THE VIEW OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MANAGERS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF E-PARTICIPATION: AN APPLICATION TO CLIMATE PROTECTION POLICIES

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This paper is part of a broad research project funded by the European Science Foundation entitled "Comparative Assessment of E-Participation in the Context of Sustainable Development / Climate Change".
Las iniciativas de participación ciudadana pretenden reforzar la confianza de los ciudadanos en la Administración y superar el rol pasivo de éstos en los procesos de reforma enmarcados en el New Public Management. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar la eficacia de la e-participación versus la participación ciudadana tradicional, a través de la experiencia de los gestores de seis ciudades europeas. Nuestro estudio está centrado en la evaluación de políticas de cambio climático. Los resultados indican que el uso de la tecnología facilita, pero no es una solución para involucrar a los ciudadanos en los procesos de participación.
INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation is gaining popularity in the public sector of EU countries, especially at local government level (Bovaird, 2007; Cahn and Gray, 2004; Dunstan et al, 2008). Just as in the 90s, there was global pressure for undertaking managerial public sector reforms under New Public Management (NPM) postulates, in the XXI century the demand for new ways of governance are putting governments worldwide under pressure to develop tools for improving information, consultation and active citizen participation (OECD 2001b).

Citizen participation initiatives can be found in almost all 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 NPM reform wave. After more than three decades of NPM reforms in which the bureaucratic public administration model has been strongly criticized, there is, at the moment, 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 of 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.

In recent years, many OECD countries have undertaken a major devolution of power from central to regional and local governments in an attempt to bring decision-making closer to the citizen (OECD 2001). This is because the majority of citizens’ contacts with government occur during service delivery and at local level. For Löffler et al. (2008) citizens are particularly active in taking steps to look after the local environment. In their survey, they found the highest level of citizen participation (61%) in the development of local government programs related to environmental protection, concluding that these are initiatives where citizen participation works well. For this reason, we chose climate-saving public policies for the evaluation of citizen participation effectiveness.

The need to fight against climate change has led EU local governments to implement common strategies such as Local Agenda 21, the Aalborg Charter on Sustainable Cities, the Declaration of Hannover, the “The Covenant of Mayors” and the EU “Climate Alliance”. Likewise, the “Local Governments for Sustainability” program of the UN, and the “International Local Government Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Analysis Protocol” focused on the development of tools for the measurement of the greenhouse effect gas emissions- are also initiatives at local level. All these initiatives show that local governments are important to face the effects of climate change and are playing a central role in fighting against climate-change. The evaluation of citizen participation to their climate-saving initiatives will shed light on what can be expected from citizen participation initiatives.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to closing the evaluation gap about the usefulness of e-participation and citizen participation processes through the analysis of managers’ views about the results of their experience in citizen participation programs. There are a few online/offline citizen participation evaluation studies; none of them address the evaluation from the point of view of the local government managers. The survey will allow us to know the opinion of experts about the identification of conditions of success and failure of online and offline citizen participation programs and the expectations about e-participation and traditional participation projects. As citizen participation is a blurred and heterogeneous field, our empirical survey is focused on the evaluation of citizen participation in climate change policies. The benefits of citizen
participation are evaluated in terms of how its effects may change or improve governance and contribute to achieving public policy goals.

THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION DEBATE

For Weale (2011), ‘governance’ can simply refer to processes of government, whatever form they take. More recently, it has come to be used to denote ways of governing that are non-hierarchical and involve networks of actors, both public and private, determining policy through negotiation, bargaining and participation. Recently, considerable interest has been expressed in new ways governance which involve changes in the traditional relationship between citizens and governments. Most often the focus is on the role and methods of governments in this relationship (OECD, 2001). ‘New modes of governance’ is a term more and more used in the last decade to describe the search for new ways of relationship between citizens and governments, which aim at involving citizens in the development of public policies and in the delivery or co-production of public services Pratchett et al. (2009). Governments seek citizen contribution instead of dealing with issues unilaterally because of the increasingly critical and even disaffected attitude towards government and its performance (Norris, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Pharr & Putnam, 2000). Governments are experimenting with the settings of ‘new modes of governance’ in order to share some power with citizens by creating horizontal channels of participation which aim to connect with social organizations and citizens. This is the case, for instance, of participatory budgets, the co-production of services, e-voting, or 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, 2009).

For Pratchett et al. (2009) participation using information and communication technologies (ICT) – eParticipation – may bring three additional types of benefit:

a) It offers more opportunities for participation – because they are not anchored in time or place, e-participation mechanisms mean that people can engage as and when they want, without being bound by conventional meeting places and times.

b) It allows for a greater range of participants – because gender, ethnicity, age and so on are not immediately apparent in an online environment, participation is relatively easy, especially for groups that are traditionally excluded from political engagement. It is more inclusive, therefore, than offline mechanisms.

c) It facilitates ‘better’ participation – because new technologies allow participation to be linked to a whole range of information resources, the quality of engagement can be much higher than in more traditional spheres.

After a decade of academic and professional studies about ICTs contribution 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 et al, 2009). Available comparative evaluation is based on secondary analysis of existing reports, which are not completely comparable as they do not provide the same kind of data for the different projects under review. With regard to the aspects evaluated, there is much more about e-tools and their use than about their impact.

This paper is a part of a broader research project that presents an ongoing innovative
research which is explicitly designed to allow a comparative evaluation through an international survey, employing the opinion of experts from Austria, Germany and Spain in five cities or regions each. The particular objective of this paper is not only to compare the opinion of experts on the use of the e-tools but also the impact of e-participation on the policy goals for which participation is offered. Given the high degree of EU local governments involve in environmental policies, the area of climate change policy has been chosen.

METHODOLOGY

Brief description of the e2democracy project (www.e2democracy.eu)

This Delphi survey is part of a broad research project funded by the European Science Foundation entitled “Comparative Assessment of EParticipation in the Context of Sustainable Development / Climate Change” coordinated by Prof. Herbert Kubicek, ifib, Germany1. The overall project aims at evaluating the effectiveness of eParticipation initiatives versus traditional citizen participation. The sample is made up of municipalities in Austria, Germany and Spain. In the project, the following tasks can be distinguished: a) cross-national comparison of the use and effects of eParticipation (“European perspective”), b) cross-municipality comparison of the use and effects of eParticipation (“national perspective”), c) development and empirical testing of a multidisciplinary concept, set of indicators and data collection methods to understand how citizens’ input is taken into account and to assess the quality and effects of this input on local programs for sustainable development (“closing the evaluation gap”) and d) analysis of the use and effects of eParticipation tools within an ecology of applications employed in similar processes (“tool assessment”). The research teams in the three countries employ the same research design and methods, which have been developed in a division of labor by each partner for the other two. This paper reports preliminary results referred of the Delphi survey.

The Delphi method

The Delphi method is a systematic approach for gathering experts’ opinions. Henessy and Hicks (2003) define the Delphi method as “a multiple interaction survey technique that enables anonymous, systematic refinement of expert opinion, with the aim of arriving at a combined or consensual position”. It is a highly recommended technique to study areas where little is known about the topic. The Delphi method has been widely used in the private and public sectors in different areas with a variety of modifications and interpretations (Powell, 2003). According to Keeney et al. (2001), this technique has gained popularity in a great number of disciplines.

The method comprises a series of questionnaires sent to a pre-selected group of experts. These questionnaires are designed to elicit and develop individual responses to the problems posed and to enable the experts to refine their views as the group’s work progresses. Typically, three rounds are carried out (Powell, 2003). Because the number of respondents is usually small, Delphi does not (and is not intended to) produce statistically significant results. So, the results provided by any panel do not predict the response of a larger population or even of a different Delphi panel.

The interviews were carried out to 45 experts in climate change policies from 14 local governments which are involved in international environmental initiatives (Bremen, Munich, Bremenhaven, Friburg, Hannover and Wasserburg in Germany; Zaragoza, Pamplona, Alcobendas, Sant Cugar del Valles and Regional Government of Aragon in Spain; and Bregenz, Mariazellierland and Vienna in Austria). The interviews were

1 The project team is made up of: Herbert Kubicek and Ralf Cimander (ifib, Germany), Georg Aich, Doris Allhutter and Stephan Strauss (ITA, Austria) and Lourdes Torres and Vicente Pina (Spain).
carried out from September 2010 to January 2011 by the research team in each country.

**ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part A deals with the experience of the experts in previous initiatives in which citizen participation was involved via the Internet and/or traditional ways. Part B collects the expectations of managers about citizen panels and which may be the key factors of the success or failure of this kind of initiative.

**Part A: EXPERIENCE IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE SAVING**

1. How long have you been involved in climate-saving projects?

Interviewees report different degrees of experience in climate-saving projects which range from 1 to 19 years, although more than 50% state between ten and nineteen years of experience. The average participation in this kind of project is 7.5 years. This experience gives experts a solid background to build an informed opinion about what can be expected from citizen participation in climate-saving programs. By countries, Germany presents the largest experience in climate-saving programs, followed by Austria and Spain.

2, 3. Did they include any form of citizen participation i.e. some kind of interactive exercise involving input or feedback from citizens?

Almost all interviewees also have experience in citizen participation projects in which citizens are involved in local programs such as energy-saving, mobility, replacement of bulks, ecology education, CO$_2$-saving habits and recycling. In addition to climate-saving programs, some of them have also been involved in programs included in Agenda 21.

4. Did at least one of these projects involve communication or cooperation between the authority and citizens via Internet?

Around 50% reports previous experience in some kind of e-participation. By countries, Germany shows a higher level of experience in e-participation since 2/3 of experts interviewed state that they have been involved in e-participation initiatives, followed by Spain (50%) and Austria.

5. Considering the citizen participation initiatives in climate saving you have been involved in, to what extent did you achieve the following effects of the citizen participation?

For them the effects on ‘transparency’ and ‘increased attention of climate effects of actions’ are the most outstanding benefits from these participation programs. Furthermore, more than 40% highlight the contribution of e-participation for testing new ways of governance and for improving social cohesion. They consider that e-participation has a moderate influence on the reduction of CO$_2$ and on citizens who do not participate in these initiatives -‘non-participant citizens’. By contrast, it seems that e-participation does not strengthen ties among the local community and does not bring about improvements in the image of the city.

6. Have there been any monitoring and/or reporting of achievements carried out within the citizen/NGO participation activities in climate saving programs?

Only 60% report to carry out some evaluation of citizen participation programs. The 40% who do not monitor the achievements consider relevant the improvements of e-participation on strengthening of ties among the local community. Thus, it seems that this group prioritizes general aspects of social integration over the goals of specific citizen participation programs.
7.- Compared to the composition of the general population, how much do citizens who participate in climate saving initiatives differ with regard to age, gender, education, income, migrant and political orientation.

For 40% of 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 ‘less migration background’. Interviewees with experience in online participation initiatives describe the profile of citizens participating online as young, with high education, non migrant background. Thus, it seems age is the only difference between the offline and online participants.

8.- Considering the citizen participation initiatives in climate change you have been involved in, how satisfied are you with citizen participation in climate-saving programs concerning the following aspects?

The degree of satisfaction with citizen participation in climate-saving programs is, on average, reasonable because the mean value of the answers is between 4.5 and 6.5. The highest scores can be found in ‘quality of citizen contributions’, ‘pay-off for participants’, ‘increase of citizens’ knowledge about the topic’, ‘cost-benefit ratio for organizers of participation processes’ and ‘short term changes’. Regarding long term changes, only 16% of the experts expect noticeable changes.

The views about the number of participants are not conclusive and similar for the offline and online population. Around 1/3 are happy with the participation of citizens and for 1/3 the participation is less satisfactory. By countries Spanish experts show the highest degree of satisfaction and German experts are the most critical of the number of participants. Regarding the representativeness of the participants, the experts are even more critical, since only three give a score of over 7 to the degree of representativeness, for the rest, it is moderate or insufficient.

The experts’ views about offline and online participation show similar scores except for ‘the usage of offers by citizens/participants’ which is lower in the case of online participants.

9.- Comparing citizen participation via Internet and via traditional ways, from your experience, what has been more successful or favorable?

Experts do not find differences between the Internet and traditional ways of citizen participation or consider the traditional ways in all issues included in question 9 as more successful except for the cost of activities which is more favorable to the online initiatives. In the case of the influence of citizen participation in future measures by public administration and politic, the sustainability of achieved results and continuity, the enhancement of democracy on local level, the boost of community building, none said that online is better than offline.

10.- Globally spoken, are you satisfied with the organization and results of the citizen participation initiatives in climate saving / environmental protection you have been involved in?

The general level of satisfaction is high since 68% of experts state they are satisfied with previous experiences.

11.- You said you are rather satisfied with citizen participation initiatives you have been involved in. How important have the following conditions been to provide for successful participation of citizens?

Around 75% are satisfied with their citizen participation programs. For them, the key conditions for the successful participation of citizens are ‘the clarity of the objectives’ and ‘the support to citizens’, such as ‘training for participants’, ‘supervision by moderators or similar’ and ‘the credibility that citizens’ opinions’ will be taken serious,
followed by the visibility of shared responsibility and the transparency of results. On the other hand, the implementation of incentives, competition and the need for coordination with other citizens are not considered relevant.

12.- Unsatisfactory citizen participation initiatives you have been involved in. From the viewpoint of public authorities, which and to which extent have the following issues been reasons for failure?

Around 25% state that they are not satisfied with their citizen participation programs. The main reasons for the failure of citizen participation initiatives are always the same (already known) people engaged in the initiatives, there is limited political will and drive and a lack of interest from the citizens.

13.- You said “lack of interest by citizens” is one reason why you are unsatisfied with citizen participation initiatives you have been involved in. To which extent do you think have the following issues been reasons why citizens did not participate or why they have decided to leave the participation activity while the participation process was still running?

Key reasons why citizens did not participate or leave the participation activity while it was still an ongoing process are: decreasing motivation, general lack of interest, the lack of consideration of citizen input in decisions, lack of time and limited attractive opportunities offered to citizens to put their motivation into practice. They consider the lack of incentives less important. As can be seen, all of the key reasons are related to the citizen perception of both the lack of effectiveness of their collaboration and the lack of true interest of politicians in citizen contributions, that is to say, the perception that citizen participation does not make a difference in the development of public policies.

14.- From your experience, what should have been done other to become the citizen participation initiatives you have been involved in a success? Please make your recommendation here for those issues that have not been indicated before in above questions:

The most outstanding recommendations are: ‘to make the objectives of the collaboration clear’, ‘to provide appropriate information’, and ‘broader campaigns for and better integration of citizens’. Other recommendations are that ‘citizen involvement needs to be started earlier’ and that ‘public authorities present a detailed and structured plan before they involve citizens’. This mistake is made regularly.

Some experts say that they only attract and reach the well-informed and active citizens, but attract others is also needed. Onliners are easier to attract. Because of this, it is necessary to think more about new ways of approaching citizens directly e.g. ‘via their neighborhood (if this still exists...)’ or ‘their social environment’.

Some experts also claim for ‘more money’ and ‘personnel resources’, even though these issues have not been between those considered by experts as important for the successful of citizen participation initiatives. As there are shortages of resources, there are only many small scale citizen participation projects but no big ones. This creates difficulties to achieve the objectives of participation projects. Another issue is the involvement of local politicians in the participation process and the need for consensus in the politics about the goals and actions. Hence, a strong support by politics is needed.

Beside the citizen panel on climate saving, would you (co-) organize or support further participation activities in future?

Almost all state that they would be happy to be involved in further citizen participation initiatives.

Part B: DELPHI-PART on PARTICIPATION RESULTS and FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS in CITIZEN PANELS on CLIMATE SAVING
Part B deals with the opinion and expectations of the experts about the potential contribution of panels of citizens to climate change saving programs. Overall view of the answers to Part B shows, in general, higher scores than in Part A. This means that managers expect better results in future participation initiatives than they have had in previous experiences, perhaps because managers consider citizen participation as a new governance policy. The answers also show that managers are willing to continue developing citizen participation initiatives as an integral part of their governance strategies.

About the benefits of the participation of citizen panels in climate saving programs the average score is over 5 in all cases, so all managers consider positive this kind of initiatives. The highest score is for ‘the expectations on CO\textsubscript{2} reduction among panelist’, ‘improved attention for the climate effects of actions’, ‘better transparency’ and ‘the proof that public administration is testing new forms of governance’.

15.- What will be the benefits or chances of the citizen panel on climate saving?

This question about expectations is similar to the question about effects of the citizen participation. More than 60% of those interviewed expect noticeable benefits for the image of the entity. This score is twice that of the percentage of experts who consider that previous citizen participation initiatives have brought about improvements in the image of the entity. More than 50% of those interviewed score the ‘benefits of new modes of governance’, ‘better transparency’, ‘increased attention for the climate effects of actions in various fields of life’ and ‘reduction of CO\textsubscript{2} over seven, which means a high degree of expectations with respect to citizen panels. These opinions about the benefits of citizen panels are consistent with the effects detected in other citizen participation initiatives although the percentages are lower. In this question all the averages of points assigned to the different items are over 5.

16.- What do you think, who has to contribute to which extent to achieve the local CO\textsubscript{2}-reduction targets?

Experts do not report differences between citizens, administration and business regarding their contribution to CO\textsubscript{2} saving. More than 50% of experts assign 1/3 each to citizens, businesses and administration, respectively.

17.- What do you think is the savings potential for CO\textsubscript{2}-emissions (in per cent) that can be achieved by 2020 for citizens, businesses and administration.

Again experts assign shared responsibilities to citizens, businesses and administration. Most of experts estimate from 20% to 40% the saving to be achieved by each group.

18.- With respect to CO\textsubscript{2}-reduction, in which different fields and to which extent do you consider citizen participation could be effective?

Around 72% of experts consider energy saving, 52% mobility, 48% nutrition (buying regional/seasonal/ecological food) and 48% smart consumption as fields in which citizen participation could be more effective. It seems clear that experts agree that citizens can make a noticeable contribution to CO\textsubscript{2} reduction, especially through changes in their domestic habits.

19.- Do you think that the citizen panel on climate saving will have an effect on other citizens, who are not or not yet involved in this participation project?

The experts do not consider noticeable the influence of citizen panel on climate saving on other citizens, who are not or not yet involved in this participation project. 28% of experts forecast little influence on other citizens and 48% a moderate effect. So, it seems that working with citizen panels could be useful to test environmental policies rather than to reduce CO\textsubscript{2} emissions directly.
20. How many citizens out of 100 already participating citizens do you think will change their climate-saving behavior because of their participation in the panel?

Regarding the effectiveness of citizen participation programs on participants, more than 50% of the experts estimate that from 70% to 80% of participants will change their climate-saving behavior. However, they consider that only less than 40% of participants will maintain such changes in the long term.

21. How much do you think monitoring of consumption and corresponding feedback will increase individual efforts to reduce CO2?

There is no consensus about the monitoring of consumption effectiveness on individual efforts to reduce CO2. The results show that the opinion of experts range from zero to a hundred per cent. Notwithstanding, on average, experts expect an increment in individual effort of around 43%, which is a high degree of effectiveness for citizen participation programs.

22. This question deals with the opinion of experts about citizens views about different aspects of climate-saving policies.

Experts show different opinion about the degree of information citizens have about environmental policies. They estimate that around 50% of citizens consider themselves well-informed about local government climate-change strategies, but only 15% would be able to state correctly the reduction targets of the city. Experts also say that citizens consider that they could make, together with business and administration, a noticeable contribution to the reduction of CO2. For the experts, the way citizen could contribute to CO2 reduction is by switching off electronic devices and using public transport. On the other hand, experts estimate that only around 15% of citizens would participate in a citizen panel.

23. What will be the drop-out quote of panelists during the two-years time in %?

The expert estimations about the drop-out percentage of onliners is 38%, giving most of them a range from 30% to 50%. For offliners, the drop-out percentage is slightly better with an average of 30%, and the range of estimation from 10% to 30%. The mean values and the ranges are better in the case of offliners. This could be because the direct contact with the research project staff.

24. Thinking on the citizen panel in climate saving. How important are the following aspects to successfully, in terms of number of participants, conduct a citizen panel on climate saving.

This question aims to apply the experience of experts from previous citizen participation initiatives to their expectations for future initiatives. The different items included in questions #11 and #24 show higher values when they refer to expectations about citizen panels rather than to previous citizen participation initiatives. This is the case of the demand of little effort from participants (68% vs 28%), no requirement of changes in citizens' lifestyle (52% vs 24%), no coordination with others (68% vs 20%), clear objectives (88% vs 60%), supporting measures (96% vs 60%), incentives (52% vs 12%), confirmation to take citizens' opinions serious (84% vs 52%), transparency of results (84% vs 64%), visibility of shared responsibility and efforts (84% vs 100%), offering appropriate participation modes (80% vs 48%), monitoring of engagement (72% vs 24%), regular contribution (56% vs 28%), competition with other citizens (40% vs 4%), different channel to mobilize participation (92% vs 52%), friendly ICTs (92% vs 12%) and commitments in national or international programs (40% vs 40%). For experts, key issues for the number of participants are the provision of training and support, user-friendly design of employed ICTs, clear objectives, visibility of shared responsibility and efforts and the use of different channels for mobilizing participation. On the other hand, competition between panelists and no changes in the personal lifestyles of panelists are considered as non important issues.
25- Thinking of the citizen panel on climate saving to which extend are the following aspects reasons why a prospective citizen panel on climate saving in your local authority may fail?

Some items of this question about reasons why citizen participation may fail are the same to those included in question #12 but, in this case, referring specifically to citizen panels. Key issues for the failure of citizen participation may be limited political will and drive (68% vs 66%), lack of interest from citizens (76% vs 83%), there are always the same (already known) people who engage (60% vs 83%), and difficulties to create one or more temporary positions (52% vs 50%). Other reasons arising from the answers to this question are lack of financial resources (60%, 33%), lack of personnel resources (72% vs 33%), lack of time (72%), decreasing motivation (68%) and lack of consideration of citizen input in decisions (68%). On the other hand, the need for official confirmations from the local parliament, the risk of getting unwanted results and the cooperation with business or other actors are no important issues for explaining the failure of citizen participation programs.

26- Low numbers of participants are generally interpreted as failure of a participation activity. In what terms and to which extent are – in your opinion - low participation rates a failure?

Around 60% of the experts consider the limited usefulness of the results of participation results as the main consequence of low participation rates. Other reasons such as low cost-benefit ratios and bad image for the entity are only considered relevant by less than 50% of the experts.

27- Comparing in the citizen panel on climate saving participation via Internet and via traditional ways, what is to be more successful or favorable in future? Please assess which method will have advantages in future with regard to

Finally, the experts do not expect differences on online and offline forms of participations in the value and effectiveness of contributions, enhancing democracy, sustainability of results and influence on future measures. They envisage better results in online than in offline participation in terms of cost and offline better than online in terms of social cohesion.

DISCUSSION

The answers of the experts show that citizen participation (both e-participation and traditional participation) initiatives are not new in the European Union (EU) arena. In countries studied, participation initiatives started in the second half of 90s concurrently with the publication of feedback studies about NPM reforms and the warnings of academics about the doubtful benefits of some NPM reforms and the decline of public trust in governments derived from such reforms.

Programs involving citizen participation were often within local environment area. An overall view of the experts responses about previous experiences shows a positive evaluation of those experiences. The general level of satisfaction is high since around 75% of experts report satisfaction with the participation of citizens in local government programs. The experts do not find and do not expect noticeable differences between online and offline participants. This could be a key finding of this survey, since the a priori prevalence of online advantages over traditional offline methods is not confirmed by the experts. For the OECD (2003) the online provision of information is an essential precondition for engagement, but quantity does not mean quality. Active promotion and competent moderation are critical for effective online consultations. This assertion is

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2 Question#12 was only answered by experts with unsatisfactory experiences and question#25 by all experts.

3 The first figure refers to this question and the second to the question#12.
consistent with the opinion of experts that consider that the ‘user-friendly designed of employed ICTs’, ‘the use of different channels, media and multiplicators in order to mobilize participation’ and ‘the offer of appropriate participation modes’ are relevant aspect of successful citizen participation initiatives.

About one of the key research questions ‘what can be expected from citizen participation programs’, for the experts, most outstanding benefits from previous participation programs have been the increment of citizen attention on climate-change effects and the enhance of transparency of the local government, together with the contribution to testing new modes of governance.

On the other hand, the experts only find moderate benefits in those aspects directly related to the participation projects. They report moderate effects in the reduction of CO₂ and on those citizens that do not participate in these projects. This is an important result given that they are critical for the successful of climate-saving initiatives, since the effective reduction of gas emission require a wide implication of population. Furthermore, 40% of local governments do not evaluate the results of citizen participation programs. Those who do not monitor the achievements consider relevant the improvements of e-participation on 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, since almost half of them do not evaluate the results. General aspects about transparency, social integration and testing new modes of governance seem to be, for the experts, the main achievements of citizen participation programs. These results are consistent with the Institutional Theory which states the institutional image as a driver of some public sector reforms. Citizen participation would represent the local government interest in implementing new horizontal modes of governance and enhanced responsiveness rather than the will of achieving specific objectives of climate-saving.

The experts do not report differences between participants and non-participants in age, gender, income and political orientation. Only report differences in education and migrant background in the sense that well-educated and with ‘less migrant background’ citizens collaborate more in citizen participation activities than the rest of population. Previous studies such as Smith et al (2009), referred to the US, only find differences in income and education, being well-off and well educated citizens more participants than the rest of population. In the case of the EU, there is difference only in education. Some experts in question#14 report that citizen participation initiatives only attract and reach the well informed and active citizens but not the total population, recommending seeking for 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 above mentioned socio-economic factors.

As in previous studies referred to the US, this survey do not find difference between online and offline participants. The experts only state a higher participation online in young than in elderly people, because younger Europeans are more likely than their elders to be internet users. Contrary to the hopes of some advocates, for the moment, the Internet is not changing the socio-economic character of citizen engagement in the EU. It seems that in Europe the Internet and broadband technology is spread on wide levels of population and therefore, income does not make a difference in attracting citizen to participation programs.

Some experts are critical about the number of participants and about the representativeness of participants. This view can be also be found in other answers in which the experts say that participants are always (already known) the same. These
results confirm a common concern about the representativeness of results, given that participants may have higher 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 experts are happy with citizen contributions to the programs, the contribution of programs to participants and the cost-benefit ratio.

Some key conditions for successful citizen participation programs deal with keeping in contact with citizens through ‘training for participants’, ‘supervision by moderators’ and other support tools to participants. Other conditions are related to signs of credibility of the process, such as ‘clear objectives’, ‘the firm belief that citizens’ opinions will be taken serious’ and the transparency of results. By contrast, ‘limited political will’, ‘lack of interest by citizens’ and the participation of the ‘same, already known, people’ seem to be main reasons for the failure of citizen participation programs. For 25% of the experts, 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 successful of citizen participation initiatives deal 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 experts to Part B questions deal with what can be expected from citizen panels. The answers reveal a positive view and a high degree of expectations about the role that citizen panels can play as a tool to conduct citizen participation in environmental programs. Thus, the items of question#5 are similar to those of question#15 and the items included in the second (about expectations) score up to twice the same items in question#5 (about previous experiences). For the experts, to work with citizen panels will improve the image and transparency of the local governments and contribute to testing new modes of governance. These responses show that citizen participation is being considered more and more a powerful tool for bringing citizen closer to public entities and citizens appreciate local government responsiveness. This view is consistent with the answers to question#19 in which the experts report that they do not expect that citizen panels influence other citizens not involved in the participation project. So, the experts do not expect noticeable CO₂ reductions when working with citizen panels, but the involvement of citizens in testing environmental policies.

Expected reasons for successful and failure further citizen panel initiatives deal with the transparency of the process, the workload for citizen and the usefulness perceived by citizens about their contribution. The availability of recourses (financial and personnel) is not considered relevant for the successful, but yes, it is, for the failure of citizen participation projects.

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

CONCLUSIONS

This study analyses the features of citizen participation in climate change policies in three EU countries. Although it is referred to the EU case, the results will be also useful for other countries considering citizen participation as a way of strengthening and enhancing the relationship between governments and citizens.

This article aimed to contribute to closing the evaluation gap of the usefulness of e-participation/citizen participation processes. The survey carried out has allowed the identification of conditions of success and failure and the determination of what can be expected from e-participation and traditional participation projects.
The evidence collected gives answer to some research questions underlying in the academic literature about e-participation and in a number of publications from multilateral organizations, which deal with whether online tools could offer more opportunities for participation; allow for a greater range of participants; and facilitates ‘better’ participation. The answer to these three questions seems to be negative or at least doubtful. For the experts interviewed the recruitment of onliners is not easier than those recruited under offline modes and with the introduction of ICTs the problems for the engagement of citizens remain. Regarding the second question, young people is predominant in online mode. The socio-economic profile of 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 to a wider range of citizens, but to the same well informed, educated and politically active citizen as traditional model of participation did. Finally, the experts do not report differences in the quality of participation between onliners and offliners, thus the hypothesis that ICTs allows better participation is not confirmed by the results of the study.

The results say that the use of technology is only an enabler but it 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 the success or failure, the participation or non-participation 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 to make the most of ICTs.

REFERENCES


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