

Citizens Report on Consumer Policy in Bavaria

An Extract

Between September 2001 and March 2002, 425 Bavarian citizens aged from 16 years on have participated in 18 citizens panels at five different places in Bavaria in order to produce a Citizens' Report on Consumer Protection in Bavaria. In four days of eight working hours each they were informed, have thoroughly thought about and discussed various important aspects of consumer policy.

This innovative and interactive model of democratic participation allows differentiated, detailed and creative proposals for the solution of public problems. The participants were randomly chosen from the population. Thus, they represent all groups of society without pursuing vested interest, be it from individuals, groups or organisations. Experience shows that the common welfare is at the centre of most recommendations condensed in a so-called citizens' report, allowing, moreover, a broad consensus. Solutions proposed in a Citizens' Report gain a broad recognition among the population where they directly come from. Thus they provide a good legitimacy for necessary measures. This transparent process provides new, reliable and unfiltered qualitative data beyond traditional expert-committees and surveys.

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final outcome:

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Chapter 1: Commissioning body and contractor

As a reaction to the BSE crisis, in January, 2001, the new Bavarian State Ministry for Health, Food and Consumer Protection was founded. Eberhard Sinner became first Minister. Shortly after having taken office, he decided to ask the consumers for their needs and notions of consumer protection by the state. By this, he wanted to be able to develop a policy based on their real needs. The innovative method was chosen to let make a Citizens Report. On August 16th, 2001, the Ministry and the University of Wuppertal signed a contract describing the following objective: the elaboration of a Citizens Report on Consumer Protection in Bavaria. About 450 citizens randomly selected should produce aims and measures for a Bavarian consumer protection programme, in 18 citizens panels working in a four days structured and moderated technique.

On September 24th the first two working groups (panels) took up their work at Tirschenreuth.

Chapter 2: The method

What is a Citizens' Report and how is it formed?

The Citizens' Report method was developed in the 1970s by Prof. Dr. Peter C. Dienel at the University of Wuppertal, Germany. Formerly, the name "planning cell" has been used, too. The basic idea is that the sovereign of the democratic state, the citizen, should elaborate solutions for political problems (in this case: priorities and ideas for the Bavarian consumer policy). Given the impossibility of the participation of each and every citizen, a selection is necessary. This selection process, information and the structure of work are crucial.

Several panels of 25 persons each are chosen randomly from the population. For four days, these devote themselves to the solution of a given problem of common interest. In order to provide the participants with the necessary knowledge to complete their task, they are exposed to a range of experts, who are specifically chosen to illustrate the range of opinions and different perspectives on the specialist area.

Work at a Citizens' Report is a structured process. The central element is the small group (*Kleingruppe*), where five participants discuss problems and develop proposed solutions. These are subsequently presented in an open forum. The small group composition is changed during the process to prevent opinion leadership or domination by a single person and to allow a maximum of personal contacts. Co-ordination is provided by two process facilitators (*Prozessbegleiter*) who are obliged to be strictly neutral and not to direct the deliberations in any way. The panel works for four days, each eight hours long. Experience has shown that this time is sufficient. However, this is demanding a very concentrated work for the participants. In the panels exists a real life and real work atmosphere. The participants are aware that they stand as representatives for the population and that the commissioning body takes their advice very seriously.

The Citizens' Report method is a citizens participation system which builds upon the belief that every citizen can contribute to the solution of a problem, if he/she is only informed sufficiently and given an enabling situation. This belief has been proved right throughout the process as in all cases the citizen participants have understood the complex subjects that are treated. Moreover, in four days they extended their knowledge to the extent that they were able to make complex judgements and develop creative solutions to pressing social problems.

How does one become a member of a citizens panel?

The 25 participants are chosen randomly from the inhabitants registers of the areas (communities) concerned. In principle every inhabitant from an age of 16 years is entitled to participate. This ensures that a representative selection of the population is selected. Every participant is paid an expense allowance and, if necessary, a compensation for loss of earning.

What happens with the results?

The results of the panels are recorded, collected and condensed into a **Citizens' Report (*Bürgergutachten*)** by the organising institution. To ensure consistency between the intentions of the participants and the contents of the report, the participants elect two or three proof-readers (*Redaktoren*) who read and edit the Citizens' Report before it is printed, given to the commissioning body, and published.

Core elements of the Citizens' Report system

- random selection of participants
- work character (4 days)
- given problems, questions and work programme
- information by experts
- documentation in a Citizens Report

Chapter 3: Project organisation and process, evaluation

Institutions co-operating

Commissioning body:	Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Gesundheit, Ernährung und Verbraucherschutz, Munich, Germany
Contractor:	Bergische Universität Gesamthochschule Wuppertal, Forschungsstelle Bürgerbeteiligung und Planungsverfahren, Prof. Dr. P. C. Dienel, Wuppertal, Germany
Conception, Project Management, Organisation, Realisation, Documentation:	Gesellschaft für Bürgergutachten/Society for Citizens' Reports, Dr. Hilmar Sturm and Dr. Christian Weilmeier, Munich and Landshut, Germany
Co-operating scientific partner:	Technische Universität München, Dienstleistungsökonomik, Prof. Dr. D. Witt, Freising-Weihenstephan, Germany

Places and times

For the project, a choice out of the 2,056 communities of Bavaria had to be made as a basis for the sample of participants. After a selection process, 6 territorial authorities were chosen, representing the major regions, rural and urban areas, northern and southern Bavaria etc. (see table p. 5).

<i>sub-project (area/ community)</i>	<i>administrative district (Regierungs- bezirk)</i>	<i>numbers and times of citizens panels</i>	<i>number of inhabitants</i>	<i>area (square kilometres)</i>	<i>inhabitants per square kilometre</i>	<i>number of communities</i>	<i>place of citizens panel sessions</i>
Landkreis* Tir- schenreuth	Oberpfalz (Upper Palatia)	PZ 01 + 02 24–26 Sept 2001	79,993	1,048	76	26	Office of Agriculture
Landkreis* Dingolfing- Landau	Niederbayern (Lower Bavaria)	PZ 03–06 15–18 and 22–25 Oct 2001	90,562	878	103	15	County Council
Landes- hauptstadt** München	Oberbayern (Upper Bavaria)	PZ 07–10 23–26 and 28–31 Jan 2002	1,210,223	310	3,904	1	Municipal Office
Stadt*** Krumbach	Schwaben (Swabia)	PZ 11–14 4–7 and 18–21 Feb 2002	12,447	45	277	1	Office of Agriculture
Stadt*** Erlangen Landkreis* Erlangen- Höchstadt	Mittelfranken (Middle Franconia)	PZ 15–18 25–28 Feb and 4–7 March 2002	100,778 128,939	77 564	1,309 229	1 25	Adult Education Authority of the City of Erlangen (Volks- hochschule)
<i>Free State of Bavaria</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>12,230,255</i>	<i>47,614</i>	<i>173</i>	<i>2,056</i>	

Overview over places and times of citizens panels

*Landkreis = county

**Landeshauptstadt = (Bavarian) capital city

***Stadt = city/town

Random selection of participants

Altogether 69 community authorities were asked to select randomly a certain number of persons from their inhabitants registers. Every inhabitant from an age of 16 years on could be chosen; the nationality was no criteria of selection. The invitation consisted of a letter of the University of Wuppertal, a letter from State Minister Sinner, and a post card for the answer. Additional information was provided in temporary offices at the places where citizens panel sessions took place, in order to help to facilitate participation of those who were invited. For information about the participants who actually participated, see chapter 5 (participants data).

The citizens panel sessions and evaluation by the participants

Always two citizens panels started their sessions with one hour difference. Sessions took place in public buildings. Food, material etc. were supplied by the organising institution. After the sessions, the participants filled in evaluation forms. Partially, marks could be given, partially the form was open. Some results:

99.5 % would recommend others to participate in a Citizens' Report process

Average marks (from 1 = excellent to 6 = bad):

the course of the 4 days:	1.5
work programme:	1.8
work sheets:	1.8
personnel teams:	1.3

Critique:

time shortage, some experts' presentations,
politicians hearing

Particularly pleasing was:

the co-operation in the groups, knowledge gained,
information, teams, work climate

Chapter 4: The work programme

Consumer protection: a definition of the work field

The consumer role was defined as the role in which somebody buys or uses a good (product or service) which he/she has purchased, rented or ordered for money. As for most types of services other Ministries are responsible, these have not been considered here, e. g. bank and insurance services. The work programme was developed on the basis of the responsibilities of the new Ministry, scientific systematics, current topics, interdependencies of parts of consumer problems, time constraints, and methodological aspects.

Obviously, the range of goods is very broad, so it was necessary to make a division into several groups and to choose certain goods as examples for each of them. In three steps the citizens gave their recommendations first for the example, then for the whole aspect or category of goods. In the third step, in the last work unit, the participants considered and weighed the importance of all aspects and recommendations to come to the final result of a concept for the Bavarian consumer policy.

Work programme

The four days are organised in 16 work units of 90 minutes each (in average).

day <i>main topic</i>	1 (Monday) <i>health nutrition</i>	2 (Tuesday) <i>food product safety</i>	3 (Wednesday) <i>product safety advertising politicians hearing</i>	4 (Thursday) <i>role of consumer and consumption final results</i>
8–9.30 h	AE 01 introduction consumer policy prevention	AE 05/06 ingredients and processing of food	AE 09 safety of techni- cal products (example: mo- bile phones)	AE 13 the consumers' own responsi- bilities
coffee break				
10–11.30 h	AE 02 environment and health		AE 10 protection needs of special con- sumer groups	AE 14 consumer ser- vices and infor- mation
lunch break				
12.30–14 h	AE 03 consumer pro- tection in the health sector (example: phar- maceuticals)	AE 07 food inspection and hygiene	AE 11 advertising (effects, counter- measures)	AE 15 the rank of con- sumption in life
coffee break				AE 16 Recapitulation and considera- tion of results: list of priorities, concepts
14.30–16 h	AE 04 nutrition and agriculture	AE 08 product safety (example: cloth- ing textiles)	AE 12 politicians hear- ing	
end	16 h	16 h	16.30 h	17 h

AE = Arbeitseinheit = work unit

Forms of action in the citizens panels

Some work units began with a short survey form to be filled in individually. Most units began with short presentations by experts. Only questions of a factual nature could be asked in the plenum. The discussion itself took place only in the small groups (*Kleingruppen*). The small groups elaborated most of the recommendations and presented them in the plenum. Afterwards, every single participant had the opportunity to evaluate the recommendations by sticking coloured points on the posters on which the recommendations were written. Most often, an individual participant could give 5 (sometimes 10) points per topic. The sums of these points served for the ranking of the recommendations (see tables in chapter 6).

Chapter 5: The participants

A central advantage of the Citizens' Report method compared to other citizens participation systems is that the participants are chosen in a random process. Thus, the results can be regarded representative for the will of the population when it is informed and has considered the problems carefully. A statistical questionnaire filled in by all participants allows a comparison to the population. The results of this are – like in all Citizens' Reports before – positive. Some key figures as examples in the following table:

<i>characteristic</i>	<i>percent of participant of the 18 citizens panelss</i>	<i>percent of the Bavarian population</i>
female persons	55	52
persons of age... (%)		
15–19	4.5	6.4
20–24	5.2	6.7
25–29	4.3	7.4
30–39	19.7	20.7
40–49	20.9	17.2
50–64	32.1	22.2
65+	13.3	19.4
no. of persons in household		
1	16.2	35.5
2	32.9	32.4
3	17.6	14.4
4	18.1	12.6
5 and more	11.8	5.2
no answer	3.2	–

Socio-demographic attributes of participants as compared to the population

The participants indicated 200 different occupations, from “Agrarbetriebswirt” (manager in agriculture) to “Zollbeamter” (customs officer). Jobless persons and housewives were also among the contributors.

Most important is that with this participation method a significant number of persons could be asked for their well-founded and well thought out opinion who are not yet belonging to the politically or socially active part of society: Only 56 % were member of any association or club whatsoever, only 4 % were member of a citizens' initiative, and only 7 % were member of a political party.

Chapter 6: Outcomes

Work Unit 01: Consumer protection and health

Citizens consider a health-orientated life style the best way to prevent diseases. They are always aware of two main possibilities to reach that goal: healthy food and sports. Medical check-ups and the prevention of addiction, especially to alcohol and tobacco, are other important issues, where more political action is needed.

The participating citizens call for more state action concerning sufficient and proper information about health risks. They demand more state surveillance and transparency. More state control not only in the food sector, but also for building material, for radiation emitted from mobile phones and for pharmaceuticals. They want more import controls on food, too. By transparency Citizens mean an obligation imposed by the state of producers to inform on production methods and precise details about the origins of their products.

<i>What can the individual do to strengthen his health?</i>	<i>Points</i>
health-orientated life style	1,111
positive attitude towards life	686
regular medical check-ups	117
drug prevention (alcohol, tobacco etc.)	98
active protection of the environment	31

Work Unit 02: Health and environment

As remedy for the above mentioned health dangers citizens suggest stricter bans and regulations. The participants mean by that the rigorous application of current laws and their efficient monitoring. The state should react faster to bad state of affairs and forbid substances highly endangering the environment. Also problems like health risks caused by building materials, electric smog and mobile phones should be taken more seriously.

<i>Greatest health dangers</i>	<i>Points</i>
<i>What are the most important environment related health dangers?</i>	
harmful substances in air, water, soil	674
harmful substances in products	579
radiation from nuclear power plant, mobile phones etc.	322
noise	139

<i>Remedy for health risks</i>	<i>Points</i>
<i>How should these dangers be diminished in your opinion?</i>	
stricter bans and conditions	755
technical improvements	278
more and better information about risks	239
change of one's own behaviour	191
promotion of alternative energies	165

Work Unit 03: Medicine and consumer protection

Most urgent is the demand for an open and personal dialogue with the treating doctor about medicine and methods. Doctors should devote more time to their patients and should regularly offer alternative therapies. More consultation is necessary if it is about prevention of diseases. Above all citizens wish more information about natural remedies. Important is also the demand for comprehensible instruction leaflets. Instruction leaflets must be easier to read, printed in not too small letters. Besides, a clearer structuring of the text (for example one page with basic information for the patient, one page with specific information for the doctor) is regarded as necessary. Frequency of occurring side effects should be expressed in per cent in order to be in a position of better assessing their relevance. The media, too, should inform better about the effects of medicine.

<i>How would you like to be informed as an consumer about therapies and medicine?</i>	<i>Points</i>
personal and open dialogue with the treating doctor	1,095
comprehensible instruction leaflets	346
get better informed by the media	224
establish an independent medical information service	52
information about alternative therapies by medical insurances	33

<i>What must the state do to improve the safety of medicine?</i>	<i>Points</i>
better control of medicine	819
introduction of a "patients card"	209
pharmaceutical companies must be supervised more efficiently	135
(independent and compulsory) further education for doctors and pharmacists	121
promotion of natural remedies	73
higher doctor's fee as motivation for good consultation	30

Work Unit 04: Agriculture and nutrition

Most of the participating citizens call for more control of not only farmers but also of veterinarians and food producers. Besides, they demand more information about what happens in the agriculture sector, because as consumers they find it important to understand how food is produced. Part of this is a proof of origin and a limited amount of marks of quality.

<i>What should the state do that high-quality food is produced?</i>	<i>Points</i>
more independent supervision of agriculture, of veterinarians and animal feed producers	599
more consumer information about problems in agriculture	404
comprehensible ways of food production	399
promotion of ecological cultivation	378
keeping animals in their natural environment	213

Work Unit 05/06: Food processing and ingredients

Apart from a food labelling which is clear and easy to understand it is very important for the great majority of the participants that the country of origin and the place of production is mentioned. Citizens stressed also that more information must be provided at the point of sale. This could be done personally by the sales staff or by putting up a notice in the shop.

It is the responsibility of the state to supervise strictly the content of food. The effects of certain substances on diabetics and persons suffering from an allergy have also to be considered.

<i>Which forms of food production are critical?</i>	<i>Points</i>
industrial production	532
genetic engineering	395
certain conservation methods, esp. Irradiation of food	369
not keeping animals in their natural environment	209
too much application of chemical methods (dung, pesticide etc.)	108

<i>What food additives are critical?</i>	<i>Points</i>
artificial additives in general (emulsifier, stabiliser etc.)	359
flavour enhancer	261
unnatural substances of conservation	241
artificial pigments	152
artificial flavouring substances	115

<i>Demands on food labelling</i>	<i>Points</i>
comprehensible and clear labelling	1,119
declaration of the country of origin	360
information at the point of sale	270
clear declaration of the date of production and of the date of expiring (shelf life)	244
declaration of genetically modified food	243

<i>Demands on food production</i>	<i>Points</i>
more products from the region	608
better supervision (unannounced, also of imports)	574
sparing production and conservation	344
improvement of hygiene in the production process	317
ban on or at least limitation of unnecessary additives	279

Work Unit 07: Food hygiene and inspection

From their own experience as consumers the participating citizens see the main problem in the fact that the sales staff do not keep to the hygienic rules. In baker's shops, for example the personnel touches the articles with its hands and not with a pair of tongs. Articles which had fallen on the floor are still sold.

As citizens see in the behaviour of sales staff the decisive factor, it is clear that they want to see food inspection reinforced. They call for more personnel in this field.

A central demand is the introduction of a so-called “public food inspection”. This means that the food inspection authorities should open more to the public than they do now. Citizens expect more information material for the consumers, they want a reinforcement of public relations activities and regularly published reports on the part of food inspection authorities.

<i>Hygienic shortcomings in retail markets and gastronomy</i>	<i>Points</i>
sales staff do not observe the hygienic rules	770
spoilt food is being sold	307
wrong storage of food	248
glasses and dishes are not really clean in restaurants	155
self-service at the fruit and vegetable shelf is not hygienic	52

<i>Suggestions of improvement for state-run food inspection</i>	<i>Points</i>
more supervision must be conducted	497
introduction of public food inspection	389
expansion of food inspection staff	283
rotation of supervisory staff	148
health certificate issued by a doctor for personnel in shops and restaurants etc.	146

Work Unit 08: Product safety (example: clothing textiles)

Citizens are in favour of products with no or less chemical or harmful substances. It is important for the consumers that they get information not only about the use of products, but also about substances of content and about the producer. This would lead to more transparency. Products should be of good quality and durable.

<i>Demands on quality and safety of textiles</i>	<i>Points</i>
no harmful substances	380
durability	360
declaration of substances of content	162
ecologically harmless production	135

<i>General demands on the safety and quality of products</i>	<i>Points</i>
no harmful substances	374
instruction manual	201
durability (things must be repairable)	174
good price-performance ratio	126

Work Unit 09: Safety of technical devices (example: mobile phones)

Citizens expect from technical devices that they should be ecologically harmless and of good quality. They are in favour of more research and call for comprehensible instruction manuals. Technical products must be repairable with acceptable costs. In the mobile phone sector more research is necessary, the radiation should be diminished and better information must be delivered.

<i>Demands on the quality and safety of mobile phones</i>	<i>Points</i>
more research	494
diminished radiation	325
more information	313
lower limit values	196

<i>Demands on the safety and quality of technical devices</i>	<i>Points</i>
ecologically harmless	257
quality standards	250
research	233
comprehensible instruction manuals	155

Work Unit 10: Particular groups of consumers

This work unit is about the interests of groups of consumers which are sometimes under-represented in the citizens panels. A great majority of the panelists demand that technical devices and the construction of buildings should be handicapped accessible. The laws for the protection of minors must be better observed. The selling of alcohol and tobacco to young persons should be monitored in a stricter way.

<i>What should the state do to meet the needs of handicapped people, children, elderly people and foreigners in the consumer protection sector?</i>	<i>Points</i>
handicapped accessible buildings and technical devices	903
stricter monitoring of the protection of minors	484
promotion of integration in general	474
more and better consultation	291
promote social services	176
more social acknowledgement of families	159
promotion of citizen participation	153

Work Unit 11: Advertising

Citizens call for a limitation of advertising. They feel their freedom of decision-making confined by the flood of advertisement they see themselves confronted with. The participants demand a restriction of TV-ads. The main goal of advertising should be information, not manipulation. The risks of certain products must be declared, especially the health risks. A broad majority demand a ban on advertisement for alcohol and tobacco. Citizens wish more information about advertisement. School pupils should learn how to deal with the vast amount of advertising. Product placement, for example for alcohol and tobacco, should be restricted.

<i>Consumer goods advertising and consumer protection</i>	<i>Points</i>
limitation of the amount of advertising	1566
no deceptive advertising	638
better protection of children from advertisement	577
ban on advertisement for drugs (alcohol, tobacco etc.)	353
better information about advertising and its methods	267

Work Unit 13: What should the consumers do by themselves?

Beyond all demands on the state, it is the question what consumers can do by themselves to resolve the problems.

<i>What should consumers do?</i>	<i>Points</i>
be aware of what one is buying	716
develop one's own initiative	485
educate children in order to become critical and considerate consumers	437
reinforcement of ecological awareness	401
retain one's own values	292
preferring of regional products	280
pay attention to a healthy life style	260
becoming aware of the power of consumers	221

Work Unit 14: Consumer services and information

This work unit was about the question how the state and others already support the consumers and what should be changed in the future.

The most important demand is to get good advice from qualified personnel in shops and institutions. This must not happen in an importunate way, but should be characterised by friendliness and patience when things are explained to the customer. Consumer protection must be organised in an citizen-oriented attitude. The authorities should inform about shortcomings and problems at an early stage. Citizens call for more support of consumer organisations. These should be better accessible personally or by telephone.

Newspapers should have an own column for consumer protection. Consumer protection in the media suffers from a lack of clear and comprehensible presentation. The participants suggested to publish a list of addresses of organisations and authorities in the consumer protection sector.

<i>How do consumers wish to be informed?</i>	<i>Points</i>
competent advice from qualified personnel	888
consumer protection must be organised in an ' consumer-oriented attitude	876
current information by the media	572
promotion of consumer organisations	428

Work Unit 15: The rank of consumption in life

Citizens dealt with the question which rank consumption has in their lives (see table):

<i>What is really important for the citizens?</i> (from 1=very important to 4=not important)	<i>Points</i>
family	1.1
friends	1.5
conversation	1.5
nature	1.6
work	1.8
leisure	1.8
<i>consumption</i>	2.2
mobility (cars, going on holidays etc.)	2.3
religion and spirituality	2.5

Work Unit 16: Conclusion – Concepts for the Bavarian consumer policy

Work unit 16 served the aim to consider and weigh all results of the 15 other units (additionally, other aspects could be included here). Concepts for the Bavarian consumer policy should be elaborated with the final recommendations to the Minister.

18 citizens panels consisting of 5 small groups each produced approximately 270 most important subjects or aims for the Bavarian consumer policy. In addition, at least 270 most important measures that should be taken to reach the objectives have been recommended. For every measure, some proposals have been made how to finance it. These proposals are not part of the Citizens Report, but ensured a certain feasibility of the recommendations.

Remarkably, not more controls or more rigid laws, but more information and education of the consumers are at the first position of the long list of recommendations given by the citizens.

<i>Most important aims for the Bavarian consumer policy</i>	<i>points</i>
information and education (education, creating awareness: 179, better and more complete information: 140)	410
nutrition and food (healthy, safe food: 98, healthy agriculture, biological farming: 71, keeping of animals in a natural way: 63)	406
environment/protection of (protection of environment, prevention of pollution: 169 saving energy: 45)	296
health, health services (prevention: 64, health general: 48, alternative medicine/natural: 30)	295
consumer policy and protection (in general)	115
safety (of products etc.)	100
other	455
sum	2,077

In the “measures” part of the recommendations, too, consumer information has the first place. Quite a few groups demand more participation in political processes to better meet the needs of people.

<i>Consumer policy measures</i>	<i>Percent of mentions</i>
information in the widest sense (information, education: 17 product information, labelling of goods: 7)	24
regulations and laws	18
control and inspection	9
(financial) promotion	9
research and research promotion	9
changes of behaviour (of producers: 6, of consumers: 3)	9
other	25

All recommendations are printed in unabridged version in the appendix of the Citizens Report.

The participating citizens have given a wide range of recommendations. Consumers are not homogeneous. There is no “one best and only policy” that should be realised and no “one most pressing and only problem” that should be addressed with priority. All measures which will be taken as consumer policy (not only in Bavaria) should help consumers to make their own free and informed decisions.

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