15

DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT

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Introduction

Citizens' expectations regarding public services have risen, and governments around the world face demands to become more citizen-oriented. Citizen engagement is a means of involving citizens in decision making regarding public policies and administration. This development is at least partly rooted in the New Public Management discourse, and governments have increasingly aligned their service provisions with citizens' demands.

Two examples illustrate the types of projects in which citizen engagement has been an important issue. Stuttgart 21 is a railway and urban development project in Southern Germany involving the renewal of the Stuttgart main station. The project has been controversial for years. The local council rejected a petition for a referendum (Bürgerbegehren) against the project in 2007. After the official decision was made to undertake the project, there were protests in which thousands of citizens were involved and that culminated in riots with the police in 2010. Ensuing mediation talks between proponents and opponents resulted in a compromise proposal; a referendum held in 2011 backed the project, and implementation of the project was subsequently begun.

In another example, Singapore faces huge challenges in urban planning due to its high population density. After a long history of top-down urban planning, Singapore is experimenting with different methods of encouraging the participation of its citizens in the planning process (Soh and Yuen 2006). In 2008, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) published its draft Master Plan for public consultation to guide Singapore's land-use development over the medium term using GIS. More than 200,000 people visited the website, and many provided feedback on its urban planning proposals.

These examples highlight the relevance of citizen engagement in the political process globally. They also show that political cultures and processes vary from country to country. As a result, fundamental questions about the relation between the development of democracy and the use of citizen engagement as well as the relationship between democracy and public management are raised. More practical questions relate to the level and the phase of the political process at which citizen engagement is appropriate. Finally, last but not least, governments must address what the opportunities and risks of increased citizen engagement are.

Based on an extensive analysis of the international democratic theory and participation literature, this chapter provides an overview of the state and the development of democracy and citizen engagement from a global perspective. The chapter is structured as follows. Following the definition of the terms 'democracy' and 'citizen engagement', an analytic framework including democracy theory and public management is developed in the subsequent section. The next section examines the democratic governance of a state and its development from a global perspective, while the following explains the relationship between democracy and public management. The chapter then focuses on the development and state of political participation. We examine the possible process of citizen engagement, and highlight the advantages and disadvantages of citizen engagement. In the final section, we draw the main conclusions from the chapter.

Defining 'democracy' and 'citizen engagement'

The manner in which democracy is implemented in countries around the world differs considerably in the same way that democracy has been variously defined by scholars throughout history (Deleon 2007). Aristotle (350 BC, new edition 1987) understood democracy as the 'rule of the poor in their own interests', whereas Schumpeter (1943) defined it as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'.

Regarding representative democracy, Schmitter and Karl (1991: 76) posit that '[m]odern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.' Emphasizing participation, Cohen (1971: 7) defines democracy as 'that system of community government in which [...] the members of a community participate, or may participate, directly or indirectly, in the making of decisions that affect them'.

A distinction is made between indirect and direct democracy. In an indirect democracy – or a representative democracy – the people themselves do not rule but instead elect representatives to rule (Sartori 1992: 122). Direct democracy may be understood as people's rights, the exercise of such rights or single-item referenda put to a popular vote (Linder 2005: 242). The entire political decision-making system – including government, parliament and citizens – is typically referred to as semi-direct democracy. These different understandings of democracy share the notion that the people should be the basis of government and that they should have some means of influencing the political decision-making process (Deleon 2007). The democratic style of decision making contrasts with the autocratic decision-making style, in which one individual decides without consulting others (Denhardt and Baker 2007).

Certain key political institutions are required for democratic governance. Dahl (2005) names six requirements for a democratic country. First, citizens elect officials under a system of representation. Second, the electoral system guarantees free, fair and frequent elections. Third, citizens enjoy freedom of expression without threat of punishment. Fourth, citizens must have access to a wide variety of information and to alternative sources of information, i.e. a free and independent media. Fifth, citizens must have the right to form organizations or associations such as political parties and interest associations. Finally, citizenship must be inclusive (Dahl 2005: 188 et seq.).

A common understanding of democracy therefore also implies participation by citizens (Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992). There have been many attempts to define political participation. 'Political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take

(Verba and Nie 1987: 2). An alternative formulation focuses on 'actions by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcome' (Brady 1999: 737).

These and similar definitions have certain essential elements in common. First, they refer to people in their role as citizens and not as politicians or civil servants. Second, participation requires active engagement by citizens, which means that being interested in politics is not the same as being a 'participant'. Third, participation is a rather broad term, involving the entire political system and not only single phases in the decision-making process (van Deth 2003: 170 et seq.). As a rule, political participation is voluntary. It may occur at different levels in the political system. In addition to the national, state and communal levels, it may also occur at a transnational level, such as the European Union (Andersen and Wichard 2003). The institutional framework and openness of the political system determines the degree to which citizens may be involved in the political process (Lowndes et al. 2006: 539). Thus, the terms 'participation' and 'citizen engagement' may be used synonymously.

Analytical framework

Citizen engagement is a concept frequently discussed in the context of participatory democracy theory, as input legitimacy may increase with citizen involvement. The underlying framework for this article depicted in Figure 15.1 therefore embeds the spectrum of citizen engagement (adapted from Sheedy 2008 and IAP2 2015) in the discussion about participatory democracy.

Proponents of theoretical approaches to participatory democracy – such as Rousseau – emphasize the connections and interactions between an individual and governmental authorities and institutions (Pateman 1970: 103). Normative postulates of participatory democracy theory include, for example, that citizen participation is central to democracy (Verba and Nie 1987) and that as many citizens as possible should participate in as much governance as possible (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2004: 20 et seqq.). Some researchers argue in favor of an enlarged circle of participants. They plead for equal opportunities for disadvantaged social groups, such as full political rights for women, adolescents and foreigners. The legitimacy of the political system might be enhanced under this view by maximizing citizen engagement (Kohout 2002: 53). Participatory democracy theory has been criticized for its (overly) optimistic conception of the human being and for overestimating the competency of citizens (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2004: 21).

What is required for citizens to be truly empowered? Public managers can involve citizens along a wide spectrum, with varying levels of public impact. The possible spectrum of citizen engagement ranges from merely informing or consulting citizens to involving them, collaborating with them or truly empowering them and even reimbursing them for participating in the policy- and decision-making processes (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1989). The level of public impact increases along this line. Informing citizens means providing the public with objective information to understand problems, alternatives and solutions. Consulting citizens entails obtaining feedback from citizens regarding a particular issue. Involving citizens means working with the public throughout the process and thereby ensuring that their concerns are considered. Collaborating means involving citizens in every aspect of the decision-making process, and empowering them by placing the final decision in their hands. Some argue that the first two stages do not qualify as citizen engagement because there is no two-way flow of information between the government and its citizens (Sheedy 2008; IAP2 2015).

This framework is an alternative to the so-called 'ladder of citizen participation', a more differentiated, classical model of participatory democracy theory developed by Arnstein (1969), in which eight steps on a ladder represent different levels of citizen participation. At the lowest level, citizens have no or only slight levels of participation. At the highest level, citizens assume
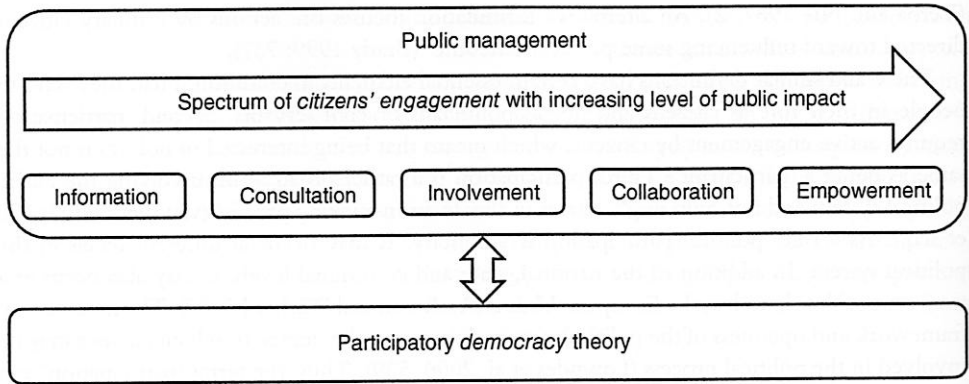
Figure 15.1 Analytical framework of democracy and citizen engagement

active and engaged participatory roles. The different intensities of participation range from 'manipulation' and 'therapy' as instruments of 'non-participation' to 'informing', 'consultation' and 'placation' as symbolic participation acts, to 'partnership', 'delegated power' and 'citizen control' as ways in which citizens can influence public administration (Kersting et al. 2008: 15 et seq.; Callahan 2007: 1138). Notably, citizen participation is not limited to politics but extends to involvement in the economic and social spheres, such as in the private sector or in nonprofit organizations (Deleon 2007). In particular, the concept of co-production, which involves citizens in the delivery of public services (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1989; Bovaird 2007), is described by John Alford in Chapter 14, "Citizen co-production of public services", of this volume.

Development of 'old' and 'new' democracies in a global perspective

Against the background of different social conditions and paths of development regarding the democratic system and participation issues, it makes sense to distinguish between 'old' and 'new' democracies. In the West today, democracy is almost taken for granted. Among scholars, however, there has been skepticism regarding democracy as a concept. The rationality of its inner logic has been questioned (Arrow 1951), and/or it has been denoted as ideological or utopian (Dunn 1979). In developing countries, in particular, democracy has also been criticized for being 'too messy, uncontrolled and prone to manipulation and abuse to provide the stability and continuity needed for sustained social and economic reform' (UNDP 2002: v). Advocates of democratic systems, however, argue that debates on policies promote economic growth and the meeting of social needs (UNDP 2002: v).

Although democratic theory has been scrutinized in the past, interest in it has recently increased mainly because of the rising number of democracies worldwide, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, the former Soviet Union and the Arab states (Shapiro 2003; UNDP 2002). Since the 1980s, over 80 countries have moved toward more democratic systems, and 140 of the nearly 200 countries in the world hold multiparty elections. However, there is currently less optimism about democracy than there was in the last two decades of the twentieth century. It has become clear that 'effective democratic governance is not yet a reality' (UNDP 2002: v). Only 80 countries are fully democratic. Several countries that had taken steps toward democracy have returned to more authoritarian rule (such as Pakistan and Zimbabwe). Some countries remain in a system between democracy and authoritarianism in which politics are dysfunctional and political freedom is limited, whereas other countries have become

breeding grounds for violent conflict and extremism (UNDP 2002: 1). Thus, democracy cannot just be 'imported' into a country but is instead shaped based on a country's history and circumstances (UNDP 2002: 4).

There have been different understandings of what constitutes a 'democracy' not only among different countries but also throughout the centuries. Democratic institutions did not emerge simultaneously. The first democratic constitution was established in Athens circa 500 BC (see, for example, Kagan 1991). In the 'old' democracies, the right to elect the legislature was introduced early, i.e. in the thirteenth century in Britain and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the United States. One of the main differences between current and earlier democracies involves the notion of universal suffrage. For a long time, political engagement was restricted to a minority of male adults. Women gained the right to vote only after the Second World War in a number of otherwise highly democratic countries, such as Belgium, France and Switzerland (Dahl 2005), the latter being one of the most distinct examples of (semi-)direct democracy.

The nature of democracy and its possibilities also varies between different levels of government, i.e. national or local (Deleon 2007). As a result of their size, local governments often have more methods at their disposal to involve citizens than regional or national governments (Peters 1996: 58).

The relationship between public management and democracy

The relationship between democracy and bureaucracy has been a frequent subject of discussion in the literature (Denhardt and Baker 2007; Rouban 2012). The main question typically relates to the legitimacy of public management, i.e. that democratic theory implies that the people are the basis of legitimate power and that there should be a connection between administrators' activities and citizens' preferences (Deleon 2007). Some scholars argue that an administrative body that is not organized democratically is not consistent with the ideas of a democratic society (Cleveland 1920) and that 'a democratic state must be [...] democratically administered' (Levitan 1943: 359). Denhardt (1993) even argues that in a democratic country, a public organization should be an example of a democratically organized workplace. This 'workplace democracy' entails that democratic practices – such as debates, voting and inclusion in decision making – should be applied in the workplace context. The governance literature identifies hierarchies, markets and networks (for the latter, see Chapter 13 by Cepiku on "Collaborative governance" in this volume) as strategies involving coordination between public management and the political system (Deleon 2007; Newman 2001).

There is extensive research on how public management can be democratized, including a selection of various means of achieving this objective (Deleon 2007). Thus, a 'representative bureaucracy' indicates that the composition of the citizenry (with respect to class, ethnicity, gender, etc.) should be reflected in the public staff (Bradbury and Kellough 2011). Such an arrangement entails equal opportunities and implies that policies and actions represent the public interest. As minorities become represented in the political and administrative system, their issues may be more present on the political agenda, but it is also possible that representatives who do not belong to a minority may nonetheless act on behalf of disadvantaged groups (Deleon 2007). A bottom-up approach involves 'street-level bureaucracy' that focuses on the front-line workforce that interacts directly with the clients (Lipsky 1980). A further means of involving citizens in public management is citizen participation, which is the focus of this chapter.

Development and state of political participation from an international perspective

The notion of citizen engagement has a long tradition (Schmitz 1983: 33) in the 'old' democracies: it has previously been the subject of works by Aristotle, Rousseau, de Tocqueville and others (Kohout 2002: 37). For example, nearly 300 years ago, Rousseau claimed that everyone should have equal political participation rights, which would lead to a state in which decisions are made in the public interest (Rousseau 2011). By the end of the 1960s, the term 'political participation' gained in popularity, and demands for more participation opportunities for citizens were made and partially implemented, particularly in contested policy fields in the social and environmental spheres (Bora 2005: 28).

The repertoire of the forms of participation has expanded in the academic community over time. In the 1940s and 1950s, election research mainly focused on voting and participation in election campaigns. By the end of the 1960s, research addressed aspects such as fundraising, group activities, and contacting civil servants and political decision-makers, extending in the 1970s to unconventional participation forms, such as political protests (van Deth 2003: 171 et seqq.; Kersting et al. 2008: 24). At about the same time, student and peace movements had taken root in a variety of countries (Gabriel and Völkl 2008: 273). At the beginning of the 1990s, scholars acknowledged that certain forms of social engagement and membership in organizations may also be considered forms of citizen engagement (van Deth 2003: 174 et seqq.).

With the emphasis on customers and citizens in the (New) Public Management discussion in recent decades, new trends have also emerged in citizen engagement. Since the 1990s, information and communication technology (ICT) has gained significance in this respect. ICT can enable citizen engagement by creating flows of information from government to citizen as well as from citizen to government (Bailur and Gigler 2014). ICT can help reduce the distance between government and citizens, cutting across time and space with the potential to increase the number of participants. Web 2.0 has opened up additional possibilities for new forms of participation (such as internet-based citizen surveys) and by enabling the formation of communities such as Facebook and web-based forums, which facilitate reciprocity and discursivity, although most governments have not yet realized the full potential of these developments (Sheedy 2008).

Although employing ICT for surveys is already quite widespread, a few governments have begun to use ICT techniques to encourage citizen participation. In addition to informing the public, ICT tools allow public reporting, for example, whereby citizens can report crimes, such as graffiti, littering or damage to public property, by pinpointing the incident on an online map provided by (local) government. Thus, using the ICT tool "Züri wie neu" (Zurich like new), which is provided by the city of Zurich, citizens can report damage to the infrastructure of the city of Zurich by describing the damage and locating the incident on a map by simply entering the appropriate address. The city government then repairs the damage and replies using the same ICT tool, which is publicly visible online.
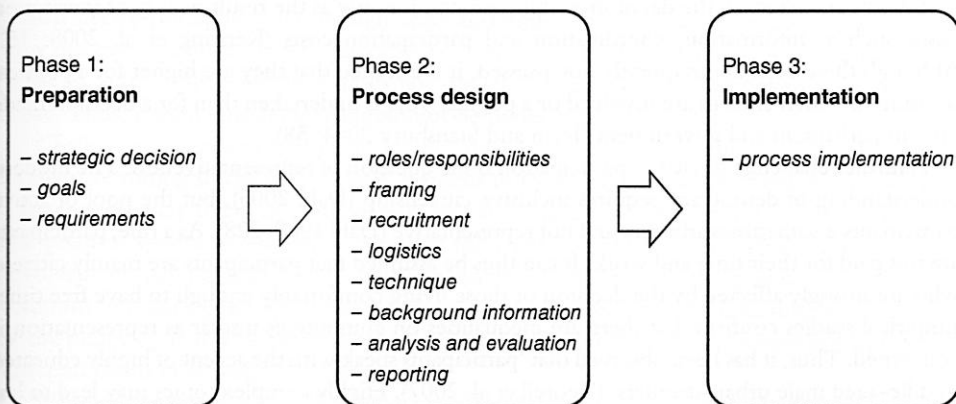
Internet voting for a binding political election was first used in the US in 2000. Subsequently, additional countries have run trials and pilots for e-voting, including Canada, Estonia, France and Switzerland. Electronic voting at the poll site (i.e. non-remote) is more widespread and is employed in Belgium, the Netherlands, the US, Brazil and India (Esteve, Goldsmith, and Turner 2012). In recent years, however, e-government, e-democracy and e-voting have become the subject of debate. Although there is potential for efficiency gains and higher participation rates, the consequences of failure or misuse may be severe (La Porte, Demchak, and Jong 2002; Moynihan 2004).

Citizen engagement has been used in development projects, such as World Bank Group projects (World Bank Group 2014). Key factors for citizen engagement include the country context including the history of civic participation, willingness and capacity. For example, in East and South Asia, citizen participation has long been applied in development projects. Political transitions in certain regions of the Middle East and North Africa have also provided opportunities for citizens to become more involved. Government ownership is important in terms of sustaining citizen involvement in processes beyond the duration of the development project. Furthermore, clear goals are a success factor in citizen involvement processes. Including women and vulnerable groups is important to ensure stakeholder representation. In 'new' democracies, however, concerns have been raised regarding citizen participation, and it has been argued that merely establishing democratic institutions is not sufficient because people must trust these institutions to engage in the political process, or democracy will 'end up being no more than an empty shell' (Krishna 2002: 437).

The citizen engagement process

The process of citizen engagement may be divided into three main phases: preparation, process design and implementation (Sheedy 2008, see Figure 15.2). The first phase, i.e. the preparation phase, establishes whether citizen engagement is the right strategy for the envisaged policy process. If so, the goals are determined and the requirements such as resources, capacity and timing are assessed. In the second phase, the process is designed and planned. The roles and responsibilities in the process must be considered, such as that of the facilitator, who is a key success factor in the process. The issue then must be framed in such a way that the public at large is able to participate, such as by using accessible language that welcomes participation. For example, people are recruited to participate in an event, whether through an open or selective invitation. As for logistics, the time and place must be fixed.

The appropriate technique reflecting the policy issue and goals must be selected, also considering ICT tools. Necessary background information should be provided to the citizens in advance. Analysis and evaluation of citizen involvement and its outcomes (contributions and decisions) is a crucial part of the process, as well as of the feedback loop, i.e. reporting to the participants and decision-makers. Thus, these elements should be planned ahead. The third phase is implementing the designed citizen involvement process (Sheedy 2008).

Phase 1:
Preparation

– *strategic decision*
– *goals*
– *requirements*

Phase 2:
Process design

– *roles/responsibilities*
– *framing*
– *recruitment*
– *logistics*
– *technique*
– *background information*
– *analysis and evaluation*
– *reporting*

Phase 3:
Implementation

– *process implementation*

Figure 15.2   The process of citizen engagement

Opportunities and risks of citizen engagement

Involving citizens in the democratic decision-making process is a much-discussed issue in many countries (OECD 2001). Citizen engagement is frequently intended to produce better decisions and more efficient outcomes for society (Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Thomas 1995). However, is it worth the effort? This question is discussed here on the basis of a review of the literature regarding the opportunities and risks of citizen participation (Steiner and Kaiser 2012).

Strengthening the input legitimacy of a political system is one main argument in favor of citizen engagement (Scharpf 1999; Haus and Heinelt 2005: 35). Political decisions are legitimate when they correspond to the will of the citizens because decisions made by a democratic sovereign, i.e. the people, are often widely accepted. The public is typically involved to gain approval, which is a prerequisite for successful implementation (Thomas 1995: 113). Benefits also arise from incorporating multiple perspectives (Denhardt and Baker 2007). By regularly contacting decision-makers and expressing their viewpoint, active citizens can personally try to convince the key actors. Political persuasion thus works in both directions (Irvin and Stansbury 2004).

Citizen participation may also help break gridlocks in the political process, particularly when political discourse has ground to a halt. By means of workshops, consultations and initiatives, citizens' opinions can help council members (politicians) compromise and find solutions (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). Furthermore, some authors argue that citizen participation can reduce litigation costs (Randolph and Bauer 1999).

Interactions between the state and its citizens (in their role as customers) can enhance customer and citizen satisfaction. For example, feedback from a citizen survey regarding the perceived administrative strengths and weaknesses of the state are important for public administration performance. Transparency about citizens' preferences influences priority setting and the allocation of state resources (Schedler and Proeller 2011: 290).

Last but not least, educational benefits should be considered. Informed and involved citizens are more capable of understanding complex situations and generating holistic solutions. Thus, the quality of political decisions and ultimately the societal benefit are enhanced. Political authorities also benefit from knowing the positions of the citizens when implementing their policies (Irvin and Stansbury 2004).

If citizen participation is such a good idea, 'why do we not see it occur more frequently?' (Moynihan 2003). Despite the above-mentioned benefits, citizen engagement also has its risks and disadvantages, which must be considered when enhancing citizen participation.

Involving citizens in the decision-making process is costly as the result mainly of transaction costs, such as information, coordination and participation costs (Kersting et al. 2008: 15). Although these costs are frequently not assessed, it is assumed that they are higher for a political decision in which citizens are involved or a popular vote is undertaken than for a decision made only in parliament and government (Irvin and Stansbury 2004: 58).

A further challenge to citizen participation is the question of representativeness. The modern understanding of democracy requires inclusive citizenship (Dahl 2005), but the pool of active participants is sometimes arbitrary and not representative (Dahl 1989: 228). As a rule, participants are not paid for their time and work. It can thus be assumed that participants are mainly citizens who are strongly affected by the decision or those living comfortably enough to have free time. Empirical studies confirm that there are inequalities on committees insofar as representation is concerned. Thus, it has been observed that 'participants speak with the accent of highly educated middle-aged male urban-dwellers' (Teorell et al. 2007). Highly complex topics may lead to less participation by lower strata of the population, which again leads to legitimacy deficits (see, for example, Linder 2005: 290). An analysis of participation in local assemblies in Switzerland yields

similar results: participants do not accurately reflect the pool of eligible voters (Ladner and Fiechter 2012).

The question of indifferent or disinterested citizens is controversial. Some authors assume that citizens would participate more if they had the opportunity to do so. However, others contend that citizens often refuse to engage in the political decision-making and implementation process. Thus, it has been suggested that citizens should only be involved in the political process when there is a certain level of public interest in the topic.

There is potential tension between empowering citizens and the goals of administrators, e.g. bureaucratic norms (Kweit and Kweit 1980), who are frequently not overly enthusiastic about such participation. The administrative decision-making process is prolonged by including more people, and administrators often argue that inclusion thus conflicts with efficiency (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1989).

Citizen engagement is time-consuming. Allowing 60 participants in a workshop or assembly to have their say for five minutes each requires a five-hour event. Conversely, at a municipal assembly only a few will actively participate with a request to speak, whereas the majority will listen, follow the argument and eventually vote (Dahl 1989: 227).

Defining the appropriate time to involve citizens is an additional challenge. At which phase of the policy cycle – i.e. at agenda setting, policy formulation, political decision, policy implementation or policy evaluation – is it appropriate to involve citizens (see, for example, Fischer et al. 2007)? Although the interest and personal engagement of citizens increase during ongoing political processes, the possibilities of participating become fewer, a phenomenon known as the so-called participation paradox (Reinert 2003: 37 et seq.). Programs that involve citizens earlier in the process tend to be considered fairer by participants (Mazmanian and Nienaber 1979). In practice, however, efforts to involve citizens often occur too late (Kersting et al. 2008) and have been criticized 'for being largely symbolic in nature' (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1989: 208).

Conclusions

Citizen participation is often expected to lead to better decisions and more efficient outcomes. Repeatedly, demands have been made for more citizen participation. The normative postulate of 'more is better', however, is questionable. In addition to the advantages of political participation in strengthening input legitimacy, this chapter has also shown its limitations, which derive primarily from its high costs and limited representativeness. Such participation may not even produce 'better' outcomes than decisions made by politicians and administrators (Deleon 2007). Furthermore, it does not directly solve problems like poverty, crime and so forth. Thus, citizen engagement should not be understood as a panacea.

Challenges to citizen participation include low levels of representativeness, high costs, inadequate timing in the policy cycle, burdens to the legislative process, and the non-binding character of many forms of participation, to name just a few (Steiner and Kaiser 2012). Thus, the political system is required to provide the right conditions for citizens to be adequately involved: by paying attention to equal inclusion of all strata of the population, by finding solutions to reduce costs (such as through new technologies), by differentiating in which phase of the policy cycle it is useful to involve citizens, and by creating the legislative prerequisites for different forms of citizen participation.

What of the future global development of democracy and citizen engagement? In closing, we set forth some theses. Fundamental changes in the social contract between the rulers and the ruled had already occurred in the West by the time that democratic systems were established.

While there is increasing acceptance in states such as China and Saudi Arabia that rulers are accountable to the people and must earn their legitimacy, it will nonetheless take time before these states become truly democratic (Mahbubani 2013). With increasing global interconnectedness and possible convergence between countries (Mahbubani 2013), it can be argued that a global civil society might arise and that the ties between the citizens of the world may be strengthened thereby (Linklater 2014), which will likely also have important consequences on the extent and form of citizen engagement at the transnational level.

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