

Chapter 14

The Managers' View of Participation Processes with Citizen Panels

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Abstract The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the effectiveness of citizen participation from the organizers' point of view. We analyze the experience of managers from Germany, Austria, and Spain and their expectations about citizen participation in local government programs through an empirical survey focused on citizen participation in climate change programs. We seek to compare the opinion of these managers, experts in climate change initiatives, about the impact of e-participation. This research will allow us to know the opinion of managers about the success and failure factors of citizen participation in environmental programs.

14.1 Citizen Participation and Trust in Government

Citizen participation initiatives can be found in almost all the modernization programs of industrialized democracies with the aim of strengthening citizen trust in governments and to overcome the passive role that citizens as “customers/clients” had (Pratchett 1999; Dimitriu 2008) in the New Public Management (NPM) reform wave of the 1990s. After more than three decades of NPM reforms, in which the bureaucratic public administration model has been strongly criticized, there is a feeling among the citizenry that the “customer approach” has widened the distance between government and citizens and that there has been a decline of public trust in governments (Welch et al. 2004). In the conclusions of the Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government (Kim et al. 2005), the search for new styles of governance which promote higher levels of citizen engagement is viewed as a way of changing such feelings and improving citizens' trust in governments. The idea of participatory governance is gaining popularity and reflects the potential of citizen participation in public policy and service delivery.

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According to Nabatchi (2012), citizen participation may have many goals. When determining goals, public managers must be mindful not only of their own needs but also of the needs (and interests) of potential allies, stakeholders, and citizens. For example, participation can be used to inform the public (to let citizens know about issues, changes, resources, and policies), explore an issue (help citizens learn about a topic or problem), transform a conflict (help resolve disagreements and improve relations among groups), obtain feedback (understand citizens' views of an issue, problem, or policy), generate ideas (help create new suggestions and alternatives), collect data (gather information about citizens' perceptions, concerns, needs, values, interests, etc.), identify problems (get information about current and potential issues), build capacity (improve the community's ability to address issues), and develop collaboration (bring groups and people together to address an issue).

Citizen participation may be indirect or direct. Indirect participation, such as voting or supporting advocacy groups, occurs when citizens select or work through representatives who make decisions for them. Direct participation occurs when citizens are personally and actively engaged in decision-making. This is the case, for instance, of participatory budgets, the co-production of services, and e-petition. In the academic literature, citizen participation has been considered under a number of labels including citizen engagement, citizen involvement, active citizenship involvement, and citizen empowerment. Typically, the highest degree of citizen participation has been found in climate change, garbage recycling, and social programs, and the benefits of citizen participation are related to improvements in effectiveness and efficiency, decision-making quality, and legitimacy (Bovair 2007; Smith et al. 2009).

After more than a decade of academic and professional studies about the contribution of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to enabling citizen participation, at present, there is an ongoing theoretical debate about the need for a well-founded evaluation of e-participation and traditional participation initiatives (Aichholzer and Westholm 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate the effectiveness of online versus offline participation from the point of view of managers, experts in climate change initiatives (hereinafter managers). For this purpose, we analyze their previous experience in, and their expectations about, citizen participation in local government programs through an empirical survey focused on citizen participation in climate change programs. The final part summarizes the managers' assessments of the development and results of the citizen panels of the e2democracy project. There are a few online/offline citizen participation evaluation studies and none of them addresses the evaluation from the point of view of local government managers. This chapter allows for a comparative evaluation through an international survey, employing the opinion of managers from Austrian, German, and Spanish cities or regions. We seek not only to compare the opinion of managers on the use of e-tools but also to assess the impact of e-participation on the policy goals for which citizen participation is offered.

14.2 Theoretical Framework: The Search for New Styles of Governance

Institutional theory has been extensively used in recent years by academics for interpreting the adoption of innovations in the public sector. Many studies about the implementation of public sector reforms have used institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) to explain the features of these implementations and the gap between rhetoric and actual results. Institutional theory is a positive theory, which explicitly considers the organization as part of a broader social system and seeks to describe corporate behavior rather than prescribing how organizations should behave. It has a degree of overlap with a number of other theories, notably the stakeholder and legitimacy theories (Deegan 2006).

Institutional theory is mostly concerned with the diffusion and spread of organizational models within a given organizational environment and with understanding organizations within larger social and cultural systems (Oliver 1991; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Institutional theory assumes that organizations respond to pressures from their institutional environments and adopt structures and practices that have high social value as answers to external changes in expectations and formal rules.

According to this theory, citizen participation can be viewed as the search for new styles of governance in order to be responsive to the wishes and expectations of citizens. Thus, in an environment of lost trust in governments, public institutions could view citizen participation as a symbol of responsiveness and of "good governance." Citizen participation may be considered as a key element of transparency and good governance (Kim et al. 2005). Organizations introduce practices which are expected to be interpreted by citizens as improvements in transparency and accountability. The intentional or unintentional separation between external image and actual structures and procedures has been referred to as "decoupling" (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 2002). Public sector entities are required to demonstrate responsiveness and citizen participation initiatives are seen as one way in which public sector entities can legitimize their operations.

The hypothesis that the public sector adopts innovations for their symbolic value is not new. It is one of the most frequently repeated arguments for explaining the features and results of the implementation of public sector reforms. So, it may come as no surprise that citizen participation initiatives are sometimes undertaken simply for image and legitimacy since no government can say that citizen participation in public action is not useful or that it is a waste of time. Furthermore, citizen participation can be seen as a sign of good governance in response to institutional and/or social pressure in order to secure legitimacy from constituents and resources from the institutional environment.

An important issue in this theory is the concept of isomorphism. Three classifications of isomorphism are proposed: coercive, mimetic, and normative (DiMaggio and Powell 1983): (a) coercive, results from both formal and informal pressure imposed on an organization by legal, hierarchical, or resource dependence (in the case of local governments, from central or regional governments); (b) mimetic, in which

organizations may imitate practices and models of leading organizations in their institutional field in an attempt to get greater recognition, becoming, in this case, passive adopters of innovations; and (c) normative isomorphism stems from environmental pressure for transformation from stakeholders such as politicians, financial institutions, scholars, and multilateral organizations, as well as from specialized groups within a profession who try to define the conditions and method of work.

14.3 Methodology

A two-part questionnaire was designed. Part A deals with the experience of the managers in previous initiatives in which citizen participation was involved via the Internet and/or traditional ways. Part B collects the future expectations of managers about the contribution of citizen panels to climate saving.

In part A, the assessment of the experience of managers regarding citizen participation processes was carried out through interviews with 48 managers of climate change programs of 19 local governments from Germany, Spain, and Austria involved in some of the most relevant international environmental initiatives (Agenda 21, Aalborg Commitments, Covenant of Mayors (CoM), Climate Alliance, e5 Programme, R20 Regions of Climate Action, etc.): Bremen, Munich, Bremerhaven, Freiburg, Hannover, Wasserburg, and Wennigsen in Germany; Saragossa, Pamplona, Diputacion Provincial de Zaragoza, Alcobendas, Sant Cugat del Valles, Alicante, and Regional Government of Aragon in Spain; and Bregenz, Mariazellerland (Steiermark), and Vienna in Austria. The interviews were carried out from September 2010 to April 2011.

In part B, the survey about expectations was limited to those cities involved in our citizen panels' initiative (Bremen, Bremerhaven, Wennigsen, Saragossa, Pamplona, Bregenz, and Mariazellerland; see <http://www.e2democracy.eu>).

Finally, at the end of the project, we sent a questionnaire to those managers ($n=23$) who had accompanied the e2democracy project throughout, asking about their degree of satisfaction with the development and results of the citizen panels.

14.4 Analysis of Results

Figure 14.1 shows the structure of the questionnaire in which managers answer or skip questions according to their degree of involvement and experience in online and offline citizen participation programs about climate change.

1. Experience in climate change or environmental protection

Interviewees ($n=48$) report different degrees of experience in climate-saving projects. More than 64% state that they have up to 10 years of experience and around 40% state that they have up to 5 years of experience. The average participation of

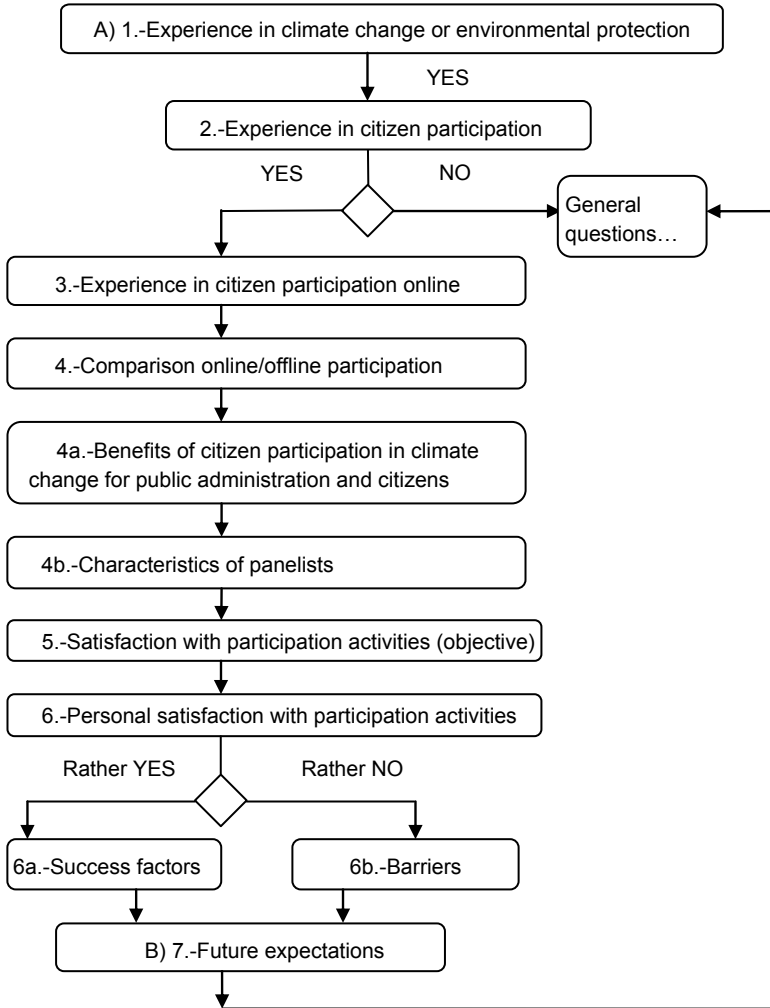


Fig. 14.1 Questionnaire diagram

managers in this kind of projects is 9 years. This experience in climate-saving programs gives managers a solid background to build an informed opinion about what can be expected from citizen participation in climate-saving programs, even though these initiatives are relatively recent in local administration agendas.

2. Experience in citizen participation

Most of the interviewees also have experience in citizen participation projects in which citizens are involved in local programs (80%), such as energy saving, mobility, ecology education, CO₂ reduction habits, and recycling. In addition to climate-saving programs, some interviewees have also been involved in programs included in Agenda 21.

3. Experience in citizen participation online

Germany and Spain show the highest level of experience in e-participation with 58 and 43 %, respectively, of the managers interviewed stating that they have been involved in e-participation initiatives; the level in Austria is 12.5 %. The questions directly related to e-participation have been answered only by the managers with experience in e-participation.

4. Comparison online/offline participation

Around 50 % of the managers report better online project performance in cost for public administrations and citizens, better offline project performance in the “value of the content of the contributions” and they find no differences in effectiveness in CO₂ reduction.

4a. Benefits of citizen participation in climate change for public administration and citizens

From the point of view of managers, the most outstanding benefits from both online and offline participation programs are “better transparency in the development of local measures for climate saving” and “increased attention to the climate effects of actions in various fields of life” (see Table 14.1). Other effects from the contribution of citizen participation are a test of new ways of governance and the improvement of the image of the city. German, Spanish, and Austrian managers show a similar degree of satisfaction with respect to their previous experiences with citizens. In all cases, the standard deviations of the Spanish managers’ answers are below average, which means a lower degree of dispersion of manager views about the benefits of citizen participation than in the case of German and Austrian managers.

4b. Characteristics of participants in climate-saving programs

For the interviewees, there is no difference in age, gender, income, and political orientation in the population who participate in climate-saving programs. By contrast, they report more participation in citizens with higher education and a lower background of migration. Interviewees with experience in online participation initiatives describe the profile of citizens participating online as young, with high education and a nonmigrant background.

5. Satisfaction with participation activities (objective)

Among managers with experience in citizen participation in climate-saving programs, there is a tendency towards offline projects, as reflects the mean value of the answers of 6.2 for offline projects with respect to 5.5 for online projects. Only the item related to the cost-benefits is slightly higher in the case of online initiatives. The highest scores can be found in “quality of citizen contributions,” “payoff for participants,” “increase of citizen knowledge about the topic,” “cost-benefit ratio for organizers of participation processes,” and “short-term changes.” Regarding long-term changes, only 19 % of the managers expect noticeable changes.

With respect to the number of participants, in the case of offline projects, 25.7 % of the respondents are happy with the level of participation, 54.3 % show a moderate

Table 14.1 Benefits of citizen participation initiatives

	Spain		Germany		Austria		Total	
	m	SD	m	SD	m	SD	m	SD
Better image of the city administration has been achieved	6.4	1.3	5.6	2.2	5.1	2.5	5.8	2.0
The participation process was proof that public administration is testing new forms of governance	6.6	1.8	5.5	3.2	5.3	3.0	5.9	2.7
An improvement of social cohesion has been achieved	6.1	2.0	5.2	2.9	6.1	2.2	5.7	2.4
Better transparency in the development of local measures for climate saving has been achieved	7.2	1.3	6.8	2.6	4.6	2.3	6.5	2.3
Increased attention to the climate effects of actions in various fields of life has been achieved	7.5	1.3	5.8	2.2	5.4	2.6	6.3	2.1
On the whole, a reduction in the CO ₂ emission levels among participants has been achieved	6.1	1.6	5.8	1.7	3.9	1.5	5.5	1.8
A positive effect on climate-saving behavior among other citizens in the area has been achieved	5.6	1.3	5.6	2.0	4.6	2.1	5.4	1.8
A significant improvement in citizen engagement in city affairs has been achieved	6.8	1.3	4.8	2.9	3.4	2.5	5.3	2.6

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0 = very low extent, 10 = very high extent), *n* = 48

level of satisfaction, and 20% are not happy. The managers are very critical about citizen participation in online projects since 29.4% are happy, 29.4% show a moderate level of satisfaction, and 41.2% are not happy with the number of citizens who participate in these initiatives. By countries, the German and Austrian managers are the most critical about the number of participants. Almost all the Spanish managers show a moderate degree of satisfaction with the number of participants.

Regarding the representativeness of the participants, the managers are critical since only 23.5% for offline and 25.1% for online projects give a score of over 7 to the degree of representativeness; for the rest, it is moderate (around 50%) or insufficient.

6. Personal satisfaction with participation activities

The general level of satisfaction is high since 75% of managers state their satisfaction with previous experiences. By countries, only the Austrian managers show some degree of dissatisfaction while 100% of the German and Spanish managers are satisfied with previous project results.

Table 14.2 Factors of citizen participation panel success

	Previous experience m	SD	Expectations on citizen panels m	SD
The level of changes in personal lifestyles required to meet the reduction objectives	4.9	2.7	5.7	2.6
The level of coordination among panelists required	4.6	3.0	6.1	2.7
The level of clarity of the objectives	8.3	2.0	8.5	2.0
The level of support provided, such as advertising, supervision by moderators, or similar	8.6	1.6	8.6	1.8
The level of incentives provided lotteries to maintain interest in the participation process	3.0	3.4	6.5	2.5
The level of transparency in the process and traceability of the results	8.8	1.1	8.0	2.1
The variety of participation modes offered for different target groups: online, offline	6.6	2.8	7.6	2.3
The length of the time span for monitoring citizen engagement	5.1	3.5	7.4	2.5
The level of regular input demanded from panelists	6.4	2.8	6.6	2.4
The level of competition among panelists	2.1	2.5	5.6	2.5
The variety of channels, media, and multipliers used in order to mobilize participation	7.6	2.0	8.3	1.8
The level of user-friendliness of the ICTs employed	6.7	3.0	8.6	1.9
The existence of commitments signed in national or international programs to reduce CO ₂ emissions or to engage in citizen participation activities (e.g., Aalborg Commitments, Covenant of Mayors, and Climate Alliance)	7.0	3.0	5.7	2.7

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0 (very low extent, 10 (very high extent)), *n* = 48

6a. Success factors

The key conditions for the successful participation of citizens with mean values over 7 points are “the transparency of results,” “the support to citizens,” “the clarity of the objectives,” and “channels used to mobilize participation” (see Table 14.2). The implementation of incentives and competition with other citizens are not considered relevant. The standard deviations of the success factors with the highest means (over 8) are the lowest. This reflects a consensus about what they consider to be the relevant factors in citizen participation processes.

6b. Barriers

Around 25% of the managers state that they are not satisfied with their citizen participation projects. The main reason (with a mean value of over 7 points) is that

Table 14.3 Failure factors of citizen participation panels

	Previous experience m	SD	Expectations of citizen panels m	SD
Limited political will and drive	5.3	3.7	7.1	2.5
Lack of interest by citizens	5.6	2.7	7.3	2.5
There are always the same already known people who engage	7.7	1.1	6.7	2.8
Lack of financial resources	5.4	2.4	6.6	2.5
Lack of personnel resources	6.3	2.9	7.0	2.7
Cooperation with other actors, for example, with enterprises, is more effective	4.1	2.8	4.1	2.5
Risk of being criticized by steering committees or political bodies in case the participation activity fails expectations	2.9	3.3	4.6	2.8
Risk of getting results that are not wanted or that are difficult to implement	3.4	3.5	4.5	2.8
Decreasing citizen motivation during longer periods of time	–	–	7.1	2.2
Limited attractive opportunities offered to citizens to put their motivation into practice	–	–	6.2	2.1
Time citizens are willing to spend in participation processes overall	–	–	7.0	2.5
Lack of economic incentives for citizens	–	–	4.9	2.6
Lack of consideration of citizen input in decisions	–	–	6.9	2.4

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0=very low extent, 10=very high extent), *n* = 48

it is always the same (already known) people who participate in the initiatives (see Table 14.3). Other reasons with mean values of over 5 and 6 points are limited political will and drive, lack of interest from the citizens, lack of personnel, and lack of resources.

7. Future expectations

Regarding the effectiveness of citizen participation programs, managers estimate that, on average, 65% of participants will change their climate-saving behavior in the short term, while only less than 45% of participants will maintain such changes in the long term.

As can be seen in Table 14.2, most items increase their mean value when referring to expectations. The mean value of “setting clear objectives,” “the provision of support,” and “the level of transparency of the process” again score over 8 points when referring to previous experiences and expectations; so there seems to be a wide consensus between managers in considering these items as key factors of success. From previous experience to expectations, “the variety of different channels of communication” and “the level of user-friendliness of the ICTs to enhance citizen participation” increase their mean value to over 8 points with the lowest values of

standard deviations. However, the expectations for the contribution of “the signing of commitments to the improvement of citizen participation” decrease.

The expectations about the factors that might lead to the failure of future citizen participation are included in Table 14.3. In general, the items included in this question increase their mean in the column of expectations. There are several items with mean values of over 7, which show an acceptable consensus regarding the reasons for the failure of citizen participation: limited political will, lack of interest from citizens, and decreasing citizen motivation during longer periods. Notwithstanding, the standard deviations are relatively high, which means different views between managers about the extent to which they are failure factors.

Finally, just over 50% of the German and Spanish managers and around 25% of the Austrian managers report that some evaluation of citizen participation programs is carried out. If almost half of the local governments do not test the results and/or the impact of their climate-saving programs, it could mean that the implementation of these initiatives is an objective in itself. This low level of interest in monitoring their participation programs is consistent with the low values they give to the contribution of citizen participation, especially in the case of Austrian local government climate-saving programs.

14.5 Managers' Evaluation of Citizen Panels of the E2democracy Project

This section collects the opinions of the managers about the citizen panel initiative at the end of the project. The questionnaire was made up of 16 questions, which encompass a total of 94 items. It was responded by 23 local organizers of the project. In almost all items, managers were invited to give points from 0 to 10. The following tables collect the answers which score over 7 or below 4 points in order to highlight the answers with a higher degree of consensus.

The overall results are grouped into three thematic blocks: the benefits for the city resulting from the citizen panel initiative, the adequacy of the number of participants, and the degree of satisfaction of the managers with the e2democracy citizen panel project.

a. The benefits for the city resulting from the citizen panel initiative

For the managers, the most outstanding benefits of the citizen panels (with scores of over 7 points) are “increased attention to the climate effects of actions in various fields of life,” “on the whole, a reduction of the CO₂ emission level among participants,” “a boost to the ego of participants from acting as a responsible citizen,” and “a positive effect on climate-saving behavior among other citizens in the area.” Only the first item matches up with the expectations stated in part B of the first questionnaire. The managers find the achievements of the citizen panels in the reduction of CO₂ satisfactory, especially in the energy-saving field. Furthermore, most of the managers have detected behavioral changes in the participants by the

end of the project, although fewer than half expect those changes to be maintained beyond the end of the project. Just under 50% agree that the monitoring of consumption and corresponding feedback carried out in the project have increased individual efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions.

Regarding the benefits from the online and offline modes of participation, the managers highlight the low cost for citizens and the administration of the online mode, and the strengthening of community building and the sustainability and continuity of achieved results of the offline mode.

b. The number of participants

The managers agree in considering “the support to citizens through training for participants, supervision by moderators or similar” and “the variety of participation modes offered for different target groups: online, offline” as key factors of success and as aspects that have boosted the number of participants. The items related to barriers for citizens to participate in the panel on climate-saving score below 7, which reflects that managers did not find strong barriers in the development of the project. Notwithstanding, most of the managers are of the opinion that, when there are a low number of participants, the usefulness of the participation results is limited.

c. The degree of satisfaction of the managers with the e2democracy citizen panel

Table 14.4 shows the degree of satisfaction of the managers with the e2democracy citizen panels. The overall impression of the managers is, with 7.5 points and one of the lowest standard deviations, highly positive. The managers are also satisfied with the sensitization of participants concerning climate protection, the behavior changes among participants, perceived fun in organizing, accompanying the panel, and the usefulness of CO₂ monitoring. All of them show low standard deviations.

Table 14.4 Satisfaction with the e2democracy citizen panel

	m	SD
a) Overall impression	7.5	1.4
b) Usefulness of CO ₂ monitoring	8.0	1.3
c) Practicability of CO ₂ monitoring	6.0	2.1
d) Number of participants	4.5	2.4
e) Reduction of CO ₂ and energy consumption	6.2	2.1
f) Sensitization of participants concerning climate protection	7.7	1.2
g) Behavior changes among participants	7.2	1.4
h) Community building	6.4	1.4
i) Participation intensity of participants	6.6	1.5
j) Representativeness of participants	4.7	2.1
k) General impact on panelists, for example, to keep them interested in climate protection and to keep them active in a community	6.6	1.2
l) Perceived fun in organizing, accompanying the panel	7.2	2.0

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0=very low extent, 10=very high extent), *n*=23

Table 14.5 To what extent do the following effects apply to the citizen panel on climate saving carried out in your city/region?

	m	SD
a) Enhanced collaboration between local government and citizens	4.9	2.9
b) Increased interest of local government to practice citizen participation	5.7	2.9
c) Increased readiness of panelists to engage in local sustainability issues	6.5	2.0
d) A lasting change towards citizen participation in climate policies	5.1	2.3
e) Information about local government policies for panelists	5.4	2.5
f) Enhanced civic skills among the panelists	6.1	1.8
g) A higher level of trust in local government among the panelists	5.9	2.3

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0=very low extent, 10=very high extent), *n* =23

By contrast, the managers are critical about the number of participants which has been very low in the case of Mariazell, Bregenz (Austria), and Bremen (Germany).

Table 14.5 collects information about the opinion of the managers on other collateral effects of the citizen panel initiative. As can be seen, all items are scored between 4 and 7, which reflects the lack of consensus about these additional potential effects of citizen panels.

Regarding the contextual factors of the citizen panels in the different cities involved in the project, all the managers—except for those of Mariazell and Bremerhaven—state that environment and sustainable development have been relevant policy issues in their cities. In all the cities, except for those mentioned above, direct participation of citizens in local government issues seems to be a common practice and most of the managers agree that citizens had had previous opportunities to participate in the sustainable development policies developed in their cities. In any case, the strong variations in the answers of the managers to these questions in cities such as Mariazell, Bremerhaven, and Bregenz reduce the representativeness of the averages shown in Table 14.6.

Table 14.6 How do you assess the context of the citizen panel on climate protection in (city/region)?

	m	SD
a) Environment and sustainable development have been relevant policy issues in (city/region) already before this initiative	7.3	2.7
b) Direct participation of citizens in local government issues are common practice in (city/region)	5.5	2.1
c) Public administration in (city/region) has already had some experience in citizen participation in the area of sustainable development (e.g., with local agenda processes)	6.2	3.3
d) Citizens in (city/region) had little opportunities to engage in sustainable development policies before this initiative	3.8	2.3
e) Civil society activities (NGOs, NPOs) have had a visible impact on local climate policies in (city/region)	6.1	2.3

m mean, *SD* standard deviation; scale from 0–10 (0=very low extent, 10=very high extent), *n* =23

14.6 Discussion

The answers of the managers show that most participation initiatives started in the second half of the 1990s at the same time as the publication of feedback studies about NPM reforms and the warnings of academics about the doubtful benefits and the decline of public trust in governments derived from these reforms.

Programs involving citizen participation are often applied to environment issues. An overall view of the managers' responses about previous experiences shows a positive evaluation of these experiences. The general level of satisfaction is high since around 75% of them report satisfaction with the participation of citizens in local government programs.

The managers do not find noticeable differences between online and offline participants (although the profile of onliners is young, with higher education and a nonmigrant background), and expect only slight improvements from the use of ICTs in future projects. This is one finding of this survey because the expected prevalence of online over the offline methods is not clearly confirmed by these managers. For the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD; 2003), the online provision of information is an essential precondition for engagement, but quantity does not mean quality. Active promotion is critical for effective online consultations. This assertion is consistent with the opinion of managers who consider that "the variety of different channels of communication" and "the level of user-friendliness of the ICTs to enhance citizen participation" are relevant aspects of successful citizen participation initiatives.

For the managers, most outstanding benefits from previous participation programs have been the increment of citizen attention on climate change effects and the enhancement of transparency of the local government, together with better image of the city administration and the contribution to testing new modes of governance.

However, the managers only find moderate benefits in aspects directly related to the participation projects. They report moderate effects in the reduction of CO₂ and on climate-saving behavior among other citizens who do not participate in these projects. This is an important result because citizenship involvement is critical for the success of climate-saving initiatives. The effective reduction of greenhouse gas emissions requires the active engagement of the population.

More than 40% of local governments do not evaluate the outcomes of citizen participation programs. However, the entities which do not monitor these outcomes consider the contribution of e-participation programs important for the strengthening of ties among the local community. It seems that local governments are more interested in implementing citizen participation initiatives than in achieving the specific objectives of that participation. These results are consistent with the institutional theory, which suggests the institutional image as a driver of some public sector reforms. Citizen participation programs may represent local government interest in implementing new horizontal modes of governance and in enhanced responsiveness rather than a desire to achieve the specific objectives of climate-saving.

The intrinsic value of the engagement of citizens in city affairs in terms of image contributes to explaining the “decoupling” of citizen participation contributions from the overall public policy of the organization, as the institutional theory states. So, some citizen participation programs may be introduced when they are considered as signals of “good governance” and then copied from other local governments with reputations for responsiveness and openness to citizenship wishes (mimetic behavior). Even though we have not empirically tested whether there is mimetic behavior, when the local governments studied introduce citizen participation initiatives into their local government agendas and fail to control and monitor the results, there is evidence for concluding that citizen participation may not only be sought for the value of its contributions. This implementation of citizen participation could be carried out through a mixture of mimetic institutionalism—when there is an imitation of practices implemented by other local governments with a reputation for being well-managed—and coercive institutionalism—when there is a legal requirement which imposes citizen consultation in local government environmental issues.

The managers report that well-educated and nonmigrant background citizens collaborate more in citizen participation activities than the rest of population. Previous studies, such as Smith et al. (2009), for the USA, only find that well-off and well-educated citizens participate more than the rest of the population. Some managers report that citizen participation initiatives only attract and reach the well-informed and active citizens but not the total population, and recommend seeking new ways of approaching citizens. For Smith et al. (2009), income and education have the same relationship to online and offline political activity, and there is no evidence that Web-based participation fundamentally alters the long-established association between offline political participation and the above-mentioned socioeconomic factors.

As in previous studies referring to the USA, the managers who collaborated in our survey do not find differences between online and offline participants. The managers only report a higher online participation in young people. Contrary to the hopes of some advocates, for the moment, the Internet is not changing the socioeconomic character of citizen engagement in the European Union (EU). It seems that, in Europe, the Internet and broadband technology is spread over wide levels of the population and, therefore, income does not make a difference in attracting citizens to participation programs.

Some managers are critical about the number of participants and about the representativeness of participants. This view can also be found in other answers in which the managers say that the participants are always the same. These results confirm a common concern about the representativeness of results, taking into account that participants may have greater or special motivation or interest in the topic than the average of the population, or may be more politically active. Despite this potential problem of representativeness, the managers are happy with citizen contributions to the programs, the contribution of programs to the participants, and the cost-benefit ratio.

Some key conditions for successful citizen participation programs are “the clarity of the objectives,” “the support to citizens through training for participants,

supervision by moderators, or similar,” and the “transparency of the process and traceability of the results.” By contrast, “limited political will,” “lack of interest from citizens,” the participation of the “same, already known, people,” and the lack of personnel seem to be main reasons for the failure of citizen participation programs. Notwithstanding, the standard deviations are high, which shows strong dispersion in the answers of managers. For 25 % of the managers, barriers for recruiting citizens are related to the citizen perception of both the lack of effectiveness of their collaboration and the lack of true interest of politicians in the contributions of citizens. Therefore, key factors for the success of citizen participation initiatives are those that have to do with motivation, credibility, and responsiveness, whereas the citizen perception that participation does not make a difference in the development of public policies seems to be the main cause of failure.

The answers of the managers to the questions in part B deal with what can be expected from citizen participation. The answers reveal a positive view and a high degree of expectations about the role that citizen participation can play in environmental programs. Managers agree that citizens can make a noticeable contribution to CO₂ reduction, especially through changes in their domestic habits such as in energy saving. The opinions of managers from previous experience to expectations are similar: In terms of cost, they envisage better results in online than in offline participation and, in terms of social consequences and sustainability, better offline than online.

These results are consistent with previous studies in other countries. Studies carried out by the OECD (2003) show that successful online consultation requires demonstrating commitment, tailoring your approach to fit your target group, integrating online consultation with traditional methods, providing feedback, and ensuring coherence.

Several lessons could be learnt by managers and academics alike. Citizen participation programs have the intrinsic value of giving citizens an image of responsiveness, but the mere implementation of citizen participation initiatives does not guarantee improvements in public policy decision-making and in accountability.

14.7 Conclusions

The survey carried out has allowed the identification of conditions for the success and failure of e-participation initiatives/programs and the determination of what can be expected from them compared to traditional participation projects.

Managers are critical about the success of citizen participation initiatives. Almost half of the local governments analyzed do not evaluate the results of citizen participation programs; therefore, it seems that local governments are more interested in implementing citizen participation initiatives than in achieving the specific results of that participation. Some managers are also critical about the number of participants and their representativeness, given that participants may have greater or special motivation or interest in the topic than the average of the population, or may be more politically active.

The evidence collected answers some research questions raised in the academic literature about e-participation and in a number of publications from multilateral organizations. These questions include whether online tools could offer more opportunities for participation, allow for a greater range of participants, and facilitate “better” participation. The answers to these three questions seem to be negative or at least doubtful. For the managers interviewed, the recruitment of onliners is not easier than recruitment in offline modes and, with the introduction of ICTs, the problems for the engagement of citizens remain or even increase. Regarding the second question, the socioeconomic profile of the participants is the same in both modes, with no difference in age (perhaps onliners are younger), gender, or income. The Internet is not allowing local governments to access a wider range of citizens: the same well-informed, educated, and politically active citizens who participated in the traditional model continue to do so. Finally, the managers do not report differences in the quality of participation between onliners and offliners; therefore, the hypothesis that ICTs allow better participation is not confirmed by the results of the study.

The results reveal that the use of technology is only an enabler but is not the solution for the engagement of citizens in participation processes. It facilitates existing or, in some cases, new methods of engagement, but the key issues for success or failure, participation or nonparticipation, and social and political problems cannot easily be solved by merely introducing technology into the process. It seems that the integration of e-participation with traditional “offline” tools for public participation in policy-making is needed.

Although this study analyzes the features of citizen participation in climate change policies in three EU countries, the results will also be useful for other countries considering citizen participation as a way of strengthening and enhancing the relationship between governments and citizens.

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