



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Government Information Quarterly

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/govinf

How IT and social change facilitates public participation: A stakeholder-oriented approach

Sascha Alexander Wagner^{a,*}, Sebastian Vogt^b, Rüdiger Kabst^b

^a University of Giessen, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Department for Human Resource Management, Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and Entrepreneurship, Licher Straße 62, 35394 Gießen, Germany

^b University of Paderborn, Faculty of Business & Economics, International Business, Warburger Straße 100, 33098 Paderborn, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 December 2015

Received in revised form 23 April 2016

Accepted 18 July 2016

Available online xxxxx

Keywords:

Public participation
Public administration
Politicians
Citizens
Delphi survey
Future studies

ABSTRACT

The participation of the public in political decisions is a subject with a long history, in which public participation was subject to many development processes and has been gaining in importance particularly in the past years. The key issues therein are the influence of social developments and the increasing impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on the structures of political decision making. In this context, the identification of potential developments and the underlying incentive structures of involved stakeholder groups play a particularly important role. Therefore, in this study, we offer a comprehensive overview of potential developments in the field of public participation that are driven by ICT and social developments. We also demonstrate how differently these developments are evaluated by politics, public administration and citizens. Furthermore, we find significant differences between the evaluation by citizens and the public sector regarding the desirability of developments. Conclusions about the existence of diverse incentive structures are also drawn. We use data from three concurrently but independently conducted real-time Delphi surveys with 172 experts from the political, 168 experts from the administrative and 104 experts from the citizenry sectors as the basis of our analysis.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The origins of public participation in political decision making processes reach far back to the early beginnings of democracy in ancient Greece and have been subject to continuous change in the subsequent centuries (Breindl & Francq, 2008). Until the modern age, the idea of integrating the public into political decisions has not been lost and can nowadays be found in different forms in all constitutions of Western-oriented democracies. Due to this history, one could assume that the subject matter has already been extensively fathomed by research and offers only few unresolved research issues. However, this is not the case, as the intended application and objective of public participation have always been subject to continuous change (Fedotova, Teixeira, & Alvelos, 2012; Lourenço & Costa, 2007). Moreover, especially since the past years, the topic is having a remarkable revival due to social and technological developments (Evans-Cowley & Hollander, 2010). In this connection, it should be made clear first that “public participation” is a generic term for the multiplicity of processes and attempts at involvement, which feature a continuum of offers. Both the transparent presentation of information as the basis for a collective decision making process and precise participation offers with a specific reference to the

topic form an equal part of this continuum (Bishop & Davis, 2002; Hickey & Kipping, 1998). Social development processes exist in the form that citizens have developed an altered self-perception over the past years: They do not see themselves as persons that surrender their right to a say by the election of a representative; rather, they want to be included in decisions directly affecting themselves even in between legislative periods. Apart from formal forms of participation such as elections, citizens also demand informal, thematic possibilities for participation (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Technological developments in the field of ICT encourage this demand, since barriers to the information flow and the interaction between politics and the population are dismantled by the use of ICT: Information can be better presented and disseminated, and bigger groups can take part in concepts and decisions together (Ganapati & Reddick, 2014; Ke & Wei, 2004; Macintosh & Whyte, 2008). A great impact on political decision making processes, which are not necessarily perceived in a positive way by all affected groups, can be seen in these developments (Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martínez, & Luna-Reyes, 2012). Consequently, the question arises as to whether public participation will increase due to technological and social developments or whether it will be hampered by conflicting interests. The role of the state is subject to continuous transformations through social and technological developments, which leads to the increasingly complex governance of society. For example, the structures of the stakeholders in Western democracies are becoming increasingly smaller and diverse

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: sascha.a.wagner@wirtschaft.uni-giessen.de (S.A. Wagner), vogts@campus.uni-paderborn.de (S. Vogt), kabst@upb.de (R. Kabst).

(Willke, 1997). In addition to national institutions and parties, an active civil society that exerts an increasing influence on political and social developments has developed over the past several decades (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; King et al., 1998). According to Willke (1997), the state changes into a structure in which all members wish to be involved in the design and direction of society. The technological innovations in the sphere of information and communication technology (ICT) in particular support this development and offer new possibilities for transparent information and a more direct involvement of the population (Ganapati & Reddick, 2014; Macintosh & Whyte, 2008).

There can be considerable differences between the incentive structures of the major stakeholders with regard to public participation, which is a relevant counterargument against the increasing participation of the public in the future. The interests of individual groups can be highly contentious and have the potential to hinder future developments (Bertot et al., 2012; King et al., 1998; Vogt & Haas, 2015). For instance, citizens demand an increase in participation offers and greater codetermination, which corresponds to the previously described change in self-perception and increased self-confidence (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; King et al., 1998). However, the question arises as to how offers are accepted by the population, as acceptance and use are necessary for creating added value (Zuiderwijk, Janssen, & Dwivedi, 2015). In contrast, politicians potentially fear the loss of power and influence through greater public participation (Bertot et al., 2012; Picazo-Vela et al., 2012), which could lead to a defensive reaction toward greater public participation. Public administration professionals could, in turn, become skeptical about additional participation offers, as they can also involve additional effort or a loss of influence (Vogt & Haas, 2015). Hence, an investigation of the future of public participation in political decision making must consider these three groups and their incentive structures. A comparative study can provide evidence for the assumed asymmetrical incentive structures and the resulting hostility toward innovations of the public sector.

Therefore, with this study, we address three questions: First, which ICT-driven developments will facilitate and accelerate public participation in the future? Second, what is the probability of such occurrences, and what are their consequences for politics and the desirability of these developments as assessed from the perspectives of policy-makers, public administration professionals and citizens? Third, are there any significant differences in the assessment, and can they provide information on the existence of hostility toward innovations of the public sector with regard to public participation? Previous research on these questions focused on the isolated examination of single stakeholder groups, such as public administration professionals (Vogt & Haas, 2015) or citizens (Walther, Vogt, & Kabst, 2016). In our study, we compare the data generated by three real-time Delphi (RT-Delphi) surveys, each of which addresses one of the major stakeholder groups, namely policy-makers, public administration professionals and citizens. All three RT-Delphi surveys were conducted concurrently but independently with the respective expert group between the middle of June and the middle of August 2012. This dataset enables us to conduct an accurate analysis of the differences between the stakeholder groups.

The remainder of our paper is structured as follows: First, we derive the Delphi projections through four phases of a development process. Second, we describe our research methodology, including a presentation of the Delphi technique, a description of the discussion samples and the procedure for the data analysis. This will be followed by a presentation of the results and a discussion of the implications of our research. In the final section, we provide an overview of the central results of our work, examine its limitations and offer suggestions for future research.

2. Projection development

The future projections used in the three RT-Delphi studies were established in four consecutive phases in the first half of the year 2012

and then refined up to the final form. As demanded in the specialist literature, different sources were included in this process (Gausemeier, Fink, & Schlake, 1995). In the first step, an internal workshop was conducted with the three members of the research team and two more academics with relevant knowledge from the fields of politics and participation research. In order to structure the problem area and to name potential future developments, a brainstorming session served as the starting point of the workshop. The goal of the workshop was to roughly predefine the search direction for the subsequent literature analysis. The aspects and developments identified during the workshop served as an orientation, and did not present fixed limitations to preset areas. Hence, relevant aspects that had not been mentioned during the workshop could be added in the next step.

Based on this internal workshop, an explorative literature analysis was conducted by the research team. The initial focus of the literature analysis was on identifying and evaluating relevant research contributions. Electronic databases and libraries were extensively searched for relevant contributions, and magazine articles, conference papers as well as articles from scholarly reference books were consulted for the analysis. The thematic reference to the themes ICT and public participation served as selection criteria for relevant literary sources. In order to ensure the highest degree of generalization and transferability of the final results even beyond Germany, international literature was taken into account within the analysis. Thus, thematically related literature from the US, UK, New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria was included in the investigation. Within the analytic procedure, each identified literary source that potentially came into consideration for deducing the projections was investigated and rated by the three members of the research team independently and according to standardized methodological parameters. The identification of relevant sources was performed in a highly standardized manner and with methodological rigor. The high degree of standardization with regard to rating literary sources serves to ensure the reliability and validity of the selected contents (Von der Gracht & Darkow, 2010). Preliminary assumptions about the future of public participation in political decision making processes were developed as a result of the literature analysis.

The future projections generated by the literature research were, in a third step, evaluated and enhanced in an external workshop with experts from academia, politics, administration and municipal IT service providers. The afore-established future projections were handed to the experts prior to the workshop, with the request to assess their completeness, plausibility and relevance. In the course of the workshop, these assessments were retrieved and the holding of the future projections was discussed elaborately. The workshop took place on 11 May 2012 at the Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. Apart from the three academics from the team of authors, two more academics from the research fields of political and participation research took part in the workshop. The academic expertise within the workshop was, moreover, complemented by two further academics with extensive experience in the conception and implementation of Delphi surveys. The political sector was represented by two experienced policy-makers who work as consultants in the fields of e-government and public participation for municipalities. Due to their consultancy work, these two people have an overview of established procedures for public participation and can give clues about the discussed future projections. The administration level was typified by two more participants from municipal administrations, who occupied positions in the sphere of public participation and thus had expert knowledge in the practical planning and implementation of public participations. The workshop was complemented by two further representatives of a municipal IT service provider, who brought in their high expertise in the use of ICT in the municipal sector. As a result of the workshop, the final 10 subject areas or rather focal points were determined and pre-formulated as future projections.

In a fourth step, the projections formulated within the workshop were finally revised by the team of authors and optimized with regard to the complexity of the language and number of words used. During

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5110638>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5110638>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)