Bas Denters

Chapter 3: Participation and Democratic Accountability: Making a Difference for the Citizens

with the assistance of Daniel Klimovsky and based on contributions by Giulio Citroni, Colin Copus, Jochen Franzke, Jana Gasparikova, Miro Hacek, Angel Iglesias, Michael Illner, Maija Karjalainen, Norbert Kersting, Daniel Klimovsky, Jelizaveta Krenjova, Andreas Ladner, Anders Lidström, Poul Erik Mouritzen, Lawrence E. Rose, Theodore N. Tsekos Angelika Vetter, Eran Vigoda-Gadot

3.1 Introduction

These are troubled times for democracy. Even though still hardly anyone challenges the desirability of democratic governance as such, enthusiasm for the democratic creed appears to be waning. There is widespread disenchantment with contemporary democratic practices. The representative democratic systems that are prevalent in most European nations are being challenged. Previously strong links – via mass-parties and popular elections -- between political representatives and the represented have been weakened by declining party membership, 'Parteiverdrossenheit' and ever lower turnout rates in elections.

Since the late Robert Dahl now more than 50 years ago wrote his thought-provoking article *The City in the Future of Democracy* (Dahl 1967), the local tier of governments has been widely considered a cornerstone of the democratic edifice. Its proximity to citizens would provide an effective antidote to a growing sense of political alienation and powerlessness amongst citizens and would allow for direct, more meaningful forms of participation of citizens in public affairs. It is no surprise that over the past decades all over Europe, cities, towns and villages became the locus of reforms aimed at revitalizing local democracy.

Evidence-base for the lessons and advice

In the remainder of this chapter, we will zoom in on the experiences with specific democratic reforms across European countries and cities. In Table

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4 you will find an overview of the empirical basis for the lessons and recommendations formulated in the various sections of this chapter. On the basis of this, we will formulate lessons and recommendations that are relevant for the formulation of a more concrete local democratic reform agenda.

We do so in modesty, because systematic, comparative research on the effects of democratic reforms is mostly limited to case studies that often defy easy generalization. Because, in the context of our research, we had to rely on previously conducted research by the project partners, there is also an inevitable bias in the reforms covered in this contribution. For this reason, we ignore important local democratic innovations, like local referendums and initiatives and the new modes of digital democracy.

Moreover, we also need to be modest because our research primarily covers local democratic reforms that are initiated by higher tiers of government, and especially by central government through national legislation or national policies. But of course, there is also a multitude of locally initiated reforms. These locally initiated projects have only occasionally attracted scholarly attention, and therefore the experiences from such reforms are grossly underrepresented in this chapter. Notwithstanding these limitations, our research learns important lessons.

≡ Table 4: Overview of the evidence-base for lessons and advice formulated in chapter 3

Section	Countries (additional references)
3.2	Denmark, Netherlands, Norway Switzerland
3.3	Norway, Sweden; Denmark Iceland; Finland; Netherlands), UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal; France; Belgium; Greece; Italy, Germany; Switzerland; Austria; Latvia; Estonia; Czech Republic; Lithuania; Poland; Hungary; Slovakia; Slovenia; Croatia; Bulgaria; Romania (Vetter et al. 2016) Czech Republic, England, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden (Copus et al. 2016)
3.4	Spain, Slovakia, Estonia, Germany (Kersting et al. 2016) Finland (Karjalainen 2015)
3.5	Israel, Norway, Italy and Hungary, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Croatia, Poland and Turkey
3.6	Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Sweden (Denters/Klok 2013) the Netherlands (Denters 2016b)
3.7	the Netherlands (Denters 2016b)
3.8	the Netherlands (Denters 2016a; based on similar approach developed in UK and USA)

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A final limitation of our research pertains to the evaluation of the reforms. How successful were efforts to reform local governments? The success of democratic reforms might be defined in a number of ways. One conception of success is the politico-administrative success of a policy: is a reform proposal politically accepted and has it actually been implemented? Here, success pertains to the results of the politico-administrative process. Most of our studies focus on the success of reforms in this limited sense. Far less is known about another, admittedly more interesting conception of success: the actual impact of reforms on the quality of local democracy. Unfortunately, evaluations of the results of reform policies in these terms are rare and this chapter will only occasionally discuss the actual impact of implemented reforms.

3.2 Citizens' views

Do citizens appreciate such efforts at democratic reforms? Do they value representative democracy and more extensive opportunities to participate in politics relative to other values, like effectiveness and efficiency? Surprisingly little is known about this. Of course, we know, for example from the Eurobarometer or the World Values Study, to what extent citizens in different European countries consider it important that people get a greater say in important government decisions. But the endorsement of this democratic value is rather general. First, it does not tell us through which channels citizens would like to make themselves heard. Second, the statement refers to 'government' in general and is not specific about the level of government. So it does not tell us how important citizens think it is to have a greater say in important *local government* decisions.

Research in Switzerland, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands sheds some light on such questions. In this research, citizens were asked about their appreciation of different components of what might be considered *good local governance* (Denters et al. 2016). These questions related to both effectiveness/efficiency and to democracy and participation. The research also asked how satisfied citizens were about both these aspects of the quality of local governance. Of course, the four countries in which this research was conducted are small, prosperous states in Northern Europe, but the research findings there also have implications outside this specific context.

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This research indicates that in all these four countries, a Singaporean conception of good (local) governance – dominated by the values of effectiveness and efficiency – is not widely endorsed. Effectiveness and efficiency are important, but not all important! The dominant political culture in these countries combines functional and democratic values. This research also found that citizens in these four countries value both elements of representative democracy and participatory democracy.

The aforementioned research also indicates that both across and within countries, there are important differences of emphasis. Depending on different national and local traditions, effectiveness and efficiency may be considered more important in some places than in others. And likewise, in some countries or localities, citizens may differ in their appreciation of representative and participatory democracy. But such important differentiations should not distract from the fact that local governments in all four countries have to be 'jacks of all trades': they have to meet citizens' demands for effective policies and cheap, high-quality services and facilities, but at that same time they have to provide a well-functioning, responsive, representative democratic system with adequate opportunities for direct citizen involvement. It is therefore no wonder that in the light of all these different demands, despite reasonable satisfaction with the functional and the democratic performance of local governments, there is plenty of room for improvement.

Lesson 3.2.1: Effectiveness and efficiency are considered important for good local governance, but citizens also value democratic elements highly.

Lesson 3.2.2: Effectiveness, efficiency and democracy are valued differently by citizens depending on national and local traditions.

Lesson 3.2.3: Local governments have to meet citizens' demands for effective and efficient service delivery as well as for democratic participation and direct involvement. There is room for improvement to avoid trade-offs.

Advice 3.2.1: Be aware that European peoples appreciate balanced reform packages. Effectiveness and efficiency are top of citizens' priority lists, but this by no means implies that democracy and participation can be ignored. Reforms aimed at improving effectiveness and efficiency should be combined with better representation and more opportunities for meaningful direct citizen involvement in local governance.

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Advice 3.2.2: Take into account that different segments of the public may have different expectations concerning the content of reforms. Citizens in some municipalities may ask for more meaningful channels for citizen participation, whereas, in other places, there may be a demand for more openness, transparency and responsiveness from councillors. Adapt reforms to national, regional, and local differences according to the weight the public attaches to different aspects of the democratic quality of governance.

Advice 3.2.3: Use multifaceted instruments to monitor how *your own* citizens' evaluate the quality of *their* local governance. These instruments should combine aspects of functional performance, democratic representation and responsiveness, and satisfaction with the availability and effectiveness of opportunities for citizen participation.

Advice 3.2.4: Avoid conceit and self-congratulation. Even if your municipality does well in many or most respects, there is always plenty of room for improving the quality of local governance (effectiveness and/or efficiency and/or quality of democracy). Therefore – using the result of a differentiated monitoring instrument (previous recommendation) – decide which reforms can improve the quality of governance in *your* municipality.

Advice 3.2.5: Adapt your reform strategy to local needs and demands. There is no single 'best way' to improve local governance. Hence, avoid copying and pasting fashionable 'best-practices' from elsewhere. Democratic reform strategies should be adapted to local variations in political traditions and dominant political values and if possible should also be sensitive to the needs and demands of local minorities.

3.3 Changing the rules of the game: access to information, directly elected mayors, and referendums ■

Many European democracies are confronted with problems of legitimacy: declining trust in political institutions, increasing levels of political alienation and powerlessness, declining voter turnout, rising votes for extremist parties, and rising protests. This challenge to democracy is not only a result of the recent financial crisis and the current wave of migration to Europe. It is also related to more long-term trends, like transnationalization and the growing complexity of governance. These processes tend to reduce individual citizens' chances of effectively influencing political decisions at the same time as emancipated citizens are demanding a greater say. The coincidence of decreasing opportunities and increasing demands for effective participation give rise to widespread feelings of political powerlessness and dissatisfaction.

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These challenges have incited a call for democratic reforms, particularly at the local level of governance, where the contact between government and the governed is closest and where it may be easiest to implement reforms. A widening of the range of opportunities for citizens' influence on local decision-making might compensate for a loss of influence at higher levels of government. In recent decades, many countries have made efforts to increase the transparency of local government and open up additional channels for citizens' influence on local decisions. In our research, we have focused on three such reforms: a) implementing the right of free access to information, b) allowing the direct election of mayors, and c) introducing the possibility of binding local referenda for citizens to directly control local decision-making by expressing their opinions apart from in local council elections (Vetter et al. 2016). On the basis of an expert survey conducted in all member states of the EU with a population of more than one million, plus Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, we have charted patterns of local government reforms in these three domains in the period from 1990 to 2014. To what extent were such reforms implemented in various countries? As for the introduction of elected mayors, a more detailed analysis in five countries (England, Spain, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden) is provided in a second study (Copus et al 2016).

Lessons and Policy Advice

Our results indicate that there is an overall trend in European local government towards giving citizens more information and more say in local policymaking. However, change is not a universal phenomenon and the degree of change is different across countries. There are clear politico-geographical patterns observable, reflecting common political traditions, shared historical events or socio-economic conditions. Changes are most distinctive in many post-communist countries. Only in two 'Western' local government systems is change quite obvious: Germany and the UK. On the other hand, in most Northern (with the exception of Iceland and Belgium) and Southern European countries (with the exception of Greece and France) changes were less radical. Most of these changes were made in the domain of free access to information. With regard to the more far-reaching reforms, like the introduction of directly elected mayors and, even more so, the implementation of binding referenda, there is more reluctance. This reluctance reflects two types of uncertainty. First of all, there is uncertainty about the acceptance of reform proposals. At least in some countries, these democratic reforms would have led to major

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changes in the division of local power and many times such changes would also have required constitutional change. Second, especially for more drastic reforms, there is also uncertainty about the effects of reforms. Free access to information – as a modest reform – probably involves a lesser degree of uncertainty and is therefore more likely to be implemented. The evidence from England, Spain, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Sweden shows that the (possible) introduction of directly elected mayors meets with considerable resistance. This resistance is nourished by the fear that a directly elected mayor will radically change existing power relations in local politics. It might pose threats to the domination of local politics by traditional, national political parties and the power of councils and councillors. It may take political crises (like in Germany and Italy) to overcome such institutional resistance (Copus et al. 2016).

Lesson 3.3.1: There is an overall trend in European local government towards giving citizens more information and more say in local policymaking with most significant changes in the post-communist countries and less radical changes in the Northern and Southern European countries (with some exceptions).

Lesson 3.3.2: Most changes are related to the free access to information, whereas far-reaching reforms (e.g. the introduction of directly elected mayors, binding referenda) are less frequent, because of the uncertainty about the acceptance of respective reform proposals and the reform effects.

Lesson 3.3.3: In some countries, the resistance vis-à-vis the introduction of directly elected mayors is nourished by the fear that a directly elected mayor will radically change existing power relations in local politics, e.g. question national political parties' domination of local politics.

Advice 3.3.1: Consider to what extent major institutional democratic reforms are likely to be blocked by constitutional provisions that are hard to change and institutional forces that are difficult to overcome. Where such institutional barriers are likely to occur, it may be more effective to aim at modest piecemeal reforms that do not require constitutional change, and are therefore more likely to be implemented, than more radical reforms that are unlikely to be accepted by the required absolute majorities.

Advice 3.3.2: Recognize the implications of our limited knowledge about the effectiveness of democratic reforms and do not expect fast changes in political legitimacy. Refrain from raising unwarranted high hopes regarding such reforms.

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Advice 3.3.3: Because of the as yet unknown effects of democratic reforms, modest piecemeal reforms in a few localities may be a more promising reform strategy than 'Great Leaps Forward'.

Advice 3.3.4: Consider the experiences with such a reform in countries/municipalities where they were previously implemented, especially if these previous adopters of reforms are rather similar (in political traditions, shared history, or socio-economic conditions; cf. lesson 1) to your own jurisdiction. This will allow you to get a better a priori understanding of the possible understanding of the consequences of reforms.

Advice 3.3.5: Consider new democratic reforms in the domain of free-access-to-information and transparency reforms. Because of new digital technologies and the 'big data' revolution, standards of transparency and free access may have to be redefined and new tools to meet these standards will have to be designed and implemented. Moreover, historical evidence demonstrates that in this relatively uncontested domain it appears to be easy to implement democratic reforms (quick wins).

3.4 Participatory reforms

The use of participatory innovations has expanded vastly around the world. These new channels for participation have become popular as add-ons to established channels – like hearings and interactive governance – through which citizens can make themselves heard in between elections. These innovations – such as deliberative mini-publics, participatory budgeting and direct legislation – are typically introduced as local initiatives. Systematic research into the adoption and the impact of such local reforms is rare. Proponents of participatory reforms claim that these reforms can strengthen democracy in different ways. So far, empirical studies have focused on how many people participate through these new channels and on the representativeness of participation. But what is the effect of the availability of participatory innovations on citizens' actual influence over political decisions and on their evaluations of government?

A comparative analysis of case studies from Spain, Slovakia, Estonia, and Germany shows that so-called deliberative modes of democratic governance do not always practice what is being preached. New modes of online participation are often nothing more than electronic suggestion boxes and 'participatory budgeting' does not always offer genuine channels for deliberation, resulting in binding decisions and community development (Kersting et al. 2016).

In an interesting Finnish study, the effects of participation on citizens' views was scrutinized. The data for this study consist of 9,603 individuals

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in a representative sample of Finnish municipalities (N=34). Multilevel regression modelling was used to analyse the effect of the availability of eight different types of participatory innovations – such as participatory planning events and citizen juries – on dependent variables. In answering this question two components of perceived legitimacy were considered: procedural fairness and outcome satisfaction.

Lessons and Policy Advice

Although this research was limited to a single country, its findings nicely fit into more general and theoretically plausible patterns of findings about the impact of participation on active citizens. On this basis, we have formulated two lessons and a number of recommendations:

Lesson 3.4.1: Research indicates that the mere number of participatory innovations does not increase perceived legitimacy, but deliberative innovations in particular seem to do so.

Lesson 3.4.2: The effect is, however, moderated by how aware citizens are of local decision-making and their opportunities to influence decisions.

Advice 3.4.1: Do not consider the introduction of new participatory instruments as an easy fix. Participatory governance should not become a race for the number of instruments, even if participation has become a buzzword.

Advice 3.4.2: Certain types of participatory instruments that enable communication between the citizens and listening to opposing views do, however, have a positive effect on procedural fairness and satisfaction with policy outcomes. Therefore, perceived legitimacy might be increased in a municipality by establishing participatory innovations that are deliberative by design.

Advice 3.4.3: Make opportunities to participate widely public and transparent, even for those who do not participate.

Advice 3.4.4: Make sure that public consultation has policy impacts and make this known to the public. Failing to do this explains why citizens become even more sceptical if new participation channels are adopted. Hence, it is important not only to stage democratic reforms, but also to take the results seriously in terms of policy decisions and their implementation.

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3.5 NPM and post-NPM reforms: Securing participation and democratic accountability in the changing world of local governance

In recent decades, the nature of local politics and administration has undergone radical changes. At the turn of the millennium, the introduction of NPM reforms considerably changed the nature of local governance. In previous chapters, we have considered how these reforms have affected the effectiveness and efficiency of local governance. Here, we consider the possible side effects of such reforms on the democratic quality of local governance. NPM reforms are manifold and pertain to innovations in public management that affect both the internal and the external management of municipalities. As for internal management, the introduction of performance management is most important. Since the late 1980s, performance management has become a bon ton in central and local government research and practice. Systems of performance management not only allow public managers to steer and control administrative organization, but they also provide the information that allows for a public debate in which citizens, local organizations and elected representatives can hold the local executive to account. Therefore, performance management has the potential to contribute to the democratic accountability of local administration to citizens and their representatives. This is especially the case because citizens today are more sophisticated than ever before. They are also better informed and have much wider access to information, data, and criticism expressed in social media platforms and with virtual group dynamics. But to what extent does performance management actually exploit this potential? So far, empirical evidence has been mixed. Recent findings from research in Israel, Norway, Italy and Hungary suggest a number of lessons (see Raadschelders/Vigoda-Gadot 2015).

External management reforms are the other side of the NPM coin. Currently, many municipalities use methods such as corporatization, concessions, outsourcing and privatization to improve the quality and reduce the costs of public services. In recent years, there has been a debate on the desirability of such external management reforms. On the one hand, in some places municipalities have tried to strengthen their role in the provision and production of services. But under the influence of the financial crisis, austerity policies seem to have reversed the post-NPM dynamics (see Citroni et al. 2016). In the context of this chapter, it is interesting to know to what extent 'external' NPM and post-NPM reforms affect the participation of users and their confidence in and satisfaction with local politicians and local services. Empirical findings collected over the course

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of the COST Action LocRef for the cases of the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Croatia, Poland and Turkey provided evidence on this question.

Lessons and Policy Advice

The countries studied here provide no unequivocal evidence that either NPM or post-NPM reforms have substantially enhanced citizens' participation and user's satisfaction and trust. Providing performance information can affect public visibility and the public debate about public performance. But this possible contribution hinges upon the role of the media and the accessibility of performance management reports. Often, complex performance management system reports make it difficult for the broader environment to grasp developments in actual performance. In the same respect, municipalities have problems communicating their efforts and good deeds to their environment. Hence, we found that a low degree of information and visibility of findings in performance management systems is likely to result in inaccurate citizen evaluations of municipality performance.

During the NPM period, business-like solutions such as corporatization, concessions, asset privatizations and outsourcing were adopted. These reforms consider users chiefly as customers and not as stakeholders. In this context, attempts to privatize local utilities have paid no attention to transparency, nor to the participation of users and citizens. Both corporatization under public ownership and re-municipalization permitted, in certain cases, the establishment of forms of indirect citizen participation and control through audit and consultation bodies. During (post-NPM) re-municipalization projects – mainly for reasons of political legitimacy – a participative approach was taken. As a complement to the corporate management system, voluntary open participatory bodies were established. In practice, these procedures attracted a limited number of participants, while the overall process essentially remained invisible to the general public. In Germany, citizens' cooperatives have been implemented to enhance participation. As a component of austerity, strategies – such as the British 'Big Society' – express a participatory ambition. Here, the aim of reducing the role of the central state goes hand in hand with an effort to empower citizens and local communities. Nonetheless, as centralization continues and spending cuts remain the norm, these policies face the risk of being reduced to pure rhetoric. In countries like Greece and Turkey, but also in many Western and Eastern European countries, no fully fledged NPM-reforms have been implemented. In Southern Europe,

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efforts to strengthen citizen participation in the early eighties – e.g. by introducing 'commissions of social control' and citizens' panels – were stifled by a lack of social trust and a weak civil society. Even though there is quite extensive use of (participatory) social economy enterprises and of voluntary work in social programmes, this situation has persisted in recent years. In some Eastern European countries, by contrast, transition from a system of hyper-centralized, planned and controlled service provision to a market-oriented model created opportunities for participatory initiatives and allowed citizens to establish associations to organize the delivery of mainly social services. However, for the most part, in these countries citizens were in fact not really involved in public service provision and production.

Lesson 3.5.1: In many European countries, no full-fledged (Anglo-Saxon type) NPM reforms have been implemented.

Lesson 3.5.2: NPM-inspired concepts of privatization and outsourcing perceive users as customers and not as stakeholders, which is why less attention is paid to transparency and participation.

Lesson 3.5.3: There is no unequivocal evidence that NPM or post-NPM reforms have substantially enhanced citizens' participation, user's satisfaction or trust.

Lesson 3.5.4: Post-NPM developments, such as public corporatization and remunicipalization, have permitted new forms of indirect citizen participation and control through audit and consultation bodies. However, in practice, these procedures have attracted only a limited number of participants.

Lesson 3.5.5: In some cases, the effort to empower citizens and local communities was combined with austerity strategies, centralization and spending cuts, which entails the risk of user participation being reduced to pure rhetoric.

Lesson 3.5.6: Providing performance information to the citizens can affect the public debate and the citizens' evaluations of local performance. Yet, this requires public access to performance management reports, simplified reporting systems, and the willingness as well as capability of municipalities to communicate performance information in a reasonable way.

Advice 3.5.1: Do involve citizens as co-producers and stakeholders when jointly providing public services. Do not reduce them to a role of mere customers and make sure that their input and concerns are seriously taken into account in strategic decisions on services.

Advice 3.5.2: Provide your citizens and users with access to all information that is necessary for the evaluation of and – if applicable – co-decision-making on public services.

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Advice 3.5.3: Apply the free information policies on services not only to public (in-house) service provision, but also to NPM-related corporatization, concessions, asset privatizations and outsourcing. Use your power as a principal to ensure that quasi-public and private agencies are forced to allow participation and provide adequate information to users.

Advice 3.5.4: Present results of performance management to citizens on a regular basis, in a simplified manner, and as a basis for a public debate that includes citizens and their elected representatives. Reduce the complexity of performance management reports and make them publicly available.

Advice 3.5.5: Use local media as an interface for sharing performance information with citizens. Employ attractive forms of information dissemination in a way that is inviting, interesting and understandable. Internal learning should not be the only purpose of a performance management system.

Advice 3.5.6: Use ICT and new social media for the purpose of online monitoring, e-consultation and e-surveys in combination with meaningful channels for public participation and control to improve the quality of services, users' satisfaction and citizens' trust.

Advice 3.5.7: Be aware that instruments (citizens' panels, user councils, client cooperatives, commissions and similar bodies) that may be effective in some countries may not work in countries and regions where social and political trust are low and where civil society is weak.

Another observation connected with NPM and post-NPM reforms is the relocation of local public decision-making from town halls to collaborative governance that crosses the public-private divide, specifically in the following two cases:

– *Public-private partnerships, outsourcing and privatization*: where quasi-governmental agencies (operating at arms-length) and private companies – alone or together with municipalities – are providing local public services and management of public facilities based on contractual arrangements and subsidization.
– *Community governance*: where local government either works together with individuals, civic organizations and companies in co-productions and partnerships or facilitates forms of community or neighbourhood self-governance.

This leads to recommendations that predominantly address the role of municipal councils directly elected by the citizenry and which represent the people. In this capacity, the council and its members have a special responsibility to secure the democratic quality of systems of local governance. In general terms, we recommend you to:

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Advice 3.5.8: Put the reform of the traditional council-centred models of control and accountability (CA) on your agenda and stage experiments with new CA-regimes in the context of privatization and community governance.

Advice 3.5.9: Consider the need for a multiplicity of CA-arrangements in the light of the different functions that these will have to fulfil, and also because the importance of such functions varies per task.

Advice 3.5.10: Given the work-pressure on councillors and the increasing skills and awareness of citizens, consider empowering citizen organizations to rearrange local CA-regimes. Citizens could be involved, inter alia, in expert/user councils, as accountants, in visitations and accreditation systems.

3.6 Citizen participation in the context of amalgamation reforms: the role of Intra-Municipal Units (IMUs)

In this section, we consider the implications of territorial reforms for the democratic quality of local governance. In response to such reforms – either in the form of municipal amalgamations or through intensification of inter-municipal cooperation (see further below) – it is widely recognized that new modes of civic participation and new arrangements for securing accountability are due. In the second half of the 20th century, amalgamation reforms were typically concentrated in a number of countries in North-West Europe. But in recent years, amalgamation reforms have also been implemented in Southern Europe, e.g. in Portugal and Greece. In Germany, where many 'Länder' were also reluctant to implement amalgamation reforms, we also observe that amalgamations of local authorities at municipal and county levels have been prepared (e.g. in Thuringia and Brandenburg).

There is a heated scholarly debate on the effects of such amalgamation reforms, both in terms of their implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of governance and their impact on local democracy. With regard to its democratic effects, several studies conclude that municipal amalgamations may result in a visible decline in participation (e.g. lower voter turnout; fewer candidates for local council mandates) and the quality of political representation (e.g. reduction in local mandates per inhabitant; longer distances for councillors to contact the citizens, less-informed councillors, more influence of local bureaucracy). Other studies also point at a reverse effect: bigger municipalities may attract more competent candidates for local mandates and local elections may be more competitive.

Ultimately, amalgamation reforms require a political decision in which a choice is to be made about potentially conflicting goals. Citizen

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support for these reforms – and the legitimacy of the newly established municipalities – depends on the carefulness with which these political decisions are made. This is particularly relevant when amalgamations are imposed, and local citizens do not have the final say via a referendum. Careful preparation includes the consideration of alternatives for amalgamations in the form of inter-municipal cooperation. Of course, careful preparation of the reforms also implies the need for an active information policy and the creation of opportunities for public dialogue parallel to the parliamentary decision-making process.

Moreover, once a choice is made in favour of amalgamations, measures might be considered to compensate for a possible loss of opportunities for effective citizen participation and responsiveness. In the light of possible negative effects, several countries have tried to combine amalgamation reforms with subsidiary measures to counteract possible negative effects in terms of declining rates of political participation and citizen involvement. To this end, some German 'Länder', for example, have experimented with a special type of first-tier municipalities ('Verbandsgemeinde'), where smaller municipalities ('Ortsgemeinden') remain politically independent, but their resources are centralized in bigger municipalities (e.g. Sachsen-Anhalt). In a similar vein, in other places there have been experiments with intra-municipal decentralization.

Many European countries have implemented forms of intra-municipal decentralization. These reforms were mainly implemented to bring local government closer to its citizens. This argument was particularly important in big (urban) municipalities and in countries with large-scale amalgamations (e.g. in Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands). But how do such democratically inspired reforms impact upon the quality of local governance, especially in terms of offering meaningful channels for participation and the municipality's capacity for responding to the needs and demands of citizens?

There is only limited research on this question available, and the evidence thus far is suggestive rather than conclusive. Denters and Klok (2013) - in a recent survey amongst European academic local government experts - looked into the current state of intra-municipal units (IMUs) in 19 European countries with more than five million inhabitants.

Lessons and Policy Advice

In many countries, there are such IMUs. They typically have a rather broad range of tasks and responsibilities in two domains: 1) neighborhood and sports facilities as well as socio-cultural activities for the young and

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the elderly; 2) neighborhood physical infrastructure (buildings, greens), planning and the care for the livability, cleanliness and safety of neighborhoods. In general, the country experts in the 17 countries with IMUs rated both the democratic effects of the IMUs (e.g. in terms of their effects on the political involvement of citizens and their responsiveness to citizens' demands) and the IMUs' effects on the effectiveness and the efficiency as rather poor (with scores around 5 on a ten-point scale). A number of five country case studies suggests that results were somewhat more favorable in countries where IMUs combine:

- solid democratic legitimation (through direct elections and assembly democracy, as in English parish councils)
- a strong institutional position (in terms of multiple tasks and degree of autonomy) and
- institutional longevity.

Here, the case of English parish councils is particularly interesting because their firm historical roots and small scale allow them to function as a vehicle for community governance and active citizenship (government 'by' the people rather than 'for' the people).

Lesson 3.6.1: IMUs play an important role in many countries and they assume a significant number of local functions (e.g. sports facilities, socio-cultural activities, planning, and safety of neighborhoods).

Lesson 3.6.2: The democratic and performance effects of the IMUs are, however, rated as rather poor.

Lesson 3.6.3: Under certain conditions, the evaluation of IMUs is more favorable, especially if they combine solid democratic legitimation, a strong functional profile, and a high degree of autonomy.

Advice 3.6.1: Consider the option of introducing IMUs in amalgamated (or large) municipalities, especially in neighborhoods or settlements that have their own (historical) identity and correspond to existing social communities (rather than subdividing the jurisdiction on the basis of administrative logic and numerical criteria). In such a context, IMUs can develop into democratically meaningful and effective/efficient small-scale units in the context of large municipalities.

Advice 3.6.2: When introducing IMUs, be prepared to provide these new units with the institutional conditions for success: (a) solid democratic legitimation, (b) and a meaningful range of responsibilities.

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Advice 3.6.3: After having introduced IMUs, be prepared to accept that it may take considerable time for such institutions to take firm root and develop their own identity and prove themselves.

3.7 Participation and democratic accountability in inter-municipal cooperation (IMC)

In most European countries the democratic control and accountability of IMC is concentrated in the hands of the directly elected municipal councils. This system is flawed. First, democratically, channels for citizen control are rather indirect: citizens elect councillors; these councillors then elect and control the members of an IMC council, who in their turn hold the IMC executive to account. Second, this system is probably better geared to the protection of local autonomy than to the representation of the interests of regional citizens. Third, in the prevalent system, the position of the popularly elected municipal councillors is weak because they are typically ill-equipped to exercise effective control over IMCs. Fourth, accountability is impeded because it is unclear – in this complex multi-actor setting – who is responsible for decisions and their outcomes (problem of many hands). This is a problem from a democratic perspective. But in such a system, there are also no clear incentives for effectiveness and efficiency, because it is unclear who should be praised in case of success and who is to blame in case of failure. Finally, the system is often costly (high transaction costs) and ineffective (lack of decisiveness and deadlocks in decision-making). Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that there has been a call for new forms of democratic control and accountability on IMCs. This call becomes louder when the functional scope of IMCs broadens, and more (and politically more salient) tasks are transferred to IMCs.

Lessons and Policy Advice

Currently, there is hardly any systematic empirical evidence about which of these new mechanisms do and do not work. But nevertheless – on the basis of a growing base of literature (Denters 2016b) – we can already draw some lessons and recommendations for the design of such new IMC accountability regimes. One general lesson to be learned from IMC is that local political decisions have been increasingly relocated from traditional public decision-making to collaborative governance in multi-agency networks that go beyond traditional jurisdictional boundaries (both vertical,

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across levels of government, and horizontal, between different local governments). Against this backdrop, there is an emerging consensus on the need to experiment with and carefully evaluate new modes of participation and democratic control of IMCs, particularly where IMC affects highly salient domains and strategic regional decisions.

Lesson 3.7.1: Accountability regimes in public governance have to perform a number of important functions: (a) securing democratic legitimation and citizen control; (b) protecting against arbitrariness and abuse of power; and (c) improving effectiveness and efficiency. In the IMC context, d) the protection of local autonomy is another concern.

Lesson 3.7.2: In the light of these different functions, alternative accountability mechanisms have their specific weaknesses and strengths. A particular mechanism, e.g. the prevalent council-centred system, may be better at protecting municipal autonomy than representing the interests of the citizens in the region as a whole.

Lesson 3.7.3: The salience of these functions differs between different tasks: democratic control may not be important for refuse collection, but might be highly salient in environmental and planning policy. Moreover, for many tasks, more than one function may be important, which calls for a combination of various accountability mechanisms.

Lesson 3.7.4: In combination, these principles imply that newly emerging IMC accountability regimes are likely to constitute an ecology of arrangements, where provisions can differ across domains, and where for particular tasks different accountability mechanisms may have to be combined (e.g. to guarantee regional democratic control, municipal autonomy and effectiveness) at the same time.

Advice 3.7.1: Consider experimenting with new modes of democratic control of IMCs, particularly where IMC affects highly salient domains and strategic regional decisions. Moreover, such experiments should be carefully evaluated and the results should be shared with the local government community.

Advice 3.7.2: Consider setting up an (ad hoc) regional assembly of councillors that decides on the adoption of new arrangements for establishing democratic control. After all, these councillors, as directly elected representatives of the people councils, have the legitimation to design new forms of democratic control in the region where they operate.

Advice 3.7.3: Try to be creative in developing experiments and consider unconventional solutions. In IMCs, for example, direct participation and citizen control might allow for a better expression of the needs and demands of regional citizens. Moreover, direct democratic legitimation of such inter-municipal decisions might also help in overcoming the deadlocks in the current system of vol-

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untary cooperation with strong institutional guarantees, thus protecting local autonomy (de jure or de facto veto power for all municipalities in the region). This would also reduce the transaction costs and enhance the decisiveness of IMCs.

3.8 How to improve the use of new and existing channels ■

Since the 1960s, ever new channels for citizen participation in local politics and governance have been introduced. In addition to the right to vote in elections, citizens in most countries have a wide range of ways to engage in public affairs and to voice their opinions and demands regarding (important) government decisions and the delivery of public services: the introduction of 'access-to-information-policies', public hearings, consumer surveys and client councils, interactive governance, e-democracy, referendums and other forms of direct democracy, direct election of mayors and other executives, forms of deliberative democracy (citizen juries and forums, mini-publics), and most recently community initiatives (rights to challenge and neighbourhood rights). Many of these new channels for active citizenship are created at the local level. Most participatory politics is LOCAL politics. In terms of thinking about democratic reforms, most attention has been given to the design and implementation of new forms of participation. Much less attention has been devoted to less spectacular but perhaps even more important reforms that aim at the broader use of existing channels for participation. To develop policies and instruments that stimulate and facilitate citizen participation, it is important to know why some people participate and others don't.

Lessons and Policy Advice

There is a vast array of literature on the factors that stimulate and hamper citizens' use of participatory channels. We can conveniently summarize the factors that encourage and discourage participation in five broad categories:

– **A**mbitions: the motivation of people to become active. These motives can be either *public* and pertain to the desire to influence public decisions, the quality of life, the quality of governance etc. in one's city or neighbourhood, or *personal* (e.g. securing individual benefits, e.g. a housing permit, or the opportunity to meet people or the satisfaction gained from simply doing one's neighbourly or civic duty)

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– **C**ontacts: people's relational social capital. Inclusion in social networks is increasingly recognized as an important resource for individual and collective forms of political participation.
– **T**alents and time: pertain to the personal resources that are necessary to facilitate participation. Here 'talents' (just like in the biblical parable) stand for both monetary (and physical) capital and human capital (knowledge and skills). Finally, time is also an important and, for many people, is becoming an increasingly scarce personal resource.

These three clusters of factors pertain to characteristics of potential participants. But it is also widely recognized that participation can be stimulated or hampered by features of the politico-administrative context (see Bouckaert and Kuhlmann 2016). Here, two components can be distinguished:

– **I**nstitutions: participation may be hindered or facilitated by the formal and informal rules of the participation game. These rules not only determine the structure of available participatory opportunities, but also their accessibility, scope and potential effectiveness.
– **E**mpathy and responsiveness: in addition to the structural component (I-factor), the organizational culture in governmental organizations (both political and administrative) is important both in stimulating or hindering participation and in affecting the chances of *successful* participation.

These five factors - which can be conveniently summarized in the acronym ACTIE (Denters 2016a)[2] – provide a comprehensive and practically useful tool to help us systematically think about possible measures to promote the (effective) use of existing channels for citizen participation (and the design of new channels).

2 The ACTIE framework was initially developed in the context of the 'Citizens making their Neighborhood'- project (together with Dutch colleagues: Judith Bakker, Imrat Verhoeven and Evelien Tonkens) and builds upon previous work by Verba c.s. and Lowndes c.s. After its initial development the instrument was further refined and recently published in Denters (2016).

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Lesson 3.8.1: Five broad categories of factors can be distinguished that encourage and discourage participation, and which can be summarized in the ACTIE framework.

Lesson 3.8.2: The motivations and ambitions of people – be they public or personal ones - to become active are crucial for the process and outcome of participation.

Lesson 3.8.3: Social capital is an increasingly important resource for individual and collective forms of political participation.

Lesson 3.8.4: Personal resources are an important precondition with which to facilitate participation. Monetary and human capital, as well as time capacities as an increasingly scarce resource, are necessary factors in driving participatory processes.

Lesson 3.8.5: Formal and informal institutions may hinder or facilitate the participation game by way of structuring the participatory opportunities and determining their accessibility, scope and effectiveness.

Lesson 3.8.6: The organizational culture in governmental organizations can stimulate or hinder participation and thus influence the chances of *successful* participation.

Advice 3.8.1: In thinking about democratic reforms, do not only consider the introduction of ever more new channels for participation, but also, and perhaps even primarily, increasing the use and the effectiveness of already existing channels.

Advice 3.8.2: Use the ACTIE framework to systematically think about ways to promote and facilitate various forms of citizen participation. By carefully considering the personal motives (A-factor) and resources (C- and T-factor) of different groups of potential participants, you can develop a differentiated strategy of mobilization and facilitation that avoids the mobilization of the 'usual suspects' (prosperous, highly educated and middle-aged men) only.

Advice 3.8.3: Rethink established rules and organizational practices (I-factor) and the organizational culture in local public sector organizations (E-factor). Facilitating citizen participation is not only about enticing and helping citizens to engage in local government, but it is also about making your own organization 'citizen-friendly'.

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