

EMBEDDING CITIZEN SURVEYS IN EFFECTIVE LOCAL PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES

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1. Background and Research Objectives

Citizen surveys are becoming increasingly popular among local governments. To realise their full potential, it is important to understand how to maximize citizens' perception of...

... their participatory effectiveness

... local governments' responsiveness

... communicative practices

Knowledge gap: Previous research centres mainly on how local governments utilize surveys to improve service performance – the issues of effective communication, processing and presentation of survey results has only scarcely been examined

Research objectives:

- Study current practices of local governments
- Assess differences in citizens' perception of responsiveness and efficiency
- Identify obstacles to effective participation
- Establish guidelines to embed citizens surveys in effective local participation strategies

2. Method and Data

We draw insights from multiple case studies of more than twenty citizen surveys of various sizes and on various topics with over 12,000 participants in numerous municipalities (e.g. Alsfeld, Friedrichshafen, Konstanz, Marburg).



multiple case studies



20 cases (citizen surveys)



more than 12,000 participants



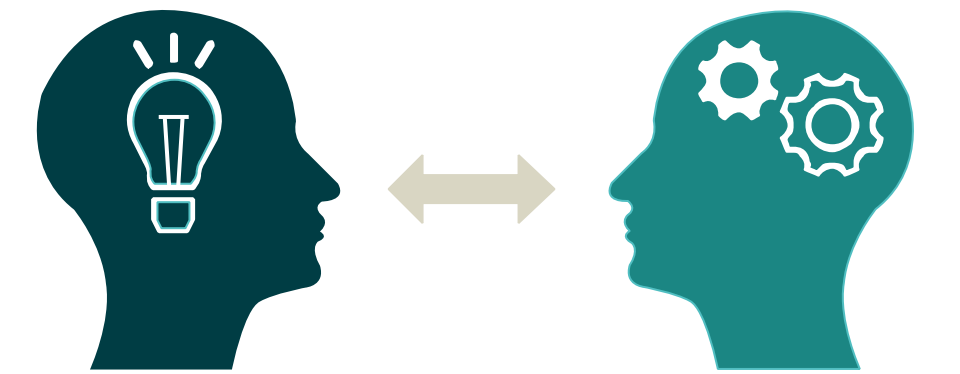
10 cities / municipalities

3. Results

Surveys are particularly well suited for initiating and fostering a culture of participation

Surveys effectively promote political awareness and participation among **citizens** beyond the survey period if there is...

- ... a clear focus / topic of interest
- ... an unambiguous scope and purpose
- ... an honest and reliable communication
- ... an unbiased evaluation, analysis and presentation of results
- ... a consideration of the survey results in the policy-making process



Following a successful survey, **local officials** often tend to utilize further surveys or other participatory procedures in other policy fields as well

surveys as a familiar mode of political participation with few opportunity costs

experience promotes a more positive attitude toward citizen participation among local officials

citizen participation as more viable and less laborious than previously expected

often leads to an increase of public involvement and government responsiveness

4. Conclusions

Local governments increasingly understand citizens surveys as part of a broader participation strategy but often pay insufficient attention to effective communication throughout the whole process

Surveys often initiate the development of a **participation culture** among both, the **citizens** as well as **local officials**

In times of coronavirus-related restrictions surveys could also represent a **viable mode of communication** between officials and citizens:

- top-down information (officials → citizens)
- bottom-up participation (citizens → officials)