



**CHANCES AND RISKS
OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION**
22 NOVEMBER 2013

WRAP UP



World peace by political participation?

The Internet is connected with promises of individual and collective empowerment. Online based tools seem to make political participation easy and attractive for everybody. For an individual, it only takes small effort to participate by signing an online petition, as it hardly takes more than one click to express one's support for a certain cause. However, many of these small efforts combined can indeed form a widespread participatory movement with actual political consequences. What can be expected from online participation, how does it effect democracy and transform social practices? In November 2013 researchers from different disciplines vividly debated the chances and risks of social participation.

PROGRAMME

MORNING SESSIONS

09:00 – 10:00 Welcome Address and Keynote

10:15 – 11:30 Workshop Sessions
Participation – Enabling or Hindering Democracy?
Making Political Participation Effective
Open Source Hardware

11:45 – 12:45 Lunch

12:45 – 14:00 Concluding Session
How much difference can technology make?



Nishant Shah questioned in his keynote the positive bias when talking about participation.

WORKSHOP SESSIONS

PARTICIPATION – ENABLING OR HINDERING DEMOCRACY?

by Lennart Ziebarth

Political participation is usually considered to be a basement of democracy, as the sovereign people legitimise their leaders through it. But can it also pose an impediment to it in a society that is more and more digitalising itself? This was to be discussed in the workshop which was moderated by Ulrike Klinger, Senior Research and Teaching Associate of the IPMZ, Zurich, with Juan Carlos de Martin, Director of the Nexa Center for Internet & Society, Torino, Martin Emmer, Director of the Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Berlin and Alexander Trechsel, Head of Department Political and Social Sciences, EUI, Florence, presenting their work on the topic.

As Juan Carlos de Martin pointed out, it is not the technology that matters, but the politics. If there is no credible political offer, people will not participate. He disclosed this by referring to the recent example of Beppe Grillo and the Five Star Movement Party (M5S) in Italy. Though taking its start online, the M5S built up momentum when combined with a charismatic personality, bringing forth the political agenda and matters of concern in a traditional electoral campaign, resulting in a surprisingly strong outcome for the party, becoming one of the strongest in the Italian parliament in its very first campaign. In the aftermath, society and established political parties started to experiment with new forms of participation and inclusion, also involving online participation. Unfortunately this also led to efforts to change the Italian constitution in order not to promote participation, but to hamper it – keeping the political system as it were.

This fits in with the findings presented by Martin Emmer, who pointed out that most institutions of today, such as insurances, states, but also mass media and the society of millions, still employ the same structures and behaviour as they did in the 19th century. An example for this would be the public administration in Germany that was taken by surprise by grass root movements such as ‘Stuttgart 21’ or ‘nolympia’, when people

started to participate and opposed public projects. Also the media is just adapting to the digitisation of society, as a dominance of online media in politics is yet to come, but an obvious trend is clearly visible. Therefore as habits in political communication change, the political system will have to change accordingly in order to meet new participatory needs.

Some of these needs can be met by voting advice applications (VAA) as presented by Alexander Trechsel. As the democratic field gets more and more fragmented, voters feel lost, at some times to a point of refraining from participating at all. But they are also curious, turning to tools as VAA in order to make political decisions. Such tools take a part in changing the democratic field and it will be a point of research in the future which role they play. In this manner it will also be exciting to see if VAA can provide not only a vertical matchmaking between voters and political parties, but also between voters themselves.

In the open session following the presentations all these implications were carried forth in a prolific and complacent atmosphere, as it became clear that there is a desire for participation in society that is not yet fully met by institutions and actors in the democratic field. It will be a future challenge but also an opportunity to make way for alternatives to a top down mobilisation of society. This shows that the provocative question the session started with, began with false presumptions – participation cannot hinder democracy, democracy will rather be hindered if participatorial needs of the society are not met in an appropriate way in the future.

Participants: Juan Carlos de Martin, Alexander Trechsel, Martin Emmer

Moderator: Ulrike Klingner

MAKING POLITICAL PARTICIPATION EFFECTIVE

by Kirsten Gollatz

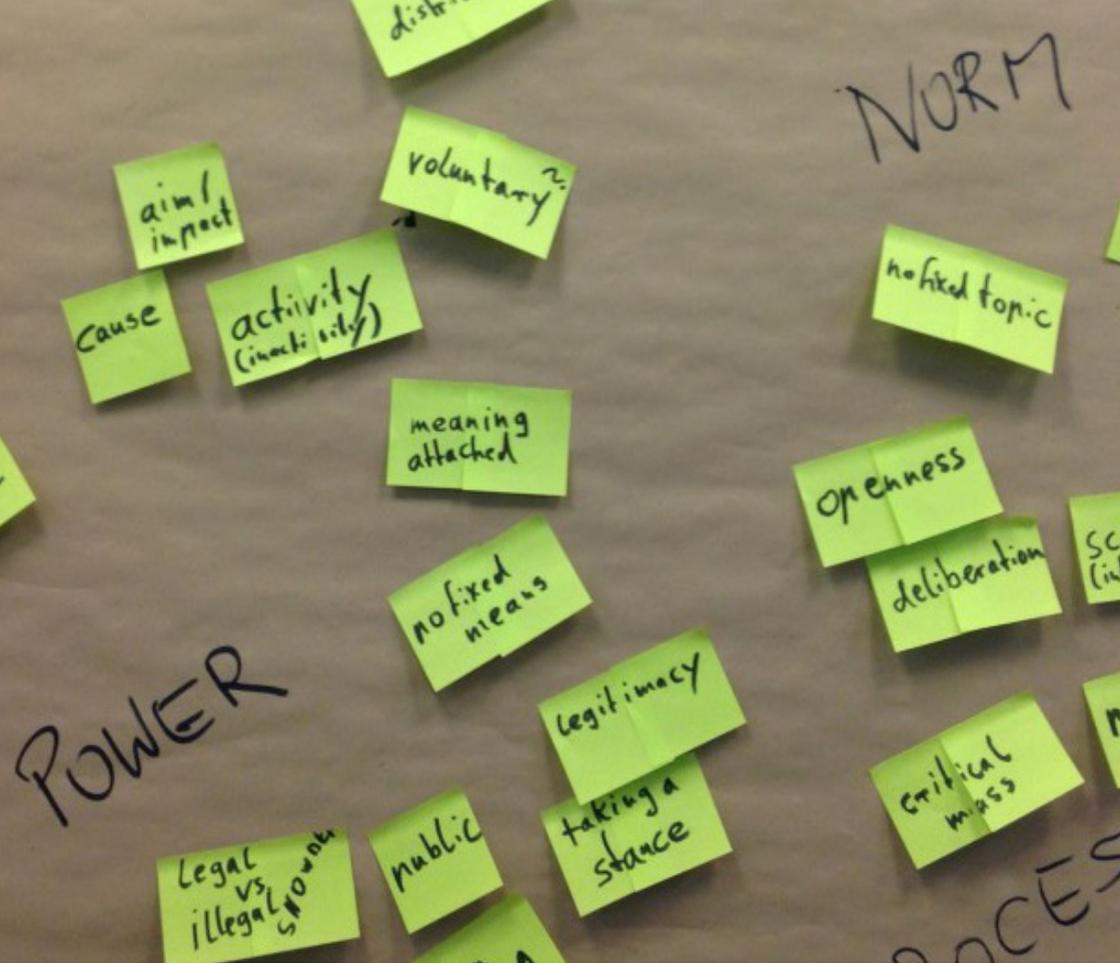
Starting from the observation that the promises of participation are not self-fulfilling and that participation has to be actively realised, the workshop aimed at identifying a set of criteria for strategies that can make participation more effective.

The workshop was organised and moderated by Christian Pentzold, associate researcher at the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society in Berlin and lecturer at Technische Universität Chemnitz, by Dr Tobias Escher, researcher at Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf and Dr Steffen Albrecht, who is a researcher at Technical University Dresden. A hands-on perspective on online voluntarism and collaboration was provided by Nikolas Becker, who is board member of Wikimedia Germany and researcher.

Altogether around 20 participants with academic backgrounds predominantly in the social sciences and humanities attended and contributed to a lively discussion which was centred on the overarching question of how to make participation function and how to make it effective. Along this way, the workshop was structured by three questions that built upon each other.

I. What is participation? — Normative and empirical perspectives

The notion of participation covers many different means by which people become engaged in various enterprises and for a range of causes. The workshop mirrored this diversity of definitions and elements of what participation is or should be. Topics such as openness, legitimacy, distribution of power, and decision-making, among others, have been considered as crucial elements when we talk about the activity of taking part in society – or refusing to do so. Whereas in the beginning the most compelling elements workshop participants



Defining Participation: Categories of most compelling Elements

attributed to the term did not seem to have clear connections to one another, at the end of the first round five sub-categories could be extracted. While not exhaustive and partly overlapping, societal participation, whether offline or online, is often discussed within categories of participatory norms, aspects of content, the process of participatory activities, as well as power through or because of participation. It became obvious that empirical as well as normative criteria are being combined in our views of participation.

II. What should effective participation be? — Process and outcome, but how are they linked?

The processes and outcomes of participation are linked to expectations and evaluations of their efficiency. Both aspects were discussed separately by workshop participants favouring one or the other. With regard to the design of the process of participation, broadly speaking, one has to perceive to be included and recognised. Together with visibility, these aspects related to the notion of the significance of individual contributions within the process, which is considered an important incentive to overcome the costs of engagement. Yet another perspective attracted greater attention. The notion of effectiveness linked to the ownership of the process helps to understand why people are likely to take part in the process even though they don't like the expected outcome. The reason for this lies within the design of processes which are considered to be trustworthy and legitimate. The acceptance and internalisation of societal participatory norms has been acknowledged within political sociology as a predictor for the likelihood to participate. With regard to an outcome-orientation of participation, questions of goal-orientation, of who has set that goal, and under what authority an issue has been raised. Some workshop participants stated that effective participation should also make a difference in society and that it is effective when powers are balanced. It became clear in this second part of the workshop, that what is actually taken as effective or successful participation is highly variable and relates, among other things, to the different actors involved in making participation function, be they citizens, stakeholders, or facilitators. Still, the question of the links between the design of a process and the outcome of participation seems to be an open question for research.

What is effective participation?

embeddedness

representation
in outcome

WHO
SETS THE
AGENDA

connectivity

create
content

individual
vs
collective

fairness

emancipation

change
in
power
decision

WHEN?

identification

agenda
setting

process
vs
outcome

ESS

OUTCOME

Mapping differing aims: process vs. outcome of participation?

III. How can participation be made effective? — Frames of reference of effectiveness

Once the aims of effective participation are clearly formulated, the question still remains what and who makes participation effective. The workshop participants agreed that this question depends on the specific case as well on the individual context, and thus is difficult to answer via fixed principles. Instead, reference frames of effectiveness exist. When the frame changes, the notion of effectiveness is also likely to change. For research it is then useful to step back from single observable phenomena and define classes of cases that have something in common. A good example might be to compare what is considered effective online participation within the political context and within the corporate realm. Furthermore, Wikipedia often holds as a successful example of participation concerning its process and outcome. What has been recognised as key point, and also within the discussion, is that many people's different motivations and intentions are facilitated by a dynamic and flexible regulatory structure and ordering system, which are able to negotiate and balance conflicting goals and interests. The discussion among workshop participants furthermore revolved around additional conditions, resulting in a list of measures that go into crafting the processes and settings in order to make participation effective, such as access, defining objectives, providing a shared base of knowledge, incentivisation, leadership, (new) forms of hierarchies, and the authority to enforce decisions.

So, was it effective for you?

On the one hand, there are plenty of academic, professional and lay opinions and concepts about participation and how it works out effectively. On the other, participation processes of any kind involve different agents with different agendas. The top-down perspective on participation – which indicates the more goal-oriented debate and also is often preferring a quantified output – has not disappeared, even though the bottom-up perspective which is centred on the process and where the outcome might remain unclear has gained much greater atten-

tion in the light of online participatory activities.

Given this situation, the workshop first of all made a timely and important effort to collect and connect such varying perspectives and positions. As the event itself was a participatory activity too, the organizers finally asked those who contributed whether they felt that participation in the workshop was effective and what strategies could inform future attempts to participate effectively. Thus, what are the ideas coming to your mind when thinking about effective participation?

Participants: Christian Pentzold, Tobias Escher, Steffen Albrecht

OPEN HARDWARE – PARTICIPATORY FUTURE OF PHYSICAL GOODS

by Hendrik Send

In this session Jussi Ängeslevä (lecturer at the University of Arts, Berlin and researcher in the Rethinking Prototyping Project), Wolf Jeschonnek (activist and founder of the Fablab Berlin) and Andreas Steinhauser (co-founder and former CTO at txtr, member of supervisory board of the Holzmarkt collective project) discussed the expectations projected onto Open Source Hardware and its potential contribution to value creation networks.

The Open Source Hardware Research Project at the Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society is inspired by our general interest to conduct research on participatory forms of interaction on the Internet. Open Source Hardware (OSHW) describes an emergent bundle of technologies, practices, business opportunities, and regulatory approaches for collaborative manufacturing. In the field of consumer 3D printing for instance, intense innovation activity has sprung from a surge of hardware devices and organizations. From our perspective this can be seen as an Internet innovation phenomenon because a) a lot of the exchange and self-organisation in the community of people who contribute to OSHW takes place online and b) online platforms that aggregate digital designs or services are an important – if not elemental – resource in OSHW.

We started by discussing the question whether the current explosion of innovations and projects in the OSHW domain are evidence of a broader development towards a so-called democratization of production. While many promising projects are interesting alternatives to mainstream firm products indeed, the panelists concurred that current OSHW is particularly valuable because it opens a space for experiments, production, and new connections. The central question was not how to enable a massive market entry of OSHW products, but rather how to facilitate further experimentation and (re-)combination. During the open discussion we debated how to research such a quickly developing phenomenon and its substructures. While observing

the development is interesting and will contribute to its understanding, a more rewarding approach might be the one of in-depth case studies and experiments that allow for own experiences regarding the management of openness in the wild. Educating the general public to become future innovators will catalyse innovation. The panelists suggested a great need of research into how this can be achieved. In the workshop, we tried to identify opportunities for complementary interactions between established firms and the creative community, such as those implied by the open innovation paradigm. Currently, there are only few if any projects that bring established firms and the OSHW community together. Hence, the audience and speakers agreed that we are in a very early stage of the OSHW development and can still await such projects. Yet, because the marginal cost of production in OSHW is never zero as in the case of software, the incentives from a business perspective will always be smaller than in the case of software.

The panel concluded with reflections on the contribution of OSHW to sustainability. While OSHW has been shown to be economically viable for some firms and socially contributing to learning and more distributed innovation, the environmental impact was discussed with contradiction. While 3D printers or laser cutters enable massive experimentation they also generate massive quantities of waste material such as failed prints. Andreas Steinhauser pointed out that 20 years after the paperless office was touted and not achieved we are now on our way to actually abstain from printing pages. Therefore, we might have to wait a little longer for the positive effects of OSHW to kick in.

Speakers: Jussi Ängeslevä, Wolf Jeschonnek, Andreas Steinhauser

Host: Hendrik Send



CONCLUDING SESSION

HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE CAN TECHNOLOGY MAKE FOR SOCIETAL PARTICIPATION?

Author: Kirsten Gollatz

Whereas the workshop sessions sought to further and facilitate the ongoing academic discussions about participation in economic, political or civil society settings across various disciplines, the concluding session aimed at stepping back a bit from the science-focused discourses by looking at the actual realization of technology-enabled participation. Carlos Affonso Pereira de Souza, Director of the Rio de Janeiro Institute for Technology and Society and Mayte Peters, Chair of the Board Publixphere e.V., both with a background in research and academia, provided their insights on two actual applications and practices of societal participation.

The ambiguous role of technology for participation

The introduction to the Concluding Session titled with the question of ‘How much difference can technology make?’ was given by Wolfgang Schulz, Research Director of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute. He pointed towards the ambiguous role internet-based platforms and digital tools may have in participatory activities. While participation online and offline is not an issue caused by technology, technical means shape the rules of communication and rules of participation in public communication. This, as he mentioned, is being illustrated for example by so called social reporting and community tools provided to users for exercising particular control over their own content but also over the content of others in online social networks; a topic which has recently been analysed by Chris Peterson, Researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

People's hands on writing a law for the Internet 'Marco Civil da Internet'



The screenshot shows a Twitter thread. At the top is a blue header with a back arrow, a search icon, and a menu icon. The first tweet is from user **latelyontime** (@latelyontime) with a profile picture of a person. The text of the tweet reads: "@lenstarnes removing code from the domain of participation is a reduction that bothers me. Why isn't code as political as content? #hiigconf". Below the text is the timestamp "2:09 PM · 22 Nov 13" and four interaction icons: reply, retweet, favorite, and share. Below this are two replies. The first reply is from **Len Starnes** (@lenstarnes) with a profile picture of a man, dated "4d". The text says: "@latelyontime No one cares about code, people care about dialogue and collaboration #HIIGconf". The second reply is from **neleheise** (@neleheise) with a profile picture of a woman, also dated "4d". The text says: "@lenstarnes @latelyontime there are two dimensions: Code is political because it".

Side Discussion on Twitter: Is code political?

topic in such open participatory processes, Carlos pointed out. However, challenging questions remain, such as of how to deal best with a situation when wordings and arguments have changed in a transparent way. After several sessions in parliamentary discussion the draft is still pending waiting for a vote. Nevertheless, in the

Then it was first Carlos Affonso Pereira de Souza from Brazil who gave a talk on the 'Marco Civil da Internet' – a civil rights framework for the Internet in Brazil, which is an example of the use of technology to improve public participation in the creation of laws.

The law development process of the Marco Civil, which Carlos Affonso also thinks of as a Bill of rights for Brazilian Internet, has undergone two rounds of open discussions and consultations and almost received 2000 contributions from citizens via an on-line platform. Whereas the first round intended to generate general ideas and principles, the second consultation sought to discuss the actual wording of the law. It marked the first time people have their hand in writing "a law" for the Internet. In 2011 the final draft was issued to the Brazilian parliament. Carlos Affonso also gave an update on what happened afterwards. The wording of the law was slightly changed also including contributions made via Twitter and other communication channels, however, every change was recorded and made available online. The demand for transparency has been and will further be an important

aftermath, online consultations for other internet-related policy issues have taken place concerning a copyright law reform and the age rating-system for games.

Bridging Online and Offline Participation: The Project Publixphere

Then it was Mayte Peters who started her presentation from the observation that established forms of political participatory systems are being somewhat disconnected from ways in particular younger people are going in order to participate. She made a good point saying that adolescents are already involved and engaged in political discussion but not in the traditional way via elected representatives for instance. It's the aim of a project she initiated, which is called Publixphere, to close the gaps between established and new forms of participation as well as offline and online participatory activities. In this way the project Publixphere is meant to be more than just an online discussion platform. However, whereas on the one hand communication and exchange under participants is facilitated through the online environment, Mayte on the other hand indicated that limitations lie within the technology itself. Translating and implementing principles of effective citizen participation into the design of a technical platform and code is a challenging endeavour which not at least needs the knowledge of experts.

Ongoing Challenges: Empowerment, Anonymity and Transparency

Do internet-based platforms empower? The answer to this question, which opened the discussion with the audience, depends on the case and context. The public discourse on SOPA, PIPA, and ACTA for example significantly diffused via various online platforms. In Brazil however, having access to the internet is still a basic prerequisite for taking part in such online activities. As Carlos Affonso further added, even if people are using the internet they may be empowered in some or the other way; but the more fundamental issue is that they have to understand why using it is important. Related to this the Marco Civil community has left traces which

gives Carlos an optimistic evaluation about the Marco Civil as a integration of the debate of Internet freedom in society. Legacy of that discussion has put Brazil in a different stage on Internet Governance, despite the fact that a voting in parliament is quite unlikely, as Carlos put it. The discussion also set up a relation between anonymity and transparency in participatory processes. To what extent it is necessary to identify the single person participating in a larger issue and where to limit transparency is not easy to measure. Where to draw the line is an ongoing question not only for researchers but also in governments. Another interesting question came up in the discussion. While we have already realised that technical means change the process of participation, we have not yet gained a deeper understanding of how it changes the notion of participation itself.

The concluding session showed the linkages between the actual and everyday realization of participation through technical means in practice and how research can contribute to better understand arising questions. Thereby, it became clear that circumstances, contexts and contents of participation are specific and as such have to be analysed or even evaluated by taking these specifics into account. A very lively discussion and audience engagement pointed to the yet more than before crucial questions of anonymity in participatory activities and transparency of the process. Besides, it's the overarching questions whether technological means, digital platforms or in general the technological environment not only changes participatory processes but also what we regard as participation and the notion of participation in society at large.

Speakers: Carlos Affonso Pereira de Souza, Mayte Peters

Host: Wolfgang Schulz

ONLINE IN DIE POLITIK?

CHANCES AND RISKS OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

GLOBAL NETWORK
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INTERNET AND
RESEARCH CENTER

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PROGRAMME

PUBLIC AFTERNOON: ONLINE INTO POLITICS?

14:30 – 14:45	Welcome Address Public Event: Online into Politics? Speakers: Irina Mohr (Head of Forum Berlin, Friedrich Ebert Foundation), Ingolf Pernice (Director, Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society)
14:45 – 16:00	Scientific Findings: Participation in Democratic Structures Speakers: Helen Margetts (Director, Oxford Internet Institute), Jan Schmidt (Researcher, Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg) Host: Wolfgang Schulz (Director, Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society)
16:30 – 18:00	Panel Discussion: National Perspectives on Political Participation Panelists: Teresa Bücker (Social Media Strategist for the SPD Parliamentary Group), Alvar Freude (Activist and Member of the Special Committee on Internet and the Digital Society of the German Bundestag), Bettina Gaus (Journalist), Jonas Westphal (Speaker of the SPD Forum Netzpolitik); Moderator: Marlis Schaum (DRadio Wissen)
18:00 – 19:00	Reception



SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS: PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES

Helen Margetts, director of the Oxford Internet Institute (OII), presented her institute's research on online petitions in the United Kingdom. The data showed that petitions are only successful if they quickly gain supporters. Since collective attention decays rapidly, petitions that don't succeed within the first days end up in the “digital dust”, according to Margetts. Those results were contrasted with first findings from a study on the e-petition platform of the German parliament, the Bundestag. Within the last five years eleven online petitions collected enough signers to be heard by the petition committee. Half of the users learn about a petition when directly visiting the platform, another third discover petitions via social media.

[Read more](#) about the study on the German e-petition platform (German).

PANEL DISCUSSION: NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In the panel discussion Teresa Bückler (Social Media expert for the parliamentary SPD group), Alvar Freude (member of the commission of enquiry, 'The Internet and the Digital Society'), Bettina Gaus (journalist) and Jonas Westphal (speaker of the SPD's 'Forum Netzpolitik') gave insights on online participation from a national perspective. The participants addressed the questions of who are the people that engage in online participation and which part of the society is represented by them? Will online participation affect our parliamentary democracy? Is online participation needed and how can we foster it?

[Watch the video](#) of the panel discussion.



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