

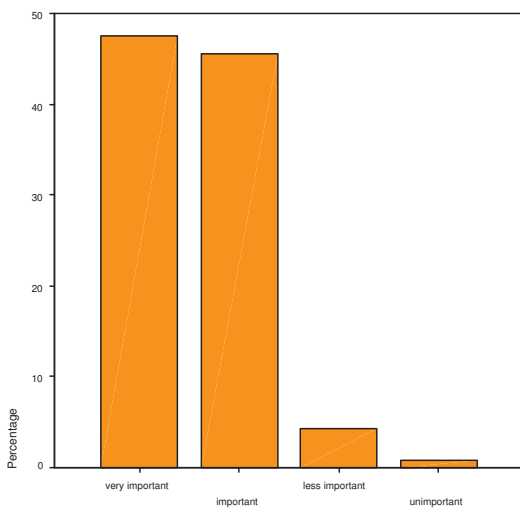
# Urban development and community participation

An extract of a German case study

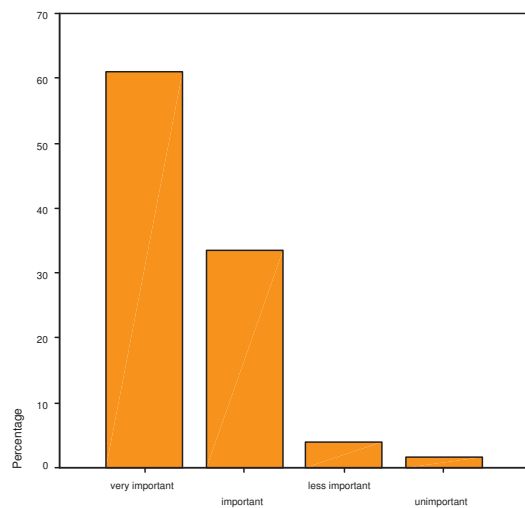
*Bastian Gofßner*

In 2004 and 2005 research was carried out about urban development and community participation (or so called “citizens’ participation”) in Buchloe, a German town with approximately 12,000 inhabitants, located 60 km west of Munich and 40 km south of Augsburg. In Germany, there is no tradition of direct democracy as in Switzerland or Scandinavia; this is one reason for various complementary community participation concepts with different qualities. In Buchloe, citizens were, for the first time ever, asked by questionnaire whether and if so how they wanted to be involved in the ongoing processes of urban development in their municipality. In addition, specialists in the field of community participation and two mayors were asked by personal interview what their thoughts were on the proper design of community participation. The most important results are summarized in this paper.

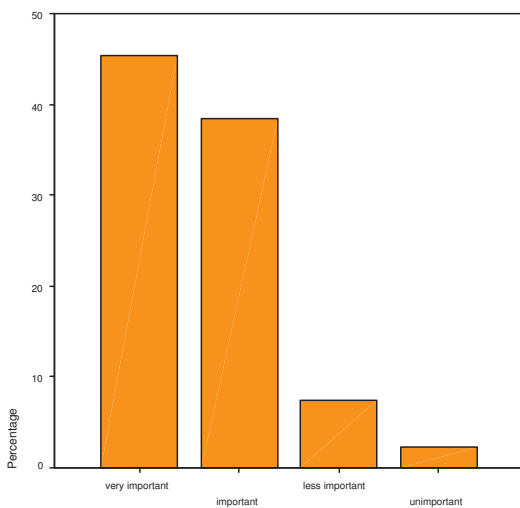
257 passers-by, 131 households, 174 commuters and 30 local businessmen were – in very basic and general terms (“How would you rate the importance of active community participation in the process of public opinion forming?”) – asked what they thought about “ordinary citizens” being involved in the current process of urban development. All groups rated active community participation by and large as very important or important. The results in details were as follows:



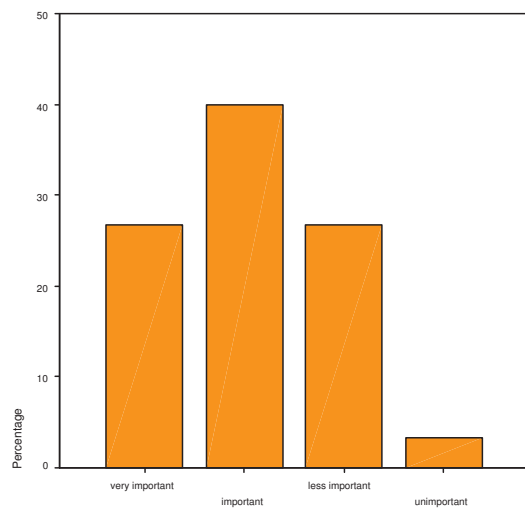
Citizens' participation



Citizens' participation (households)



Citizens' participation (commuters)



Citizens' participation (local businessmen)

Furthermore, 1,200 citizens of Buchloe (or approx. 10 % of the total inhabitants) aged 16 or older were randomly selected from the Einwohnermeldeamt's (local residents registration office) official data alone and were sent a questionnaire by mail. People were asked about several different possible types of community participation based on the results of the interviews with specialists on community participation and mayors. The interpretation of the results can be summarised as follows [n = 266, N = 1,200, rate of return = 22 %].

In the inhabitants' opinion proper community participation has first of all to satisfy five aspects:

1. Openness for everyone who wants to take part in the participation process.
2. Broad and objective information of participants, even if this requires more time.
3. Neutral management of the participation, carried out by an organization independent of official decision makers.
4. Documentation and publication of the results.
5. Feedback from official decision makers towards – at least – the participating citizens, referring to the results of community participation.

Other aspects mentioned include a serious work ethic, a participation ethic being immune towards self-interest (e.g. citizens trying to circumvent projects of urban development processes in the vicinity of their residence, such as new streets or railway lines; the not in my backyard [NIMBY] concept). The fact that most people do *not* want the participants in the public consultation to be chosen by random selection is very interesting; but people *do want* the participating citizens to be representative of all citizens in a municipality. This is to certain extent a contradiction in terms. For details see the following synopsis.

### Synopsis of the criteria and their importance for good community participation

Criterion	Specialists on community participation*	Mayors*	Citizens†
Participation of all stakeholders	●○○	●●○	●●●
Participation by random selection	●●○	●●○	○○○
Representativeness of method	●●○‡	●●○	●●○
Serious attitude towards work	●●○	●●○	●●○
Detailed information of participants	●●○	●●○	●●●
Neutral and independent organizing and facilitating organisation	●●●	●●●	●●●
Documentation and publication of the results	●●○	●●○	●●●
Feedback from decision-makers towards citizens	●●○	●●○	●●●
Immunity with respect to self-interests	●●○	●●○	●●○

●●● very important ●●○ important ●○○ less important ○○○ unimportant

\* Results of the respective interviews

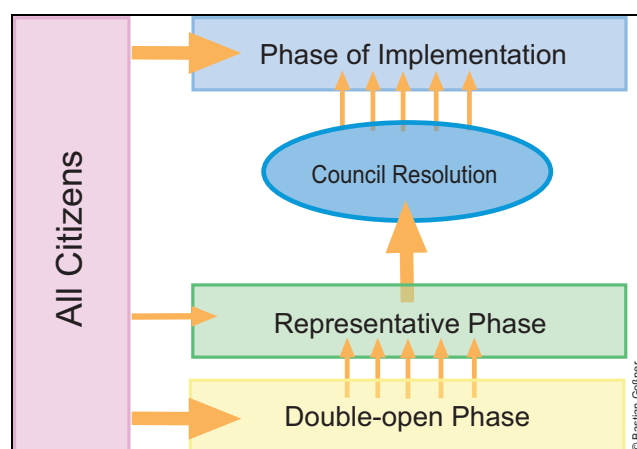
† Results of the poll by questionnaire

‡ Derived from the criterion "random selection"

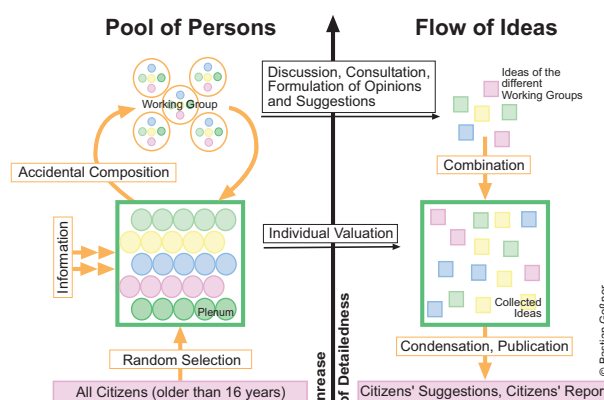
## Consequences for achieving good community participation

The needs of citizens – combined with the points of view of specialists and mayors – can be accomplished by a three-step process:

1. Double-open phase of consultation: open towards anyone and any topic. Everyone interested is allowed to take part, every topic that seems interesting to the participants is discussed. Open to citizens, organised groups, officials, representatives of the public administration. Preferably two days.
2. Representative, preferably a four day consultation, based on the results of the first phase: random selection of participants, representativeness of the method, information of participants, protection against self-interests. Only open to citizens as private persons.
3. Phase of implementation: open to every citizen, and also open to officials and representatives of public administration. Consultation with participants from phase 1.



For the representative phase, the method *Citizens' Report by Planning Cells* (minimum 4 cells with 25 persons each) is suggested. This method was invented in the 1970s and has been used and proven itself in a lot of cases since then. Its key-points are quite simple and cover the needs articulated by the citizens as well as specialists and mayors interviewed: representativeness (by random selection), information about the topic, serious work ethic, neutral and independent implementation organisation, documentation and publication of results. In addition, feed-back from decision-makers towards citizens is to be assured by agreement between officials and organizing and facilitating organisations. The following figure illustrates how a Planning Cell works.



The whole 146 pages report is available in German and can be downloaded as a PDF file at <http://www.buergergutachten.com/herunterladen/hintergrund/diplomarbeit-gossner.pdf>.



*The author, born 1980, studied geography, regional development planning, public law and management of resources at Universität Augsburg (Germany), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (Germany) and Lunds Universitet (Sweden). He obtained the degree of Diplom-Geograph Univ. at Universität Augsburg in summer 2005. Since 2001, he has been working for the Gesellschaft für Bürgergutachten (Society for Citizens' Reports) – partly in co-operation with Technische Universität München and Bergische Universität*

*Wuppertal (both Germany) – and has managed several community participation projects, for example by order of the Bavarian State Ministry for Environment, Health and Consumer protection. In 2004 and 2005, he worked with innovative projects on urban development for Universität Augsburg. Currently, he is busy with public transport consultation and citizens' reports.*

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