics.

### Examples

21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings have regularly been held in Washington, D.C., since 1998, with the mayor of the city acting as initiator. To date, a total of about 13,000 citizens have participated in five events designed to address local political issues.<sup>5</sup>

In 2005, Birmingham engaged 1,000 citizens in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting, which was held as part of a larger U.K. Department of Health citizens' participation campaign titled "Your Health, Your Care, Your Say" (YHYCYS). The initiative intended to involve the public in further developing the health-care system, with citizens voting on how resources should be invested.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the town meeting, nearly 30,000 British citizens were surveyed online, with the support of citizen advisory groups.

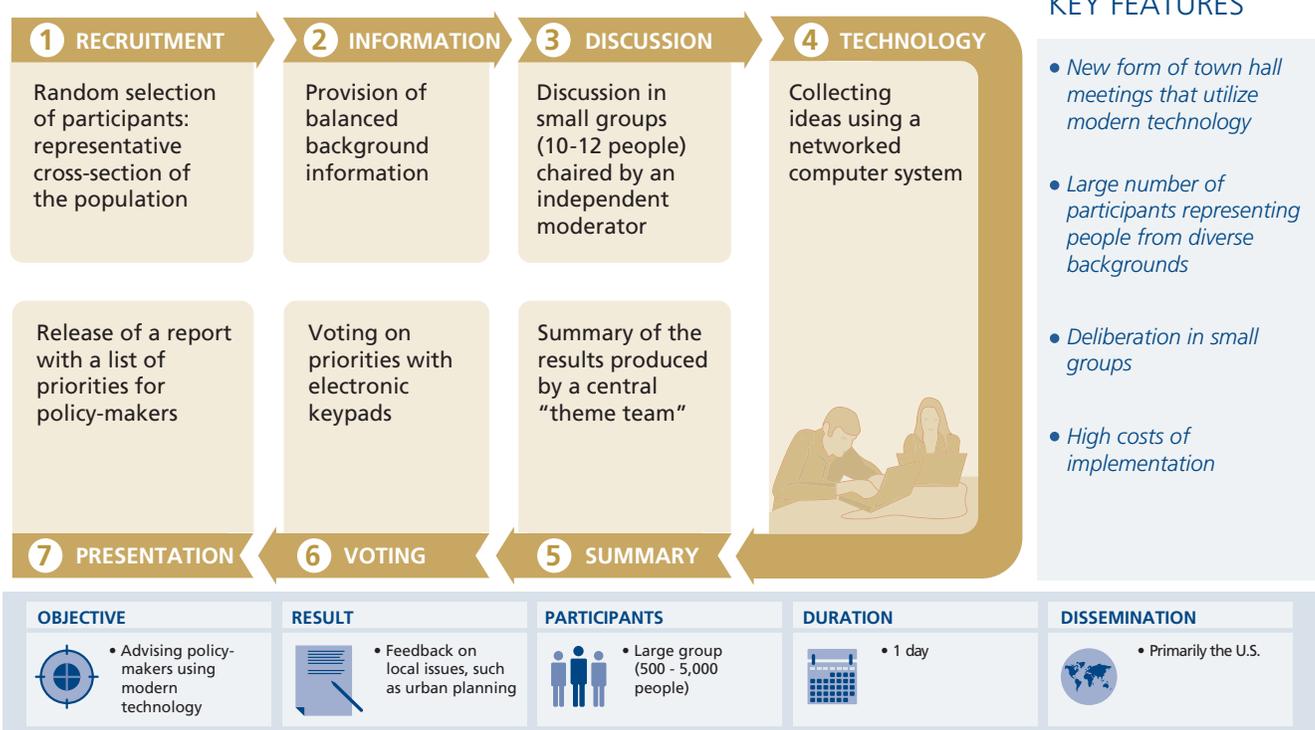
Finally, a third example stems from the work of *AmericaSpeaks*. In June 2010, *AmericaSpeaks* organized the participation of approximately 3,500 citizens to compile recommendations for the American federal budget in a process entitled "Our Budget, Our Economy". Parallel to this, Town Meetings took place in 19 towns, with small groups debating general focal points of U.S. fiscal policy and minimum standards for government support. The participants were randomly selected in advance on the basis of socio-demographic criteria. To prepare them for the meeting, they were pro-

vided with information on U.S. budgetary policy and the advantages and disadvantages of budget cuts or increased expenditures in various policy fields. In addition to Town Meetings, local citizens' meetings were held in 38 towns and communities. The various sites were connected through video and other technical means, with participants voting using electronic keypads. A "theme team" coordinated the discussions. Ultimately, the participants advocated tax increases for the highest income brackets, a reduction in government military expenditures, the introduction of a carbon dioxide tax, and a tax on securities transactions. Their recommendations were shortly thereafter presented in a public meeting to a bi-partisan commission for the reform of U.S. budget policy set up by President Barack Obama. They were then passed on to representatives in the U.S. Congress (see *AmericaSpeaks* 2010).

**Similar procedures**

An additional procedure developed by *AmericaSpeaks* is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Summit. Contrary to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings, the participants are not selected from a representative sample of the population. Instead, 50-5,000 participants are invited and represent particular interest groups connected to the summit's topic.

**21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meeting**





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