

Summary of Interviews with Local Policy- and Decision Makers of Selected Municipalities in the Alpine Area

This summary of interviews intends to provide a portrait of the second stage of the data collection by outlining the underlying methodology while also reporting, in form of comparative general statements, parts of the results of the latter.

Methodology:

The second stage of the data collection was based on **semi-structured telephone interviews** that have been conducted over the course of one month from April to May 2017. These were conducted in order to provide empirical evidence enhancing the understanding of the impact of democratic innovation on policy-making procedures. This stage of the data collection targeted municipalities that had well-functioning and innovative experiences of participatory democracy, in order to achieve the interviews' aim of identifying institutional, administrative and political practices that are conducive to participatory democracy.

The **interviewees** were selected based on the advice of the regional and state representatives who filled out the **questionnaires** for the respective Region/Canton/Land or State during the first stage of the data collection. As a result, a list of 41 particularly active municipalities was established, also based on further advice from regional administrators in order to fill regional gaps. Of the contacted municipalities, 31 responded positively and within the required time frame readily agreeing to take part in the interviews (listed in Table 1). Unfortunately, some qualifying municipalities declined due to time restraint. Consequently, it was impossible to conduct interviews in Liechtenstein.

As for the **background of the interviewees**, a balance of 16 politicians (mayors, deputy mayors, other heads of city administrations and city council members) and 18 administrators (general officers as well as the heads and associates of participation, youth, communication or urban planning departments) was achieved. In some of the interviews, more than one interviewee took part. In order to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, Table 1 only lists their general role.

Of the 31 interviewees, only **8** were **women**. This fact could be explained considering that many of the interviewees were city mayors or generally politicians, a position that is still overwhelmingly occupied by men.

Due to the linguistic diversity and the regional peculiarities of the Members States of the Alpine Space, the conduction of the interviews was divided between four of the project partners. Besides Eurac Research, the Slovenian interviews were delegated to the Municipality of Idrija and the interviews that required proficiency in the French language were delegated to ALPARC and Parc de Bauges. In order to ensure the comparability of the results, the work package leaders at Eurac Research developed **detailed guidelines** for the semi-structured telephone interviews. Their main goals were to:

- collect definitions and notions of “participatory democracy” and of the “interaction between institutions and citizens”

- collect accounts of deliberative processes, their implementation and the assessment of these processes
- evaluate the state of citizen participation in municipal matters and beyond, evaluate the general potential of citizen participation and how to improve the ‘participation infrastructure’

The approximate time frame for each interviews was set to one hour. The interview guidelines provided a working definition of participatory democracy to be discussed with the interviewees and eight questions with several sub-questions. The guidelines were send to the selected administrator or local representative beforehand in order for them to be able to prepare, if so desired.

The working definition that the interviewees were asked to critically reflect upon, and to further specify whether it applied to their municipality or which points less so reads:

„Participatory Democracy rests on consensus-driven ideation and decision-making with an emphasis on citizens’ involvement in the process. This kind of democracy revolves around dialogue and exchange between political institutions, administration and civil society. The objective is to explore the pros and cons regarding a subject in a policy field or regarding a general guiding question. If and in how far the citizens’ ideas will be implement remains the responsibility of the elected politicians and the administration.“

Following eight questions and sub-questions were laid out in the interview guidelines:

- 1) Which processes have already taken place in your municipality?
 - Have these been documented?
- 2) Why did your municipality choose to implement these processes?
 - Who initiated them? Why?
- 3) Think about one participatory process that took place in your municipality in particular.
 - Which aspect would you definitely repeat?
 - What would you change for the next time, to make it (even) more successful?
 - Would you choose to have a participatory process again in order to address the challenges of this particular policy field?
- 3.1) Have you had similar experiences in other participatory processes?
- 4) How would you evaluate the cooperation between process participants and decision-makers?
 - (How) Have the results been implemented?
- 5) How did the public react to and get involved in these processes?
 - Has one certain group dominated the processes?
- 6) Do you also have experience with participatory processes that target young adults (14-25)?

If yes: Which are these?

 - Which aspect do you remember particularly positively?
 - Which aspects, in your opinion, can be improved?

If no: Would such processes be a suitable opportunity to better involve young adults in decision-making processes? Why?

- Does your municipality have the necessary infrastructure for processes that target adolescents and young adults specifically?

7) How would you evaluate the status quo of citizen participation/participatory democracy in your Region/Canton)?

- In preparation of the processes, could you address your questions and concerns to government institutions or other institutions in your region?
- Are there special incentives for such processes?
- Are possibilities of participatory processes generally well or not so well received by municipalities and citizens?
- Do municipalities exchange experiences among each other?
- Are there more participatory processes today than there have been 10 years ago?

8) Do you think that participatory democracy has the potential to become a fixed component of the culture of democratic participation in your region?

In the next step of the data analysis, the results of each interview were then clustered in standardised answer tables for the purpose of facilitating the comparative data analysis and to reveal patterns, trend and commonalities among the interviewed municipalities.

Table 1: Interviews (municipal level, cities and towns)

Country	Municipality	State/Canton/Region	Population	Interviewee	Duration of the Interview
Austria	Moosburg http://www.moosburg.gv.at	Carinthia	4567	Politician	50:50 min
	Wolkersdorf http://www.wolkersdorft.at	Lower Austria	7192	Politician	36:09 min
	Munderfing http://www.munderfing.at	Upper Austria	3031	Politician & Administrator	56:06 min
	Leogang http://www.leogang.at/	Salzburg	3252	Politician	33:27 min
	Wies https://www.wies.at/	Styria	4511	Politician	37:06 min
	Steinberg am Rofan http://www.steinberg.tirol.gv.at/	Tyrol	ca. 300	Politician & Administrator	33:00 min
	Zell am Ziller http://www.gemeinde-zell.at/	Tyrol	1884	Politician	59:45 min
	Dornbirn https://www.dornbirn.at/home/	Vorarlberg	48 152	Administrator	54:58 min
	Hohenweiler http://www.hohenweiler.at/	Vorarlberg	ca. 1250	Politician	1:05:12 h
	Wien https://www.wien.gv.at/politik-verwaltung/	Vienna	ca. 1 840 000	Administrator	1:15:59 h

Switzerland	Teufen https://www.teufen.ch/xml_1/internet/de/intro.cfm	Appenzell Ausserrhoden	6205	Politician	56:22 min
	Herisau http://www.herisau.ch/de/	Appenzell Ausserrhoden	15 777	Administrator	1:20:52 h
	Bern http://www.bern.ch/	Bern	140 567	Administrator	1:12:59 h
	Köniz https://www.koeniz.ch/politik/politik.page/785	Bern	41 706	Administrator	55:22 min
	Ville de la Chaux-de-Fonds http://www.chaux-de-fonds.ch/	Neuchâtel	38 955	Administrator	55:31 min
	Altdorf http://www.altdorf.ch/de/	Uri	ca. 9000	Politician	59:33 min
	Lausanne http://www.lausanne.ch/de/	Vaud	ca. 135 000	Administrator	1:04:41 h
	Gland http://www.gland.ch/accueil.html	Vaud	12 788	Administrator	57:41 min
France	Ville d'Échirolles http://www.echirolles.fr/participation-citoyenne	Rhône-Alpes	35 875	Administrator	36:31 min
	Ville de Mouans-Sartoux http://www.mouans-sartoux.net/	Provence-Alpes- Côte d'Azur	ca 10 300	Politician	30 min
Germany	Heidelberg http://www.heidelberg.de/hd_Lde/HD/Rathaus/Buergerbeteiligung.html	Baden- Württemberg	ca. 150 000	Administrator	41:08 min
	Filderstadt http://www.filderstadt.de/Lde/start/alltag/Netzwerk_Portal.html	Baden- Württemberg	45 777	Administrator	58:21 min
	Erlangen https://www.erlangen.de/desktopdefault.aspx	Bavaria	ca 112 000	Administrator	56:13 min
	Weyarn http://www.weyarn.de/aktiv.htm	Bavaria	3703	Politician	54:56 min
Italy	Celle Ligure http://www.comune.celle.sv.it/	Liguria	5237	Politician	21:58 min
	Municipio 1, Centro Est del Comuni di Genova http://www.comune.genova.it/amministrazione-condivisa	Liguria	89 370	Politician	56:03 min
	Trento http://www.comune.trento.it/Aree-tematiche/Beni-comuni	Autonomous Province of Trentino	ca. 117 000	Administrator	1:00:27 h

	Mals/Malles http://www.gemeinde.mals.bz.it/system/web/default.aspx?sprache=2	Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen-South Tyrol	5088	Administrator	52:41 min
	Ponte nelle Alpi http://www.comune.pontenellealpi.bl.it/xhtml/	Veneto	8363	Politician	1:00:13 h
Slovenia	Maribor http://www.maribor.si/		ca. 95 500	Administrator	49:42 min
	Ajdovščina https://www.ajdovscina.si/		ca. 18 900	Administrator	38:15 min

Comparative general statements:

Hereafter, in accordance with the interviewees' assessments, a collection of very general trends with regard to the current state of art of participatory democracy in the interviewed municipalities of the Alpine Space. The following collection of statements follows a country division logic.

AUSTRIA

1. Overall Impression:

Overall, the numerous subnational and national initiatives and support for innovative processes indicate a rather developed system of participatory democracy. While at the local level everything still stands and falls with the political representatives' will to further involve the public in decision-making, many local representatives do see the potential of deliberative processes as a convenient alternative to the more polarizing citizen participation of direct democratic instruments.

2. Objectives:

Comparing the Austrian municipalities, no clear trend in the specified objectives for initiating participatory practices emerges. Objectives that fall under all five umbrella terms *political involvement, political efficiency/innovation/sustainability, political legitimation, civic education and political culture of cooperation* are mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews

3. Youth:

The vast majority of the Austrian municipalities does have experience with youth participation in one form or another. In many cases, youth participation is project-driven, however, and innovative participation targeting youth does not appear to be as developed as general participatory processes when it comes to institutionalization and continuity.

4. Challenges:

Some of the challenges that municipalities have named are financial resources for processes, mobilizing participants, initial skepticism among administrators, too high expectations among participants and unrealizable demands.

FRANCE

1. Overall Impression:

In France, participative democracy is rather developed. The interviewer noticed a vitality of initiatives and experiences. The interviewed municipalities share a long tradition of participation. Starting from the 80' with the promotion of neighbourhood and social development. A further milestone in the development of participatory democracy was the establishment of the National Commission for Public Debate, for the promotion and the organization of public discussions with representatives of the civil society during the development phase of major projects. A further important legal foundation of participatory democracy is the so-called Vaillant law of 2002 (on local democracy), which requires the creation of neighborhood councils in cities with more than 80,000 inhabitants.

2. Objectives:

- Prioritize the involvement of all interested citizens, possibly extending the possibility of participation to those segments of the population that are otherwise not actively involved.
- Create incentives for young people to stay or to come back to rural municipalities.

3. Youth:

The interviewed municipalities had experience especially with traditional forms and methods of youth participation.

4. Challenges:

- Lack of time and resources.
- The extension of the participation beyond already active citizens proves to be particularly challenging.

GERMANY

1. Overall Impression:

According to the interviewees, there is a wide variety of both public and private networks in Germany that they can rely on for exchange and expertise about innovative forms of citizen participation. With regard to the institutionalized support of citizen participation beyond the representative system at the local level, the interviewees indicate differences between the two states at hand. Baden Württemberg seems to have increased the institutionalization of deliberative participation, whereas Bavaria has traditionally focused more on direct democratic instruments.

2. Objectives:

Comparing the German municipalities, no clear trend in the specified objectives for initiating participatory practices emerges. Objectives that fall under all five umbrella terms *political involvement, political efficiency/innovation/sustainability, political legitimation, civic education and political culture of cooperation* are mentioned repeatedly throughout the interviews.

3. Youth:

All municipalities have indicated extensive experience with the involvement of youth in political decision-making processes, both through innovative as well as more classical methods.

4. Challenges:

All four interviewees have encountered very different challenges. They most commonly named challenge is that of how to reach and mobilize certain groups of the society. Other challenges they named are support among the administration, or the lack of expertise back when some municipalities started to implement participatory democracy.

ITALY

1. Overall Impression:

The conducted interviews show that participatory democracy is mostly a work in progress in the Italian context. Participatory democracy seems to have developed unevenly. Indeed, while some municipalities have advanced experience with participatory democracy in different policy fields, other struggle for the introduction of their first participatory processes. Moreover, the concept of “shared administration” seems to fall under the scope of participatory democracy. Accordingly, different forms of cooperation between citizens and local representatives develop with regard to the shared administration of common public goods. In conclusion, the interviewed municipalities confirmed the current lack of a “participatory” culture.

2. Objectives:

- To overcome the crisis of representative democracy, which could not be simply solved through instruments of direct democracy.
- To improve the communication and understanding between the administration, the politicians, and the citizen closer.
- To increase the consensus and legitimacy, and thus the acceptability of public decisions.

3. Youth:

The interviewed municipalities had experience with traditional and innovative forms of youth participation. Generally, the inclusion of young adults in decision-making processes is perceived as a necessity in most of the interviewed municipalities.

The tendency is to involve young people in the elaboration of projects or of policies directly affecting them. The use of social media seems to be an absolute must.

4. Challenges:

- Each municipality needs to take it upon itself to introduce a participatory process, as there is a lack of national or regional incentives.
 - Lack of financial and time resources and of professional support.
- With regard to youth participation:**
- To reach the stakeholders of the participation (effectively only through their networks and social media).
 - To keep up with the quickly changing needs and interests of young adults.

SLOVENIA

1. Overall Impression:

The state of development of participatory democracy varies among municipalities. Although the national legislation requires and guarantees the basic level of citizens’ consultation, the methods and intensity of participatory processes depend level of engagement of the municipal administration and the politicians. At national level, legislative proposals and other acts are subjected to public consultation through forms of e-democracy. Participatory democracy is a very relevant and often discussed topic. There is a common perception that the public participation should be improved. Experiences of participatory democracy are generally positive, but also depend on how an individual process is structured and implemented.

2. Objectives:

The conducted interviews lead to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, the will to initiate participatory processes, especially with regard to youth policies, came either from young adults themselves or from the administration of the concerned municipality. On the other, one of the most important reasons to initiate participatory processes was people’s dissatisfaction with local

authorities, the severe economic crisis and the lack of transparency, which concretized in mass protests in some Slovenian cities.

3. Youth:

The interviewed Slovenian municipalities showed to have a great deal of experience with youth participation. This is mostly due to the active involvement of youth organizations who collaborated with the respective municipality. A singular experience regards the cooperation between young adults (especially through the youth council) and the municipality for the joint elaboration and implementation of youth policies.

4. Challenges:

- Lack of clarity with regard to the rules of participation (with regard to the time line and the extent of the possibilities of participation).
- Difficulty to extend the breadth of participation beyond already active citizens.
- Lack of time resources and expertise of the concerned local representatives. The Slovenian interviewees expressed the need of specific training on participatory democracy.

SWITZERLAND

1. Overall Impression:

Aside from experiments of democratic innovation, especially in the policy fields of urban planning and urban regeneration, the conducted interviews do not leave the impression that participatory democracy plays a fundamental role in the Swiss democratic system. Conversely, instruments and methods of direct democracy are particularly widespread and effective; this is also due to the Swiss legal background. In conclusion, despite the level of citizen participation is very high, there is still some room left for the development of new and innovative forms of participation, especially those bridging the gap between direct democracy and citizen participation.

2. Objectives:

- To involve concerned citizens as early as possible, promoting the early recognition of obstacles.
- To increase transparency, acceptance and the legitimacy of decisions.
- To find consensual solutions for conflict situations.
- To enrich public projects and include new ideas.

3. Youth:

Only few municipalities in the French part of Switzerland had considerable experience with innovative forms of youth participation (own budgets, autonomy). Many municipalities adopted general processes of participation in which also children and young adults participated.

4. Challenges:

- Lack of regional/national incentives for the implementation of participatory processes.
- Lack of financial and time resources and of professional support, specifically in the youth services and in smaller municipalities in general.