

Chapter 5

Evaluating Public (e-)Consultation Processes

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Abstract In this chapter, the primary research question of the e2d project, the applicability and validity of evaluation tools, is applied to six cases of public consultations. Following the general idea of a twofold relativity theory of evaluating (e)-participation as outlined in Chap. 2, three pairs of similar cases are subjected to evaluation from an organizer's as well as from a participant's view by means of different tools. As a result, it is recommended that in every case a verbal assessment should be made by external observers based on a template, which has been demonstrated here. In addition, a quantitative assessment of the same success criteria can be achieved by interviewing organizers. Because we found a high level of variance in the views of different organizers in different departments on the same consultation process, as many organizers as possible should be interviewed. Their views can be complemented by surveying participants, which leads to partly different results. The votes of participants are also influenced by the point in time at which the assessment is undertaken. In most cases, it is only possible to get citizens to assess the process as well as its output and outcome, but not the impact at the time of their participation, as often it takes several months until impacts materialize and participants cannot be reached anymore as they have not registered.

5.1 Basic Evaluation Approach and Tools

In Chap. 2 we introduced a twofold relativity theory of evaluating participation processes. The evaluation criteria must be chosen with regard to the kind of participation procedure and the individual expectations and aims of the organizers and/or participants (Kubicek et al. 2011).

There are many different forms of public consultations as regards their purpose, activities, and tools. The common features are that a political body or public administration asks for contribution by the public in general or by certain target groups on a defined matter as an input for a planning or decision-making process. Within the policy life cycle, consultations are part of the second phase of analysis, after

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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016
G. Aichholzer et al. (eds.), *Evaluating e-Participation*, Public Administration and Information Technology 19, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-25403-6_5

agenda setting and before policy formation (Macintosh 2004). The constellation of actors includes the consulting party, that is political bodies or administrative units; the consulted parties, which may be divided into the target groups or stakeholders, active participants, and onlookers; and in some cases moderators as a third party as well as providers of online services and tools.

We will call the consulting party “organizers.” They define the objectives as well as the rules and procedures of a consultation process. They either ask for a certain kind of input from individuals, in particular facts, ideas or preferences, or start a process of collective opinion building, in which participants exchange ideas, comment on each other’s propositions and perhaps reach a consensus on the matter in question. This type of consultation is called “deliberative participation” (Crocker 2007). According to Coleman and Götze (2001), deliberative processes, in contrast to other forms like polling, “[...] encourage preference formation rather than simple preference assertion” (pp. 5–6). Obviously, both kinds of consultations call for partly different evaluation criteria.

For an appropriate evaluation concept, a design has to be developed, which allows for assessing to what extent the objectives and the expectations the organizers and participants have at the beginning of the consultation have ultimately been met. Ideally, this should be done through a before and after analysis, collecting data on aims and expectations at the beginning, and data on the corresponding experience at the end. The list of expectations and possible aims has to be tailored to each case, taking account of the topic and the institutional context of the consultation.

Within the e2d project, three different tools have been developed for evaluating public consultations:

- A template for assessing success criteria and success factors by external observers, in these cases the research team, partly based on data collected and partly based on their observations
- Questionnaires for assessing aims and expectations of organizers at the beginning and their assessment at the end of the consultation
- Questionnaires for assessing the expectations and final assessments of participants

Each of the following three sections will present the application of one of these three tools to two similar cases.

5.2 Assessment of Different Success Criteria by External Observers

The first generic tool which has been developed and tested is a template for assessing the success of a consultation process. In this section, we will describe its application to two similar one-phase online consultations on local climate policy in

Pamplona and Saragossa.¹ Such an evaluation by means of an external review is the minimum that should be applied in any case. The template presents a kind of reference model and allows for comparisons of the success between similar or different cases and thereby for organizational learning.

5.2.1 Objectives, Actors, Process, Output, and Outcome

According to the conceptual framework, consultation processes should be described at least by their objectives, the main actors, and processes as well as their output and outcome. Output refers to the information presented for consultation, that is, propositions or questions, outcome to the comments, or answers received. These elements were very similar in two consultations in Spain, and yet, their assessment delivered different results.

The Pamplona Case In July 2012, the Local Agenda 21 Office in the Environment Department of Pamplona started an online consultation with three objectives:

- To determine the degree of knowledge of the initiatives promoted by the council in order to reduce CO₂ emissions in the city
- To select the initiatives considered as most important among those promoted by the local government
- To receive proposals for other measures that could be taken by the City Council to reduce CO₂ emissions

The consultation was carried out online for 10 weeks only via the city web site and addressing all citizens. In addition to the Local Agenda Office, other departments were involved, in particular “Communication,” “Social affairs,” “Informatics,” and “Translation” (because of the two official languages Spanish and Basque).

To create awareness, in addition to a press release on July 23, the council sent e-mails to neighborhood associations, consumer associations, and key organizations working in the field of the environment, asking them to disseminate the information via their web sites, by e-mail to partners, etc. Additionally, notice was given to the citizens of Pamplona who participated online in the CO₂-monitoring e2d project. Later in September, information about the consultation was sent to the staff and students of the Public University of Navarre by e-mail.

Altogether there were 223 participants. They were shown a list of ten measures already taken by the local government and were asked to mark those of which they were aware and the three which they considered most important:

¹ Data for this section have been provided by the University of Saragossa (UNIZAR) research team, Vicente Pina, Sonia Royo, Lourdes Torres, and Ana Yetano. For a more comprehensive analysis of all the data collected in these two cases, see Royo et al. (2014).

“The Local Government of Pamplona wants to know the level of information and the importance given by citizens to the policies and projects related to energy effectiveness, renewable energies and reduction of CO₂ emissions. Among the following initiatives, please

1. Indicate which actions you already knew,
2. Select the three initiatives that you consider the most important.

What other measures do you think the City Council could adopt in order to reduce CO₂ emissions?”

Table 5.1 shows the output (items) and outcome (answers) to this survey.

One initiative (out of ten) is known by almost all participants (programs of sustainable mobility, 92%); six of the ten initiatives were known by more than 60% of the participants; 66.7% of the participants knew the objective of reduction of CO₂ emission stated by the council. Participants also selected “programs of sustainable mobility” as the most important initiative. Mostly, the initiatives which are best known are also considered most important.

New measures were suggested by 146 of the 223 participants. Two thirds of them concerned measures related to mobility (e.g., more cycle lanes, improving public transport, reducing downtown traffic), followed by proposals for economic measures such as cheaper public transport, greater control for industries (emission

Table 5.1 Results of the Pamplona survey among citizens

	(a) (%)	(b) (%)
The objective of reducing the CO ₂ emissions by 20% by 2020 with the implementation of an action plan (Covenant of Mayors)	66.7	25.0
Installation of solar photovoltaic cells on public schools with didactic aims (network of photovoltaic schools)	43.6	9.4
Campaign to raise public awareness for citizens and schools: museum of environmental education, energy workshops, green house program, etc.	69.3	34.4
Programs of sustainable mobility: cycle lanes, municipal bike rent service, car sharing service, public transport improvement, and mobility week	92.0	71.9
Reduction of light pollution from public lighting and traffic lights with LED technology	62.7	40.6
Reduction of energy consumption in public buildings through incentives to the managing body	40.4	31.3
Promotion of electric vehicles: installation of recharging points, acquisition of electric vehicles, etc.	60.9	6.3
Campaign ENGAGE/Compromise about climate change with citizens, businesses, and institutions	31.6	9.4
Pedestrianization, urban elevators, and streets with maximum speed of 30 km/h	69.8	31.3
Energy agency for advice and information	20.4	3.1

LED light-emitting diode
Multiple response, *n* = 223

taxes, tax reduction for electric cars), and public awareness measures. The rest was split across several other subjects such as Christmas lighting or the prohibition of energy generation from coal.

The Saragossa Case A similar consultation had been launched by the Citizen Participation Department and the Local Website Unit of the local government of Saragossa in April 2011 via the city's web site. It was also open for 10 weeks. The raising of awareness through e-mail was exactly the same as in Pamplona and resulted in 231 participants in this case.

Three initiatives (out of ten) were known by more than three quarters of participants; mobility-related initiatives are the best known by the public. One third of the participants knew the Climate Change and Saragossa Air Quality strategy. But there was no broad consensus among the participants when selecting the most important initiatives. The creation of cycle lanes and the implementation of a municipal bike service have been selected as important by 58.3% of participants. Of the 231 participants, 42.9% suggested possible new initiatives to be promoted by the council. As in Pamplona, most of them related to mobility issues.

Can these consultations be considered to be successful? In what regard and to what degree? What can be improved? In order to answer these questions, a structured description focusing on relevant success criteria is necessary.

5.2.2 *Comparative Application of the Template*

A generic template has been developed with a list of questions to assess the success criteria outlined in Chap. 2. The University of Saragossa (UNIZAR) team answered these questions for the two Spanish cases, partly based on the interviews with the organizers, partly according to their own observations and judgment (see Table 5.2).

Although the same procedure has been applied in both cases and similar numbers of participants and contributions have been reached, managers in Pamplona are more satisfied than the ones in Saragossa. Besides this important difference, there is a high level of consensus that there were sufficient resources, yet limited impact on democracy as well as problems with inclusion and the representativeness of participants.

Such an assessment by external reviewers may question the views and statements put forward by the organizers. For example, a sociologist from the city administration of Pamplona argued that the results were not valuable because the sample of participants was not representative.

For collecting suggestions for future initiatives, representativeness may not be absolutely necessary, likewise for the quality of the contributions. With regard to the assessment of the importance of existing measures, however, representativeness does matter.

Table 5.2 Template for evaluating consultation processes by observers

Success criteria	Pamplona	Saragossa
(1) Solution-relevant information: Were the organizers satisfied with the results?	Generally speaking, organizers are satisfied with the participation procedure. However, the satisfaction with the number of participants is low. Managers responsible for the Local Agenda 21 and Environment Department are very satisfied with the number of comments and suggestions, whereas the manager responsible for Communication is not satisfied in this regard	Organizers are not satisfied with the participation procedure in terms of the number of participants and the comments/contributions
To what extent were the contributions/discussions objective and relevant to the issues?	Almost all contributions were relevant to the issues	
How many contributions (and comments) were received?	There were 320 suggestions of possible initiatives to be promoted by the council from 146 participants	There were 169 suggestions of possible initiatives to be promoted by the council from 99 participants
How intensive were the discussions?	There was no facility for discussions (not applicable)	
Has the topic been covered in its entire scope?	The contributions have covered a wide range of environmental issues. Most of the suggestions deal with the issue of mobility. Others deal with economic measures, measures to raise public awareness, sustainable urban development, energy savings in public buildings, public management measures, lighting, and various other measures	
Have new insights been gained?	Yes	
(2) Influence on results: To what extent have participants influenced decision-making (by their contributions)?	Managers think that some of the comments should be included in the policies of the municipality and that there is a chance for local environmental policies to change because of the new insights	Managers have doubts about the usefulness of the results and whether the comments can feasibly be included in the policies of the municipality
(3) Outreach: Total number of participants in relation to the target group as a whole	223 participants In Pamplona, 70.9% of the population (198,473 inhabitants) use the Internet; population + 15 years old: 171,088 (2010)	231 participants In Saragossa, 71.6% of the population (698,186 inhabitants) use the Internet; population + 15 years old: 600,428 (2011)
How many people participated actively (with own contributions)?	A total of 65.5% suggested possible initiatives to be promoted	A total of 42.9% suggested possible initiatives to be promoted

Table 5.2 (continued)

Success criteria	Pamplona	Saragossa
(4) Inclusiveness, representativeness, and structure of participants: To what extent did the active participants correspond with the sociodemographic structure of the target group (age, gender, social class, migration background, etc.)?	<p>People in the 18–50 age range and citizens with a university education are overrepresented (77.4% of respondents vs 34.5% of the population). Retired people and housewives are underrepresented</p> <p>The municipal sociologist from Pamplona thinks that an e-consultation cannot provide significant results because it is biased in sample selection. The UNIZAR team does not agree</p>	<p>Males, people in the 18–50 age range and citizens with a university education are overrepresented (66.5% of respondents vs 31.6% of the population)</p> <p>Retired people and housewives are underrepresented</p>
Was there a balance of contributions from all social classes? Have the interests of groups with educational deficits been considered?	<p>Citizens with a primary school (0.5% of respondents vs 25.3% of the population) and secondary school/technical education (20.1% of respondents vs. 35.4% of the population) are underrepresented</p> <p>Ninety-eight percent of the participants stated that they took part as individual citizens</p>	<p>Citizens with a primary school (6.9% of respondents vs 30.9% of the population) and secondary school/technical education (23.5% of respondents vs 34.6% of the population) are underrepresented</p> <p>Ninety-three percent of the participants stated that they took part as individual citizens</p>
Did participants represent particular interest groups or did they take part as individual citizens?	<p>It is UNIZAR's view that the topic under consultation (propose other measures that could be taken by the City Council to reduce CO₂ emissions) was perhaps too specific for ordinary citizens to have an informed opinion</p>	
(5) Improving the acceptance for measures: What are the reasons for noncontribution by participants?	<p>The managers involved consider that there were enough resources in order to carry out the consultation. Participants think that the e-consultation is more appropriate than an offline consultation in terms of cost for participants and cost for the local council. Similarly, most of them agree that the e-consultation carried out has a higher level of efficiency (measured in terms of a higher level of influence) than participating in a forum, petition or sending e-mails in a protest campaign)</p>	
(6) Efficiency: Did the procedure require too many resources (time, money, and staff) in relation to the results achieved?	<p>Organizers say the consultation process gives citizens a feeling of enhanced influence on the development of local policies, and encourages citizens to act more responsibly, but have doubts as to whether the initiative has had a positive effect on other citizens that have not participated</p>	
(7) Enhancement of democracy: Increase of trust and political engagement	<p>Organizers see benefits for the local government in terms of better image and transparency. They consider that it shows that they are testing new forms of governance</p>	
Was there an increase in prestige of the organizing authority?	<p>There is a clear consensus in favor of carrying out further participation processes in the future</p>	<p>There is no consensus about carrying out further participation processes in the future</p>
(8) Future plans		

The most significant difference between the assessments of the organizers in both cases concerns their satisfaction and the perceived relevance of the proposals.

In Saragossa, managers doubted the usefulness of the results, while their colleagues in Pamplona were more positive. In order to find out reasons for this difference in satisfaction, one can compare the success factors according to our concept outlined in Chap. 2. However, for the two consultations in Pamplona and Saragossa, there are no differences which provide an explanation. Therefore, according to our relativity theory, we have to look for differences between the organizers.

They may not only be due to different personal preferences but due to organizational assignments as well. In Pamplona, the organizers came mostly from the environmental department, whereas in Saragossa they came mostly from the Citizen Participation Department. Thus, they have different tasks and different professional backgrounds and experience. Furthermore, the results indicate that the level of knowledge of participants is also important. In the two cases, the recruitment methods were similar, but the higher percentage of respondents with a university education and greater knowledge about previous initiatives in Pamplona seems to have led to a greater number of proposals, which were considered to be more valuable by managers.

With regard to the validity of methods and instruments for evaluating consultation processes, the different views of the organizers in both cases are very important because this illustrates the relativity not only in relation to the kind of participation procedure and roles but also between those holding the same role.

5.3 Organizers' Assessment of Public Consultations

For the assessment by organizers, two questionnaires have been developed. The first one deals with their aims, expectations, and basic assumptions at the beginning of a consultation, and the second one is about their experience and judgment on selected aspects at the end. For this kind of evaluation, as many organizers as possible should be interviewed in person or by telephone. It is not an alternative to the template presented in the previous section but rather an important input to the external evaluation that should be applied whenever possible. In the e2d project, these questionnaires have been applied to two multistage and multichannel consultations on programmatic declarations, a consultation on the Vienna Charta and one on the Bremen Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) program.² Their common objective was to collect input for and to test the acceptance of a final public document. In the case of the Vienna Charta, the city administration started a

² Information on the Vienna case has been provided by Georg Aichholzer, Doris Allhutter, Niklas Gudowsky, and Stefan Strauss; data for the SPD case by Ralf Cimander.

broad dialog on issues of living together respectfully, which was to end in a Charta issued in consensus by all participating groups of inhabitants of the City of Vienna, Austria. In the second case, the Bremen chapter of the SPD started a consultation on its government program to be presented in the forthcoming elections to the state parliament and the governor of the city-state of Bremen, Germany.

5.3.1 Objectives, Actors, Process, Output, and Outcome

At first, we compare the two cases with regard to their objectives, actor constellations, process, output, and outcome:

The Case of the Vienna Charta The Vienna Charta project was organized by the City of Vienna to initiate a broad discussion among the Viennese population on common issues of a respectful living together in everyday life and to set the course for a sustained positive social climate in the city.³ All inhabitants of Vienna (1.7 million) were invited to suggest relevant topics for discussion, to actively participate in discussing them, and to arrive at an agreement for a respectful living together in everyday life based on their personal contributions. The final outcome should be laid down in a Charta. The city government understood its role as enabling this process and offering an appropriate framework; it was not its aim to influence policy decisions. Deliberation (rather than polling) was the dominant objective.

The organizing bureau was located within the Department for Diversity and Integration. The concept for the participation process was developed in 2011 and built on the conviction that it should allow for offline as well as online participation. A project board elaborated a basic document on democracy, human and constitutional rights as well as women's and children's rights, which was published on the project homepage and served to guide the process by pointing out basic rules, which were not disputable.

The project was organized as a four-step process. It started in March 2012 with a 2-week collection of topics that the Viennese wished to discuss. Submissions could be made online as well as by phone, resulting in a total of 1848 suggestions, which were then presented online (765 postings which concerned requests to the administration or to politicians were not published as well as 36 postings which concerned the Vienna Charta as a whole). An independent advisory board clustered the topics into three key subject areas with seven subtopics: "Behavior: getting along with each other," "Attitude: not always the same," and "Space: feeling good in a tidy environment."

This served as a basis for the second step, the so-called "Charta talks." To reach as many people as possible, organizations, businesses, and associations as well as

³ Further information sources on general project features, organization, and outcome on the project homepage <https://charta.wien.gv.at/>. Accessed 27 July 2015.

individual citizens were invited to act as Charta partners. A total of 325 partners heeded the call and initiated 651 face-to-face deliberations. Between April and October 2012, around 8500 citizens participated in the Charta talks, the core of the process, which took place in a wide range of locations such as pubs, parks, club houses, public swimming pools, offices, youth centers, branches of companies, and retirement homes. This allowed for the representation of a cross-section of Vienna's population: people of all ages; blue- and white-collar workers; entrepreneurs; nonworking persons as well as people with different mother tongues and countries of origin, different religious beliefs, worldviews, and political opinions. The talks lasted about 1.5 h on average. Overall, participants discussed for about 12,700 h. The City of Vienna provided two moderators for each such event, who facilitated the discussions, summed up the results, and published them online. The Viennese could then give their opinions on the collected and summarized results for each of the topics in moderated online forums and by phone for over 2 weeks in the beginning of October. In this phase, 172 contributions were submitted; together with the proposals in the first online phase, the postings received altogether 45,633 "likes" from other participants.

Following these discussions and proposals, the organizers and the advisory board drew up a summary of the participating citizens' major demands for common rules for living together in Vienna (phase 4). The overall result, the Vienna Charta as a two-page agreement on basic principles for living together in everyday life, was presented in November 2012. Issues are summarized under three headings: the call for mutual respect, appreciation of diversity, and demands for an attractive public space. Subtopics include basic etiquette, support in learning German as common language, rules for traffic behavior as well as specific rules of conduct and politeness. The organizers followed a broad publication strategy and published the results online and offline via a multitude of media (web sites, magazines, posters, leaflets, official correspondence, etc.). The partner organizations also helped distribute the results. The total cost of this participatory exercise was about € 450,000.

The Case of the Government Program of the SDP Bremen

In June 2010, the board of the subchapter Bremen of the SDP decided to invite not only members but also citizens and civil society to participate in the development of the government program for the May 2011 elections to the state parliament and governor of the city-state of Bremen for the period 2011–2015. Bremen is the smallest of the 16 federal states of Germany, with about 650,000 inhabitants.

The participation process consisted of four phases:

- Six working groups headed by active party members nominated by the board and open to party members only drew up principal claims and promises on six key issues and policy fields.
- In October and November 2010, these principal claims were presented for discussion at seven local meetings open to the public and with invited representatives from civil society. In addition, seven online forums on the Internet were opened for discussion of these basic points.

- Based on the feedback gained in the local meetings and the Internet forums in December 2010, the board drafted the government program, presented it at a press conference, sent the text by post to the delegates of the coming party convention and, in parallel, published the text on the Internet with a request for comments.
- On February 26, 2011, the draft was presented to the party's state convention for approval. Comments from the Internet discussion were treated in the same way as demands for revision put forward by the delegates in the assembly.

As it was the first time a political party had nonmembers participating in the development of a government program, the board wanted an evaluation of this process in order to assess the added value. The questions asked for the evaluation were:

- To what extent do members and nonmembers agree with the principal claims put forward in the government program?
- Does the consultation produce new ideas in addition to those proposed by the internal working groups?
- What are the differences between online and offline consultations with regard to effectiveness and efficiency?

In this chapter, only the first two questions will be dealt with. The online–offline issue is considered in Chap. 16.

In this case, the organizers are the political board of the party and its local chief manager as well as the chairpersons of the six working groups. In personal interviews, they were asked about their expectations at the beginning and their assessment of the process at the end.

In addition, there were surveys of

- Members of the working groups ($n = 54$)
- Participants in the public meetings ($n = 179$)
- Participants in the first online consultations on principal claims ($n = 41$, 166 comments)
- Participants in the second consultation on the draft program ($n = 41$, 144 comments)

In this chapter, we will only present the data collected from the organizers.

5.3.2 *The Organizers' View*

Organizers conceive consultations as instruments to achieve certain objectives and hold assumptions and expectations. Accordingly, the interview guides for organizers deal with possible objectives and expectations and with the achievements.

Therefore, one interview guide has been developed to ask about the background of the organizers, their objectives and expectations as well as their estimates about advantages and disadvantages of different channels of communication, and a second

one to be used after the consultation process, asking about their satisfaction and how the objectives and expectations have been met or frustrated.

In the case of the Vienna Charta, the consultation has been organized by the Department for Diversity and Integration within the city government and a project board. Interviews have been conducted with organizers in different functions ($n = 6$). In the case of the SPD government program, the consultation has been organized by the Bremen Party office, headed by the chairman of the party as political leader and a managing director. Interviews were conducted with these two persons, an assistant manager at the Party office and with the six chairpersons of the working groups ($n = 10$). In this chapter, we will only present the results of the interviews after the consultation. For a few items, data from participants will be used for cross-checking.

1. Satisfaction

The most general indicator is the overall satisfaction of the organizers. It serves only as a starting point for more differentiated indicators. There were big differences between the two Spanish cases, but there are only small differences between the Vienna and the Bremen cases: 100% of the Viennese organizers and 90% of those in Bremen were very much satisfied with how the participation procedure went. Only one organizer in the Bremen case was not satisfied.

For a more differentiated assessment, the most common success criteria for consultations are the number and composition of participants and the number and quality of the contributions. Organizers were asked to assess their satisfaction with various aspects along a five-point scale.

All organizers of the Vienna Charta were very satisfied with the number of participants in the meetings, but only half of them were very satisfied or more or less satisfied with the number of participants via the Internet. In Bremen, the level of satisfaction with the number of participants in meetings and via the Internet was lower, and there was less agreement. Also, all the organizers of the Vienna Charta were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of the contributions, while only two out of ten organizers of the SPD consultation said they were satisfied.

These findings point to some methodological problems with this kind of data. While the number of participants and the number of contributions are easy to measure, it is hard to tell whether a certain number means more or less success. According to our relativity theory of evaluation, it depends on the expectations of the organizers. However, expectations are mostly based on experience. Organizers of consultations in the public sector have a lot of experience with face-to-face town hall meetings and other kinds of assemblies, but still today have little experience with online consultations. In the ex-ante interviews, most of them were not able to give a figure of how many participants they expected for the online consultation and how many they think are necessary in order to call it a success. Therefore, the variance in evaluating participation via the Internet is higher than with regard to public meetings. The difference between the Vienna and the Bremen case is due to different kinds of respondents. In the Vienna case, only full-time public servants have been asked about one and the same procedure, while in the Bremen case, in

addition to the employees from the party office, the six voluntary chairpersons of the working groups have been interviewed as well, who, furthermore, had quite different experiences with their respective groups.

With regard to the generalizability of results, the composition of the participating citizens is often considered an important factor and is evaluated by the criterion of representativeness and assessed by the distribution according to gender, age, level of education, professional status, ethnic group, or other criteria from population statistics. Organizers have, therefore, been asked how satisfied they are with these aspects among participants. Both groups are most satisfied with the gender distribution, the age distribution, and social status. But as for the number of participants, on a five-point scale, the organizers of the Vienna Charta show a higher degree of satisfaction by one point with regard to these criteria. And there is an even bigger difference with regard to the satisfaction with the number of participants with a migration background. While five of the six organizers of the Vienna Charta are very satisfied in this respect, no one among the organizers in Bremen was very satisfied.

The validity of these statements can be checked by the data from the survey of participants. And, indeed, the distribution of the respondents by sex and age seems to be quite representative of the Vienna population.

However, it is not necessary in all cases for the participating population to be representative of the whole population in sociodemographic terms but rather for the target group of the consultation. In the case of the Vienna Charta and the SPD government program, the target groups were the inhabitants of Vienna and the voters in Bremen. But in the case of the SPD program, there were additional requirements. As the government program was not an objective in itself, but rather a means to raise the chances of winning an election, organizers were interested in reaching people who were nonmembers of the party and who speak for certain groups in the population, knowing their needs and claims. Therefore, participants were not differentiated by sex, age, etc. but rather by their relation to the party and their relevance for the election campaign, that is, party members, stakeholders in certain policy fields and ordinary citizens.

As it was an explicit objective of the SPD consultation to involve nonparty members, organizers have been asked how satisfied they were with the participation of these three target groups. Almost all organizers were satisfied with getting stakeholders and members involved. However, 90% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the participation of ordinary citizens.

2. Effects of the consultation

According to our relativity theory of evaluation, organizers hold different expectations with regard to the effects of their consultation. They were offered eight different kinds of possible effects and have been asked to what extent they had expected these effects at the start and to what extent they have occurred.

Although the idea of comparing expected effects with the degree to which these expectations were met is plausible and easy to understand, it is not obvious how to put the results into numbers for a comparative analysis. A viable quantitative expression of the relation between expected and perceived effects is the comparison

Table 5.3 Effects expected and experienced by organizers of the Vienna Charta

Effects	Expected mean	Experienced mean
1. Better image of the city government of Vienna	3.3	3.8
2. Proof that the city government of Vienna is testing new forms of governance	4.5	4.8
3. Improvement of social cohesion within the participants of the talks	4.7	4.8
4. Better transparency in dealing with important themes	3.8	4.0
5. A positive effect on other citizens in the area that have not participated	4.2	4.5
6. A boost to the ego of participants through acting as responsible citizens	4.8	4.7
7. A feeling of enhanced influence as a community of citizens	4.7	4.7
8. A strengthening of ties among the population of Vienna	4.3	4.3

Five-point scale; 5 = absolutely expected/occurred, 1 = not at all expected/occurred, *n* = 6

of the respective averages. Table 5.3 shows the results of different kinds of potential effects of the Vienna Charta. For each of the eight possible effects, we can compare the different degrees of expectation and realization as reported by the organizers. In most cases, the degree of effects experienced is, on average, slightly higher than averaged expectations.

However, this is not a statistically valid exercise as the scales generate rank order values, and we cannot be sure that all respondents considered an equal distance between the points of the scale. Given the small differences, we may only conclude that there have been no strong disappointments as regards these expectations.

Again, from our relativity theory of evaluation it follows that for different consultations the degrees of expected and perceived effects vary more or less. In the SPD and the Vienna Charta case, the same questions have been put to the organizers with regard to the kind of effects but with different scales. While the Vienna team used a five-point scale, the Bremen team used a ten-point scale in order to get a more differentiated picture. Therefore, averages are not directly comparable. As we cannot assume that the scores are cardinal values but rather ordinal values, it seems more appropriate to build a rank order of the different kinds of perceived effects for both cases and compare these rankings (Table 5.4).

While the organizers of the SPD consultation see the strongest effects in better transparency (I), better image (II), and proof of testing new forms of governance (III), the organizers of the Vienna Charta report social cohesion and individual benefits among participants as the strongest effects and rank image gain (rank VIII) and transparency (rank VII) lower. These differences are plausible, considering the different objectives of both consultations. The organizers of the SPD government program wanted a positive image as an asset for the election campaign, while the organizers of the Vienna Charta strove for social cohesion in the process and as its result.

Table 5.4 Effects perceived by the organizers of the two consultations

Perceived effects of the consultation	SPD Bremen (<i>n</i> = 10)		Vienna Charta (<i>n</i> = 6)	
	Mean ^a	Rank order	Mean ^b	Rank order
1. Better image of the SPD in Bremen/of the city government of Vienna	7.9	II	3.8	VIII
2. Proof that SPD/the city government of Vienna is testing new forms of governance	7.9	II	4.8	I
3. Improvement of social cohesion within the participants of the working group/talks	6.5	V	4.8	I
4. Better transparency in the development of specific programs/in dealing with important themes	8.1	I	4.0	VII
5. A positive effect on other citizens in the area that have not participated	6.1	VII	4.5	V
6. A boost to the ego of participants from acting as responsible citizens	6.6	VI	4.7	III
7. A feeling of enhanced influence as a community of citizens	5.9	VIII	4.7	III
8. A strengthening of ties among the local SPD community/the population of Vienna	6.8	IV	4.3	VI

SPD Social Democratic Party of Germany

^a Ten-point scale

^b Five-point scale; 10 (5) = fully applies, 1 = applies not at all

5.4 Participants' Assessments of Consultations for Local Development and Planning

According to our relativity theory of evaluation, we assume that organizers assess a consultation process partly by different criteria than participants and, with regard to the same criteria, mostly have a different view. Therefore, wherever possible, an evaluation of a consultation process should not only build on the organizers' view but also on the participants' view. Compared to the organizers' view, it is more complicated, and sometimes not possible, to collect information about their expectations from participants before or during their participation and to obtain an assessment of the results at the end because of a lack of personal identification or because there is no opportunity to get individual feedback on the publication of results. In the two following cases, which deal with a consultation on local development and planning in two German communities, it was possible to carry out an ex-ante and an ex-post survey of participants and to gain interesting insights which show the importance of the point in time of conducting such a survey and to some degree question the value of ex-ante surveys.

5.4.1 Objectives, Actors, Process, and Output

At the beginning of this chapter, we pointed to two different objectives of public consultations by their organizers, that is,

- gaining proposals and new ideas for solving a problem and/or to improve the definition and analysis of problems, planning or decisions, and/or
- getting an opinion or finding out priorities concerning existing alternatives, and/or to better estimate the acceptance of these measures.

Projects may concentrate on one of these objectives. But they may also be taken as objectives for sequential phases of a consultation on a certain subject. This has been done in two German cases, where the German team has not only been involved in the evaluation but has also advised the organizers and provided the online facilities.

Both cases follow the same procedure but with slightly different subjects:

- The determination of priority measures to implement the vision “Climate City of Bremerhaven”⁴
- The multi-generational design of a neighborhood of the community of Wennigsen, Lower Saxony⁵

The Case of Climate City of Bremerhaven The first example deals with a consultation carried out by the city government of Bremerhaven. In order to prepare her work program, the newly appointed head of the environmental department wanted to know what the citizens thought of the already existing slogan or vision “Climate City Bremerhaven” and which measures they thought suitable for its implementation.

The consultation started with a kick-off meeting on January 18, 2011, which had been announced in the local newspapers. In this public meeting, the head of the environmental department introduced her request, the German team described the two-step participation procedure, and the participants were able to make first suggestions, which were immediately entered in the online forum, visible for all on a screen in the assembly room.

From January 17 until March 1, the first phase of the consultation, the collection of ideas, took place online and via a telephone hotline. In the announcement and in a press report on the kick-off event, the URL of the online consultation was published. On the city’s web site,⁶ there was a teaser and a link to the online platform provided by the German team.⁷

Instead of putting broad general questions and having one open discussion forum, the consultation was structured by five subject areas with several leading questions each:

⁴ <http://www.stateboard.de/bremerhaven/>. Accessed July 27, 2015.

⁵ <http://www.stateboard.de/wennigsen/>. Accessed July 27, 2015.

⁶ www.bremerhaven.de. Accessed July 27, 2015.

⁷ <http://www.stateboard.de/bremerhaven/>. Accessed July 27, 2015.

1. Concepts and aims

Should a Climate City aim at saving 40% CO₂ emissions by 2020, and do the city and their organizations act in a sufficiently climate-friendly manner? Which, in your opinion, are the concepts and aims Bremerhaven, its citizens, and companies should follow to be worthy of being called a Climate City?

2. Mobility

A Climate City must reduce CO₂ emissions by vehicles. This can be done by giving priority to bus and train transport, an improved cycle path network, car sharing or a city toll, and other measures. Do you have any concrete proposals in this area?

3. Energy supply

How should the Climate City of Bremerhaven provide itself with energy in the medium term? Should the focus be on alternative energy sources such as wind, water, sun, and others or on the enhancement of the long-distance heating network or both? What ideas do you have for the future energy supply in Bremerhaven?

4. Housing

A large part of the produced energy is used in residential buildings, and the field of housing is responsible for more than 40% of climate-damaging emissions. Are programs for building restoration or energy consultants required in order for us to become a Climate City? Do you have further ideas that need to be dealt with in the field of housing in a Climate City?

5. Industry, trade, services

Industry, trade, commerce, and service providers are important players concerning climate protection. In your opinion, what contribution can companies make to turn Bremerhaven into a Climate City?

The answers to these questions could be formulated freely; they were immediately visible to visitors to the Internet pages, who could comment on them. In the idea collection phase, the five subject areas attracted different degrees of attention. Most proposals concerned the subject of mobility.

For 2 weeks in March, the proposals and comments were sorted by the environment department and rephrased into aims in terms of concrete future states in order to make them comparable for the next step of evaluation. Different formulations for the same future state were combined. Unrealistic proposals were not eliminated because the contributions should not be censored but only structured. These results of the first phase were presented at a second public meeting on March 19.

The following day, the second phase, which included voting for priorities, was started online only. Three votes could be given per subject area. People were not obliged to register in order to keep barriers to participation low. The results of the vote were presented at the third public meeting. Table 5.5 shows the four proposals with the highest number of votes in the field of mobility among the 766 votes cast by 257 voters.

It is remarkable that the first two proposals are out of reach of the city government, the first one because of the immense investment and the budget deficit and the second one because it falls under the authority of the National Railroad Company.

Table 5.5 Climate City Bremerhaven—highest-ranked proposals on mobility

Proposals	%
In a Climate City there is a tram	24.0
A Climate City expands the rail network for local public transport. Therefore, the station of Speckenbüttel will be reopened	22.5
Most urgently, a Climate City needs a climate-friendly traffic concept for the whole traffic in the city	19.8
In a Climate City, extending the paths for bicycles and pedestrians is given priority	11.0

n = 257

The Case of Neighborhood Design in Wennigsen

The second example deals with a consultation in the community of Wennigsen at Deister, Lower Saxony, about improvements to the living and neighborhood conditions repeatedly demanded by the inhabitants in the neighborhood Hohes Feld. This neighborhood was built in the 1970s. Nowadays, 60% of the 550 inhabitants are aged over 60. When the old inhabitants die, young families with children move in, placing completely different demands on their new neighborhood. Due to limited resources, priorities concerning the constructional design of the neighborhood had to be defined. To find out these priorities, the mayor wanted a consultation concerning the areas playgrounds, green areas/trees as well as living environment and other topics such as height of pavement. The multistage procedure was planned and carried out in collaboration with the Institute for Information Management Bremen (ifib).

1. *Idea collection* (November 15, 2011–January 8, 2012)

Residents were formally invited via the official gazette to a town hall meeting as a kick-off. The mayor introduced the whole procedure, and ifib presented the online procedure as well as the input mask for the first phase of idea collection. This was started immediately at the meeting, which was attended by more than 160 of the 550 inhabitants. In order to strengthen trust in the seriousness of the consultation, a former mayor was asked to act as a moderator; she was introduced at the meeting. In addition to the online collection of ideas, planned to take about 6 weeks, three working groups for the three areas of action were established. Site visits were offered to enable an intense discussion of possibilities, especially for those residents who had no Internet access. In view of the age structure of the inhabitants, this was especially important. The inhabitants without Internet access had the opportunity to submit their proposals on paper in the citizen office, but only one person made use of it. The others found family members or neighbors who entered their suggestions.

After the idea collection phase, working groups and site visits, the administration checked the 112 proposals submitted online. This check by the administration had been agreed upon so that in the second phase of defining priorities, only those proposals were brought to vote that were legally admissible (e.g., compatible with the tree protection ordinance) and lay within the financial framework. At the same time, similar proposals were combined.

2. *Voting for priorities* (January 20–31, 2012)

The 40 questions concerning the design possibilities to be voted upon were presented by the administration at the second citizen meeting. The voting procedure was also discussed. The 23 people who attended this meeting, that is, far fewer than at the first meeting, emphasized that only inhabitants of Hohes Feld should be allowed to vote. In order to reduce the administrative burden, to ensure data protection in the sense of data economy when collecting personal data and to allow neighborly help, it was agreed that each of the 200 heads of the households should get a street-related password by mail. It was also possible to vote in the city hall. A total of 184 of the 300 invited persons took part in the online voting. At more than 60%, this is a seldom-reached participation rate, all the more remarkable in view of the age distribution of the target group. The results were presented at the third citizen meeting, which was attended by representatives of the administration, members of the local council, and 50 citizens.

One of the problems brought up at the first meeting was the foliage of the mostly old trees. Many of the older inhabitants who were directly concerned wanted to have at least some of these trees cut down. After the mayor and the moderator had advised them of the tree protection ordinance, the working group had discussed the pros and cons, and at the second meeting, the voting had a different result. Only a quarter of the participants still voted for cutting down the trees.

5.4.2 *The Participants' View*

Organizers have been asked the same questions as in the two cases presented in the previous section, and they were mostly very satisfied. Because of limited space, for these two cases, we will concentrate on the participants' view. In the kick-off meeting, a questionnaire on the expectations was distributed, and in the final meeting, a corresponding questionnaire about satisfaction and how far expectations had been met was distributed. The first questionnaire was also offered in the first online phase. Table 5.6 shows the participation rates in the different stages and events.

Table 5.6 Participation rates in meetings and online

	Bremerhaven	Wennigsen (Hohes Feld)
Residents	113,000	550
Participants at kick-off meeting	38	160
Online idea collection:		
Proposals	262	112
Comments	2020	na
Participants at second meeting	30	23
Voters at online voting	257	184 (300 invited)
Participants at third public meeting	43	36

- *Sociodemographic composition of participants*

Altogether 56 participants in the Wennigsen consultation and 113 in the Bremerhaven consultation have filled in the questionnaires. Regarding their sex and educational levels, the participants in the Wennigsen consultation correspond much more closely to the structure of the respective population: the share of female participants in Wennigsen was 46.4% and in Bremerhaven 28.3%. In Wennigsen, 35.7% of the participants had a university degree and as many as 46% in Bremerhaven. Also, the participants' age profile differed less from the distribution among the population in the Wennigsen case, although the figures at first sight show a much higher degree of retired people in the Wennigsen case. However, as mentioned before, the population of this particular neighborhood has a share of more than 60% people older than 60 years. Therefore, 57.1% retired people is quite representative, while for the city of Bremerhaven a share of only 15.9% is much too low.

- *Satisfaction*

The level of satisfaction expressed in the written and online surveys differs in the two cases. While in Wennigsen, more than 80% of the respondents were very satisfied overall with the course of the procedure, only 54% in Bremerhaven said so. According to the analysis of the success criteria described at the beginning of this chapter, it can be assumed that people evaluated the clarity and the ease with which the aims pursued could be understood differently in each case. The figures in Table 5.7 confirm this trend. When comparing the answers to "clarity of aims and rules" and "transparency of the procedure," the two positive answer categories, when combined, place Wennigsen 10% points ahead of Bremerhaven (a plus around 80% against a plus of 70%).

Compared to the consultation in Wennigsen, the participation rate in idea collection and online voting in Bremerhaven was clearly lower in relation to the target group. This is due to the fact that people were less concerned by the measures that were voted on. Only very few of the 44 participants commented negatively or made no statement. On the one hand, this is a good result. On the other hand, one has to consider that the majority of those who were not satisfied with the procedure did not come to the final meeting.

Satisfaction with the results varies depending on the subject areas in both cases. In Bremerhaven, 21% were very satisfied with the proposals on mobility but only 5% with the proposals for energy supply, housing, and the area of industry, trade, and services. In Wennigsen, the percentage of those who were very satisfied varied between 29% regarding parks and trees and 15.9% for playgrounds. It is remarkable that there is greatest satisfaction with the results for a topic where proposals by the local population ultimately did not find majority support (e.g., cutting down trees on public ground).

- *Expectations ex ante and ex post*

A supplementary approach to appraise the level of satisfaction is the question of how far certain initial expectations have been fulfilled or not. Independently of the

Table 5.7 Evaluation of specific aspects of the consultation procedure by participants

Do you agree to the following statements about the consultation procedure?		Fully agree (%)	Rather agree (%)	Rather disagree (%)	Fully disagree (%)	Undecided/no answer (%)
The aims of the participation procedure were stated clearly and understandably	Bremerhaven ^a	35.1	43.2	2.7	8.1	10.8
	Wennigsen ^b	52.3	38.6	0	2.3	6.8
The rules of the participation procedure were fair	Bremerhaven	54.1	27.0	5.4	2.7	10.8
	Wennigsen	59.1	27.3	4.6	2.3	6.8
The course of the procedure was transparent from the beginning to the end	Bremerhaven	54.1	21.6	10.8	2.7	10.8
	Wennigsen	56.8	25.0	9.1	2.3	6.8
The use of the online platform for idea collection and voting was simple	Bremerhaven	48.7	27.0	13.5	0	10.8
	Wennigsen	75.0	4.6	4.6	0	15.9

^a n = 113

^b n = 56

aims of the administration, the invited inhabitants have their own expectations of such an offer. The majority in Bremerhaven and in Wennigsen expected a transparent and fair process; only 7 and 3.6%, respectively, expected that their proposals would be included in the action program or implemented. At the final meeting, a questionnaire was distributed, asking how far the initial expectations had been fulfilled. The share of those participants who say their expectations have been met is between 40 and 66% (Table 5.8). This is a bit lower than the share of participants who had said they were very satisfied (54% in Bremerhaven and more than 80% in Wennigsen).

However, there are doubts about the validity of these statements. Comparing the percentage of those who expected these different effects *ex ante* to those who say in the second survey that they had not expected the particular effect, there are huge differences in both directions. Respondents do not seem to remember very well what they had previously said they expected.

- *Impact*

Often politicians and the public administration hope that a consultation will have positive effects beyond the problem at hand: that citizens' trust in political institutions will increase or that their aversion to politics will be reduced and that citizens will be motivated to engage in politics.

Therefore, citizens were asked whether their opinions on local politics have changed because of the participation project. While in Wennigsen, 56% of the respondents now judge local politics more positively as a result of their experiences, only 32% in Bremerhaven say so. In Bremerhaven, 13.5% say that they judge local politics even more negatively now.

Finally, participants have been asked if the concrete experiences will lead them to take part in further participation projects in the future. For future offers in Wennigsen, 81% say yes, for offers of other organizations only 52%. This is plausible because the respondents in Wennigsen had positive experiences with the actors, who will also be responsible in the future. Here trust was increased. But this does not mean that unspecified organizations with unspecified problems would act similarly. So, with half of the respondents the existing basic skepticism remains. Against this background, it is surprising that 78% in Bremerhaven say they would participate in future local participation projects and 84% with other organizations (Table 5.9). In Wennigsen, this share is remarkably lower, and almost 50% did not answer this question. This may be because, in their small neighborhood of 600 inhabitants, they could not imagine which other institution might invite them for a consultation in the future.

The lower satisfaction rate of the respondents in Bremerhaven is most likely due to a greater lack of clarity. Here the area of mobility got the most votes, especially the proposal to provide a further tramline. On the last day of the voting, this proposal advanced from the third to the first position, possibly due to a mobilization of longtime supporters of this claim. But at the final meeting, this proposal was rejected by several members of the local council because it was not feasible due to a lack of funds. The responsible people in Bremerhaven did not want a pre-decision

Table 5.8 Participants' expectations and their fulfillment regarding the consultation process in Bremerhaven and Wennigsen

You have started the participation procedure with certain expectations. How do you judge the participation procedure in hindsight?		Expectations (ex ante) (%)		Statement ex post		Fulfilled (%)	Not fulfilled (%)	No answer (%)
		Not expected (%)	Expected (%)	Not expected (%)	Expected (%)			
I expect(ed) that my contributions would somehow be included in the measure plan	Bremerhaven ^a	35.1	7.1	40.5	8.1			16.2
	Wennigsen ^b	22.7	3.6	52.3	11.4			13.6
I expect(ed) an open democratic process leading to a fair transparent result, even if my ideas are/were not included in the measure plan	Bremerhaven	16.2	62.0	51.3	16.2			16.2
	Wennigsen	13.6	73.2	65.9	9.1			11.4
I only want(ed) to know what others think/thought of my ideas	Bremerhaven	45.9	26.6	13.5	10.8			29.7
	Wennigsen	4.7	16.1	25.0	9.1			18.2

^a n = 113

^b n = 56

Table 5.9 Participants' interest in future participation projects

In the light of your experience with this consultation, would you participate in a similar procedure in the future?		Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)	No answer (%)
In another participation procedure of the political system in Wennigsen and Bremerhaven	Bremerhaven ^a	78.4	13.6	5.4	2.7
	Wennigsen ^b	81.2	0.0	6.8	11.4
In another participation procedure by other organizations	Bremerhaven	83.8	5.4	8.1	2.7
	Wennigsen	52.3	0.0	34.1	13.6

^a $n = 113$ ^b $n = 56$

before the voting as in Wennigsen since they did not want to be accused of censorship. At the final meeting, the participants asked the politicians in vain to make more concrete statements on which proposals should be implemented in which period of time; only then did they fill in the questionnaire. In Wennigsen, however, members of the council said at the final meeting that they would implement some of the proposals, with a high rate of agreement. This is not only due to the different openness or degree of compulsion of the politicians but also to the type and number of proposals resulting from the consultation: The scope of the subject and, therefore, the number of possibilities to act are negatively correlated to the degree of concretization and the obligation to report, and the subsequent implementation by the organizing administration.

Informal consultations are not legally binding. What degree of political importance and obligation the administration and politics assign to the results of the voting and what they announce to the participants seems to be of crucial importance for the satisfaction with the procedure, and thus for the acceptance of the results. The inquiry after the expectations shows that the majority does not expect that their own proposals will be implemented but that they are dealt with in a fair and transparent manner. It is, therefore, essential to define at the start what influence the voting will have on the decisions and, above all, to report in detail why individual proposals were or were not considered. In this regard, the division into the two phases of idea collection and priority formation and the presentation of the results has proved valuable. In both cases, more than 50% of the respondents judged the process to be transparent.

5.5 Methodological Conclusions

The main objective of the e2d project is to develop and test concepts and tools for an appropriate evaluation of participation processes. In this chapter, different tools for evaluating informal public consultations have been presented, which were tested

in six different cases. The tools employed include a template for an evaluation by researchers or external observers as well as interview guides and surveys for organizers and participants *ex ante* and *ex post*. The basic idea is to assess the objectives and expectations at the beginning of a consultation and to check to what extent they have been met or missed at the end.

Although only a small part of the data collected with these tools for each case have been presented, it became apparent that the variety of objectives, procedures and contexts is much greater than originally expected. Even for the pairs of similar cases, there are still significant differences with regard to the objectives and expectations of their organizers.

Therefore, the *most important lesson* to be learned is that it is no use striving for a standard set of objectives and expectations against which all kinds of consultations can be evaluated appropriately. There were good reasons why the three research teams in the e2d project selected tools differently and adapted them to their respective situation. Accordingly, it would not make sense to suggest the different variants of tools employed as standards. They rather serve as examples, and it seems more reasonable to document the major components of the generic tool from which selections and adaptations can be made, tailored for each individual project, as each evaluation will need a unique design and unique instruments.

A *second* important lesson to be learned for an actor-centered evaluation is that the results depend to a critical degree on the actors taking part in the exercise. In the two Spanish cases, different opinions held by the actors interviewed could be explained by the different positions they held in the consulting organization. The same is true for the six organizers interviewed in the Vienna case and the ten in the Bremen case. A closer look at the variance in their responses showed that there is no collective view among the organizers within a consulting organization and that a high agreement in the satisfaction with different aspects is the exception rather than the rule. It is, therefore, crucial for a well-founded evaluation to carry out a stakeholder analysis, to identify relevant organizers and make sure that they take part in the evaluation.

A *third* lesson concerns the idea of an *ex-ante* and *ex-post* comparison of expectations and actual experience. While this may work in interviews with organizers, we learned that when it comes to participating citizens, many of them did not remember in the *ex-post* survey what they had expected at the start. This can raise questions over the validity of the *ex-post* survey. However, with regard to the impact of participation and future behavior, it is not relevant what they had expected before the consultation but only what they think at the end, whether their expectations and aspirations have been met, regardless of what they said months earlier. Therefore, with regard to the cost of conducting an evaluation, for a final assessment, it is sufficient to conduct only an *ex-post* survey and to ask how expectations have been met or missed. *Ex-ante* surveys, however, are relevant as input for organizers in order to design and adapt an ongoing process to the expectations of the participants.

The *fourth* and final lesson is that a final assessment can be collected from the organizers but, in most cases, not from the participants. They can only reply if there is a final presentation of the results of the consultation as in the case of Bremerhaven

and Wennigsen. And even in these cases, only the results of the consultation and the intention of the organizers have been presented but not the implementation of these results. This may take several months, and participants of the consultation usually cannot be reached any more unless they have registered an e-mail address. As this is seldom the case, most evaluation exercises can assess the process of a consultation procedure much better than its result. Furthermore, the question of whether the process or the results are more relevant for the attitudes and future behavior of participants and thereby for their impact remains open.

These lessons apply no matter to what extent online channels and face-to-face meetings are used. An attempt to analyze the differences between these communication channels will be presented in Chap. 15.

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