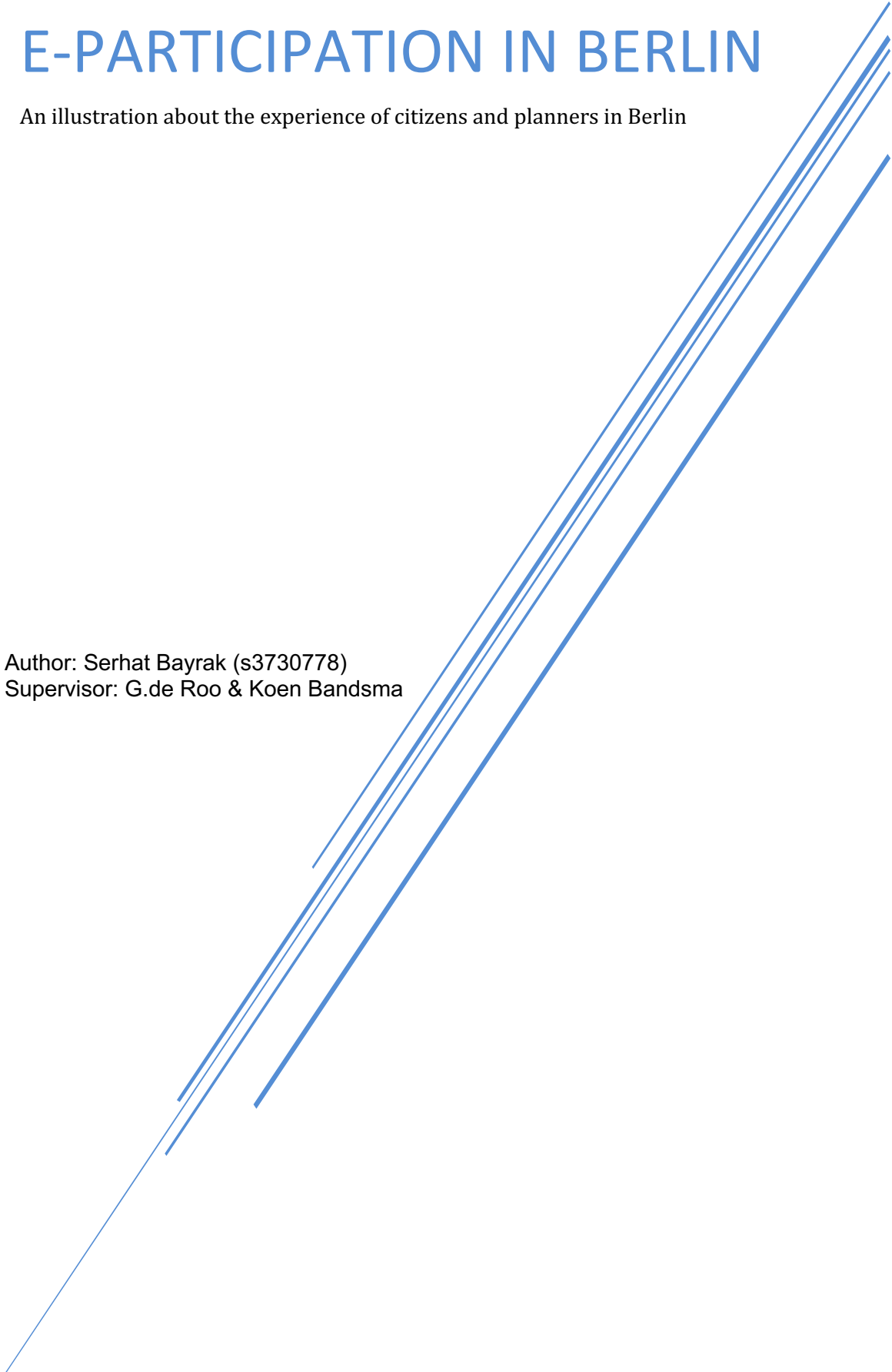


E-PARTICIPATION IN BERLIN

An illustration about the experience of citizens and planners in Berlin

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Colophon

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Abstract

German planning practice envisages two moments in planning where the citizen is included and asked to give his input. Participation gains more relevance as Berlin grows as a city and becomes more attractive to migration flows. Simultaneously, digitalisation starts to find its way into planning practice, which lead to the release of meinBerlin.de by the Senate. This tool is seen as the primary tool for e-Participation for inner-city transformation processes (of Berlin), intending to increase citizens' participation and increase diversity.

However, this research aimed to understand how and to what extent the experience of citizens and planners differ with eParticipation. Therefore, this study used semi-structured interviews to collect data and a diverse group of citizens were contacted to illustrate a broader picture.

Additionally, several traditional and digital planning experts were contacted.

This research proves the theory that the primary motivation for citizens participation in spatial proximity and interest in projects. Nevertheless, both parties are satisfied with the tool, but the tool is still under construction and has certain limitations and things to improve.

One major issue, stated by both parties, is the awareness of the tool among citizens, which is still low and needs more advertisement by the city of Berlin.

Future studies of citizen participation and e-Participation should understand how marginalised groups can be included more and affect actual planning practices.

Keywords: e-Participation, Berlin, urban planning, housing

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1. Introduction

A city is a dynamic place and its urban planning affects the living conditions of its inhabitants. Therefore most western democracies require participation by law. Public participation plays an essential role in urban planning and is built on the idea that citizens are involved in the decision-making process (Donders et al., 2014) According to van Coenen et al. (2001), public participation fails if citizens do not take part or are dissatisfied with the process. Public participation is seen as an important part of the processes in urban planning (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). The BauGB is the jurisdictional foundation for German participation and is the basis of German land-use planning. The federal building law (ger: BauGesetzbuch) requires a multi-stage assessment of public and private interests to create a democratically decided, legally secure and lasting plan (GER: Bebauungsplan, NL: Bestemmingsplan, UK: Local Land-use Plan). According to §3 II BauGB (BauGesetzbuch), it is obligatory to carry out participation methods and inform about deadlines.

This jurisdiction is needed, as an essential element in serving the population of any democracy is to understand their needs and perception (European Commission, 2007). Currently, traditional methods, such as town hall meetings and newspapers, are decreasing in popularity. With the rise of the World Wide Web and the utilization of Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT), e-Participation is seen as a complementary tool alternative (Evans and Yen, 2006 & Ferguson, 2006). eParticipation transfers the offline channels into an online environment to provide easily accessible access to the planning process (Cap Gemini, 2007). Additional reasons why eParticipation is operated are to increase the representativity, and the input from citizens and that interactive participation should provide added value to the quality and support of the project (Central Office of Information, 2009 & Boon, 2009).

An example of this process is filling out an electronic form for a new housing project in the inner city of Berlin versus the meeting in the town hall during a proposed time by the municipality or organizing planning office (Boon, 2009). As this tool is relatively new, all stakeholders are learning how to display and choose the right channel. Nevertheless, the city of Berlin introduced the tool meinBerlin.de, the most common eParticipation tool for all ongoing projects. On meinBerlin.de, citizens can find all ongoing projects for Berlin, where they can give comments, share their ideas, discuss with other citizens, and ask questions (Gaebler, 2021). The degree of engagement changes from project to project, as there is no clear guideline. Some projects have a comment section, while some projects only inform about a project, depending on the project realisation phase. This concept of eParticipation focuses on all the phases of the planning process. As the themes are vast, covering from new housing projects to mobility and cultural themes, this research will only focus on housing projects of the inner-city of Berlin.

This focus, in particular, is based on the current heated debates about Berlin's heated housing market. Daily, the news report about unaffordable housing in the city centre (Schönball, 2020), rising prices in the surrounding areas (Kaiser, 2019), and new buildings, which suit the needs of investors and large corporations buying up the stock (Kistler, 2020). As previously mentioned, the current jurisdiction includes citizen participation during housing projects.

1.1. Background and Relevance

As a multicultural city, Berlin has always experienced migrations flows, both domestic and foreign, leading to a heterogeneous urban population along various economic, cultural, and societal dimensions and now functions as a “commonplace diversity” (Wessendorf, 2013, p. 40). With the German multi-stage level planning practice being unable to provide insight into how diverse citizens can be integrated in the urban transformation process (Barwick and Beaman, 2019), eParticipation presents an opportunity for improving the processes and interaction services with citizens among various planning parties (Leenaerts, 2009). As the role of eParticipation requires special attention to how participation can be set up in a comfortable and appropriate way for the citizen (Shipley & Utz, 2012), it is important to gather more data on the understanding of eParticipation and its function in a complex social and political environment (Macintosh et al., 2009).

1.2. Research Question

This study investigates the current citizen participation and its effect on inner-city projects of Berlin.

The aim is to understand how e-Participation can influence citizen participation, as this digital trend can significantly impact Berlins’ citizens.

The main research question is:

“How and to what extent does the experience of eParticipation with regard to housing projects differ between citizens and planning experts?”

SQ1 - Which factors affect citizen e-Participation?

SQ2 - What is the role of citizens in housing projects?

SQ3 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of eParticipation?

1.3. Reading Guide

This research follows the subsequent structure: Chapter two describes and discusses the core concepts on participation and the associated theoretical framework. Chapter three elaborates the methodology used to respond to the research question, including the data analysis workflow. Results are presented and analysed in chapter four, based on several housing projects in the inner city of Berlin. Chapter five will then provide the answers to the research and sub-questions and recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following chapter builds the theoretical foundation for this research. Starting with participation theory and why it is essential for the decision-making process. Communicative rationality and its influence on the debate. A short overview of Arnstein's Ladder, to rank the role of the citizens in the later stages of this research. Following a brief description about collaborative planning and ending with the focus of this research, Factors, Advantages and Disadvantages of eParticipation to answer how planners and citizens experience this tool in Berlin.

2.1. Participation theory

The participation of citizens in any kind of political event is not a matter of course but linked to certain preconditions. The state must meet the institutional conditions for citizens' participation in political and planning decisions. In particular, democratically constituted communities need to grant their citizens a wide range of opportunities for participation (Biehl, 2005). Participation seeks to guarantee that parties, such as citizens and public interest groups in the context of development plan procedures, are included in the decision-making process of politics and administration (Rosenbrock & Hartung, 2011). At the same time, citizens must be willing to get involved in political and planning events, which vary in intensity depending on the time, place and form of participation.

Although seen as a decision-making adjunct, the concept of participation is a fundamental element of planning and decision-making (Lane, 2005). While Rogers and Cohen (1995) as well as Dryzek (2000) warn about a declining quality of democracy in matured democracies, Gaventa (2007) highlights declining patterns of citizen participation in the processes of representative democracy. This trend is critical, as participation is an essential element of the democratic planning process, as the discourse reflects the priority and interest of all significant groups (Forestry Department, 1998).

As this research focuses on Berlin, the prescribed legal basis was used (BauGb, 2004). This legal basis leads to two kinds of participation methods; formal and informal participation (BauGb, 2004). The difference between formal and informal participation is the degree of formalisation and the binding nature of the results. Procedures designs have to fulfil the needs and requirements of the respective planning subject (Hatzelhoffer et al., 2010).

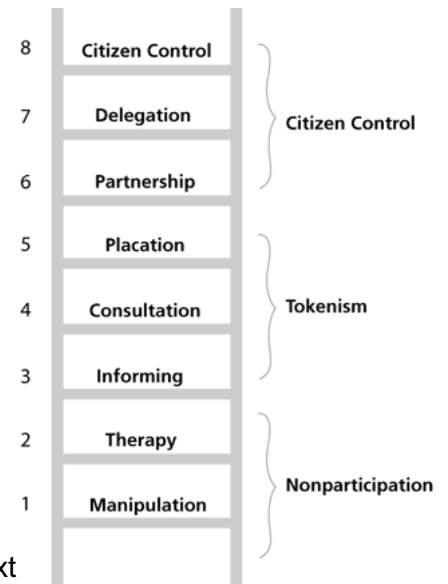
2.2. Communicative rationality

The communicative action theory became a dominant debate in the late 80s (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Innes, 1995; Hillier, 2002; Fathejali, 2017). The previous scientific-rational thinking relied on the usage of scientific knowledge; according to Hillier (2002), the primary function of public participation within this scientific-rational domain is limited as a tool for legitimising the planner's decisions. Although Richardson (1996) and Healey (1993) state that planners should take a central role in the communicative planning process, there should be left room for citizens to express their views and opinions freely. Habermas (1985) states that decisions are made through dialogue and communication, guaranteeing a safe space where consensus can be built on trust and not influenced by the power structure. Leading to a change

in approach based on Habermas Theory of “*communicative action*”. Hillier (2002) underlines this change in urban planning practices towards a moderation between different stakeholders; talking with and listening to citizens’ views and opinions.

2.3. Arnstein’s Ladder

According to Arnstein’s Ladder (1969), there are eight degrees to citizen participation. Starting with “Manipulation” and “Therapy”. Both are non-participative, and the aim is to educate citizens. This proposed plan is the most suitable, and the primary goal of participation is to achieve public support. Steps 3, 4 and 5 are labelled as Tokenism. Step 3 (“Informing”) is seen as the first legitimate step of participation but is still defined through a one-way flow of information. Following step 4, “Consultation”, where different forms of communication and participation are included. This is, according to Arnstein, still seen as a “window dressing ritual” (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). The following “placation” is step 5, which creates committees and allows citizens to advise or plan. The last three steps start with “Partnership” and occur when citizens can negotiate with other stakeholders. According to Arnstein, at this rung, the power is redistributed and two-sided. Once, formal institutions give up at least some degree of control away. The Last step “Citizen Control”, is reached when citizens can govern and are in complete charge of policy shaping or decide fully on spatial outcomes in the context of this research.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)

Figure 1: Arnsteins Ladder (1969)

2.4. Collaborative Planning

This research focuses on collaborative planning, based on Habermas theory of communicative actions. Planning should be more collaborative and should incorporate citizens more and offer a format of formal and informal ways of influencing action in the public arena (Fathejali, 2017). Collaborative planning highlights the benefits of citizen participation in strengthening public support for policy initiatives, identifying previously unforeseen concerns and recognising potential conflicts (Healey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 1999). It is broadly recognized that planning processes are context-dependent (de Roo & Voogd, 2019).

2.5. eParticipation

Hacker and van Dijk (2000) define eParticipation as “a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT as an addition, not a replacement, for traditional political practices” (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000, p.1). Traditional participation methods have their limitations indeed. Furthermore, the emergence of the Internet and ICTs have also affected the transformation of cities and urban societies and will affect the citizens’ role in urban planning (Corallo et al., 2018). New forms of citizen participation, in particular, eParticipation, are becoming the new norm (Aichholzer & Rose, 2019).

Aitken (2014) and Stratigea et al. (2015) state that e-Participation can strengthen and improve public participation. In addition, Falco (2019) states, current citizen participation is in the hands of the governmental bodies and needs to be strengthened. Local authorities decide about the location and time of participation, and if the project is not regarded as “important”, participation can be skipped. Therefore eParticipation is a valuable method for reducing spatial and temporal limitations and allows the opportunity to gain information anytime and anywhere (Höffken & Streich, 2011; Bonn, 2010; Aichholzer & Rose, 2019), providing a chance to deliver a more meaningful and independent participatory process (Falco, 2019). Due to its **accessibility**, it potentially offers the opportunity to include a higher number of interest groups, enhancing interaction and transparency of the planning process (Stratigea et al. 2015). Lefevre (2014) argues that the needs of the citizens need to be included in the decision-making process. Accessibility regarding language is another crucial aspect, especially in a multicultural city such as Berlin (Ali et al. 2009). eParticipation has the ability to provide alternative languages (Conroy & Cowley, 2005), increase **inclusion** (Le Blanc 2020) and benefit marginalised groups (Rottinghaus & Escher, 2020) as traditional methods offer a threat to the discourse by including only a one-sided milieu while excluding non-participating groups (McLaren & Agyenan, 2019, Provoost, 2013). **Transparency** can be reached through the use of open data and the public nature of the discussion (Sivarajah et al., 2015). Engagement can be stimulated by using multimodal use of text, visuals, and audio to attract technological affine individuals (Tunsek, 2007). This also leads to an improvement of communication between planning parties and citizens (Le Blanc, 2020) or other forms of engagement (Missingham, 2011).

Nevertheless, eParticipation also has its limitations. Henke et al. (2012) warn that this “electronic and digitalisation trend” will cause social injustice, as the level of education is an indicator for technological competence (Aichholzer & Rose, 2019; Loukis & Wimmer, 2012) and, therefore, will be a factor influencing participation levels. These challenges, such as the digital divide (Porwol et al., 2012; Mossberger et al., 2003, 2007) and data privacy (Diamantopoulou et al., 2020) mentioned in the literature, should be treated cautiously. From an institutional perspective, there has to be a guarantee that the data stays the citizen’s property, and its usage should be as transparent as possible (Streitz, 2019).

Limitations of eParticipation for the planning parties are financial (Viborg Andersen et al. 2007) and personnel expenditure, regarding having a sufficient number of skilled personnel (Bonn, 2010; Omar et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the Le Blanc (2020) sees the decreasing costs for providing information electronically, and the previously mentioned asynchronous and accessibility advantages also minimise the time and expenses for personal involvement. Critique points on increased participation are, if participation is even worth the effort (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004) and the slowing down of the process and increasing workload for planners (Pawlowska & Staniewska, 2014).

eParticipation also plays a vital role in constructing the discourse (Rose et al. 2007; et al. Le Blanc, 2020) and sharing the responsibility of decisions as a chance of added value to spatial outcomes (Stratigea et al., 2015).

Concluding, eParticipation can be a helpful tool and will gain more relevance the further the development goes and the awareness and interest amongst citizens rise to participate. This process will take its time, as experience shows that progress in the field of planning and e-Participation will be a long process (Klostermann, 2014).

2.6. Conceptual Model

Based on the previously done literature review, this research came up with the conceptual model proposed in figure 2. The factors for influencing eParticipation experience are separated between citizens and planners, who are seen in the context of housing projects. These form the experience of eParticipation.

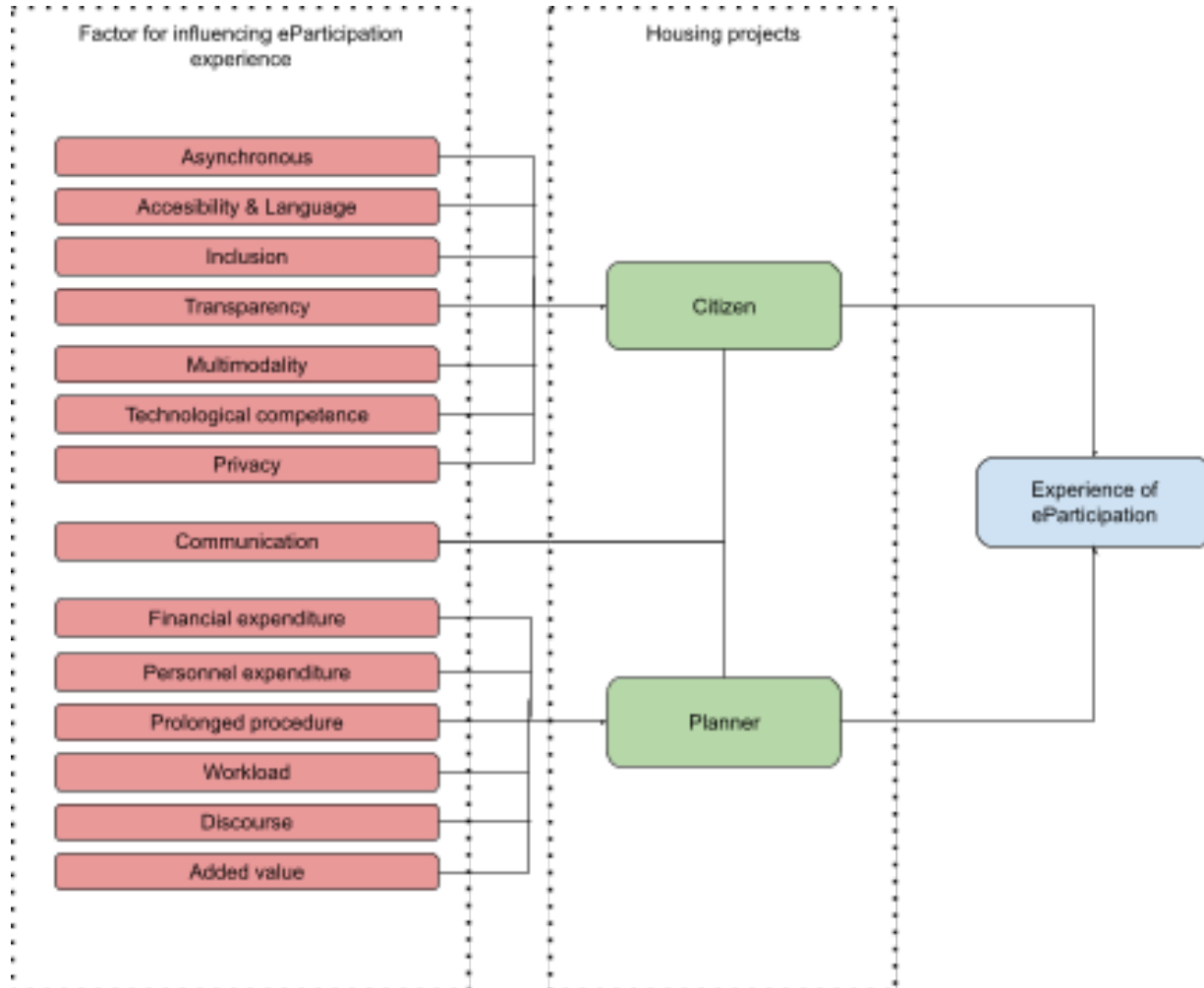


Fig 2: proposed conceptual model (Author, 2021)

3. Methodology

This research applies a mixed-methods approach; a literature review is combined with semi-structured interviews. In figure 3, an overview of the used methods in relation to the research questions is shown.

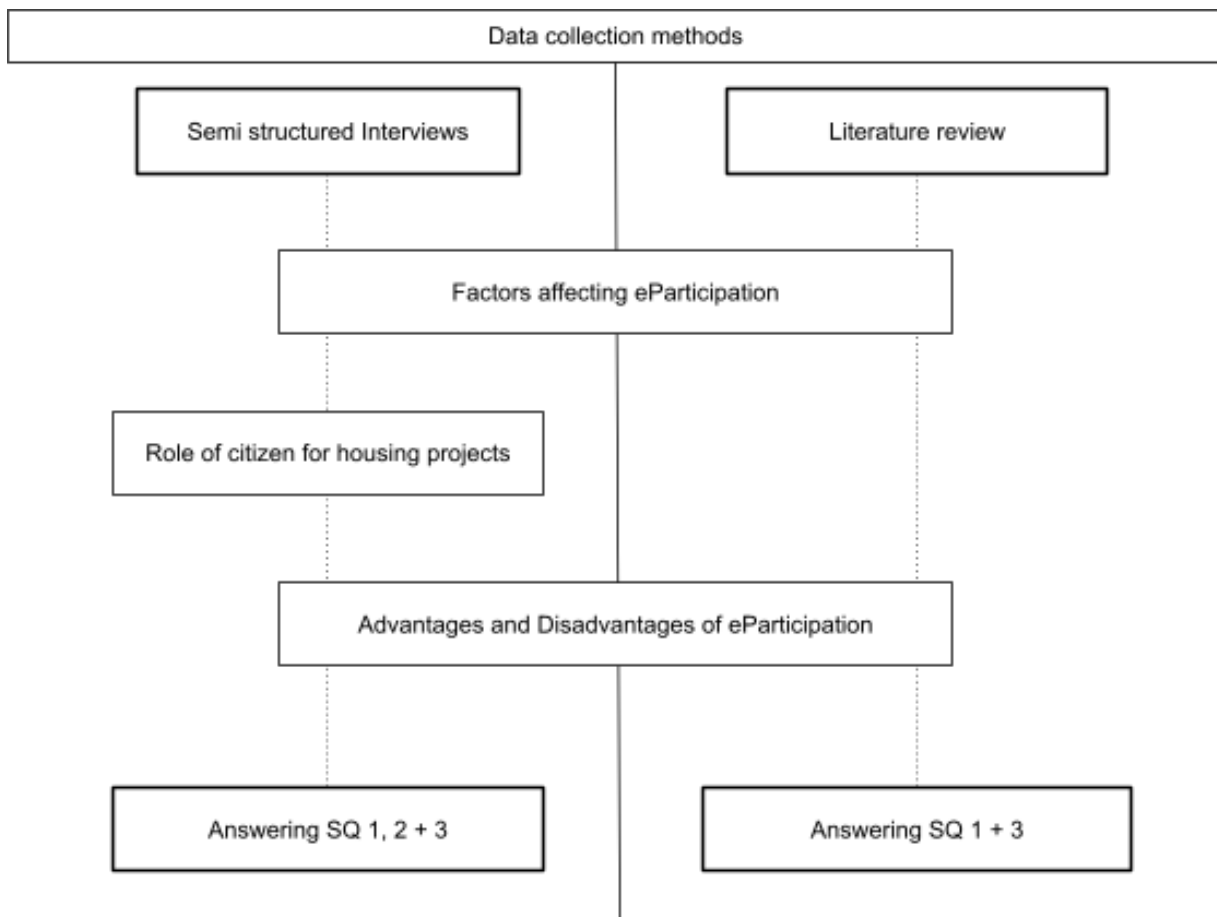


Figure 3: Data collection methods (Author, 2021)

3.1. Literature review

A literature review was conducted to define relevant concepts and narrow the research scope. In addition, the literature review helped to answer sub-questions 1 and 3 and provided input for the semi-structured interviews. According to Clifford et al. (2016), a literature review helps position the findings in a larger theoretical context.

Search engines, such as “Google Scholar” and “SmartCat” were used to find relevant literature. This helps to gain a broader understanding of the topic. As this research focuses on Berlin, the literature concerns German, but also other international scientific literature.

3.2. Interview

The qualitative research methodology is considered a suitable method when investigating new fields of study intending to ascertain and theories prominent issues (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) or gain participants' in-depth views (Punch, 2014). According to Longhurst (2016), DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), semi-structured interviews can be encoded easier, leave more room for an open response, and the interview guide also provides a way to explore the respondents systematically. This also sharpens the focus on the desired line of questions. Therefore a quantitative research method would not be fitting to this research goal (Punch, 2014). In this research, the semi-structured interview is helpful as it helps to illustrate a better picture of the experience citizens and planners with different backgrounds have with eParticipation. The information deducted from the interviews will help to answer sub-questions 1,2 and 3.

3.3. Questionnaire Design

For the interviews, a questionnaire was designed with a mix of closed and open questions. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix. Various themes have formed the basis for the questionnaire design. The questionnaire for the citizens' interview started with the first block to understand the citizens' background, including questions regarding cultural background, connection towards Berlin and if they identify with Berlin. The second block focused on participation in general, the reasoning behind participation for housing projects and which projects were chosen. Closing with the third block, which contains questions on eParticipation. To answer the RQ and SQs, citizens were asked about the mentioned advantages and disadvantages of eParticipation and how they affect the experience.

The expert interviews were designed similar to the citizens' interview. However, as research was done previously about the expert's profile, these questions were not asked. This left more time to ask questions about the actual content. The first theme was how participation affects their routine at work and how important it is. The second block focused on the current participation paradigm with all its limitations and benefits. For the third block, a set of questions about eParticipation was created. The fourth block focuses on the theme of housing and how the communication between planners and citizens goes.

An unconventional question was asked at the end of both interviews, as the researcher asked the citizens what they would change during the current planning process. Likewise, the planners were asked what could be modified with the role of the citizen in the participation process.

3.4. Area of research and Population

For this research, the inner-city of Berlin was selected. The S-Bahn ring line of Berlin is the border within which the research was conducted. The selection of this study area is based on two factors. First, Berlin does not have an inner-city definition due to its size and polycentric build-up with different districts. Second, the inner-ring space is traditionally a reference for “inner-city” in the local language.

For the interview's, citizens with different cultural backgrounds and experience in participating offline and online were chosen. As there is no exact number in the policy papers nor the news, the actual size of the population is unknown. Nevertheless, this study illustrates a picture of the experience of citizens and relevant planners in the field.

3.5. Recruitment of Participants

As the COVID-19 pandemic was still present, the citizens were contacted via the researchers own network and the network of the contacted citizens. This snowballing effect aimed to reach second-degree connections. Additionally, to reach even more potential participants, a message has been sent in various social media groups. This strategy aimed to include specific individuals, which are regarded as representative of the diversity of Berlin. Therefore, citizens of various ages and backgrounds were selected to give an insight into the reasoning behind participating. Table 1 provides an overview of the interviewed citizens.

Overview about interviews with citizens

Interviewee	Gender	Background of citizen	Date	Online medium
Citizen 1 (C1)	Female	German	11.05.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 2 (C2)	Female	multicultural	23.03.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 3 (C3)	Male	German	22.03.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 4 (C2)	Female	German	31.03.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 5 (C5)	Male	multicultural	10.04.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 6 (C6)	Female	German	12.04.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 7 (C7)	Male	multicultural	08.04.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 8 (C8)	Male	German	05.04.2021	Google Meets
Citizen 9 (C9)	Female	multicultural	04.04-2021	Google Meets

Table 1: Overview about citizen interviews (Author, 2021)

The experts were also contacted via the researchers' network, and the previously so-called snowball effect was used here. This led to interviews with institutional stakeholder, representatives of planning offices, smart city planners and moderation experts in participation procedures. These interviews provided an insight into the institutional interest and experience with current participation in inner-city transformation processes. The inclusion of digital experts with a focus on eParticipation was also needed to provide a broader perspective about current trends. The following table 2 gives an overview of the interviewed experts.

Overview about interviews with experts

Interviewee	Gender	Profession	Date	Online Medium
Expert 1 (E1)	Male	SmartCity Planer	20.04.2021	Google Meets
Expert 2 (E2)	Female	Expert in Moderation of participation events	16.04.2021	Google Meets
Expert 3 (E3)	Male	Consultant in land-use planning	25.03.2021	Google Meets
Expert 4 (E4)	Female	Representing the senate regarding Land-use planning	09.04.2021	Google Meets
Expert 5 (E5)	Male	SmartCity Planner focusing on e-Participation	15.04.2021	Google Meets

Table 2: Overview about expert interviews (Author, 2021)

3.6. Interview process and coding

The interviews were held via Google Meets and transcribing and coding with Atlas.Ti. The dynamic of the conversation and the respondents' input led to a modification of interview questions during the interview. Based on the literature review, the deductive approach was used to code the qualitative data. Nevertheless, due to the dynamic of semi-structured interview participants mentioned content, which was not given by the theory, an inductive approach was used to create new codes. Links between the code groups were examined, and the most important themes emerged. This led to a modified code scheme. Figure 4 visualizes this process and coding approach.

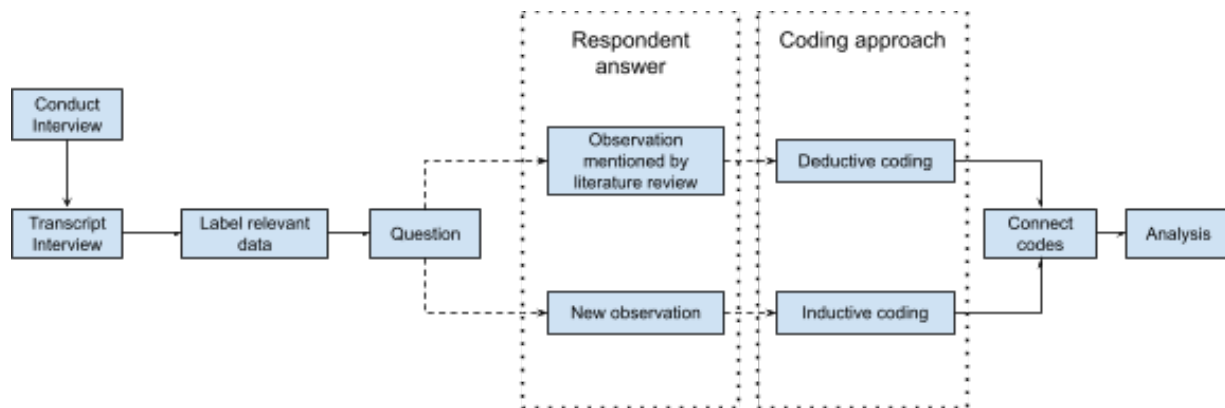


Fig. 4: Interview process and coding approach in steps (Author, 2021)

3.7. Ethical considerations

An essential factor that was reconsidered was the difference in the purpose of usage of experts and citizens. While citizens use the tool to share their opinions and ideas, planners use this tool regularly to gather this information.

This research primarily followed the ethical principles of the European Commission. “Horizon 2020 Programme - Annotated Model Grant Agreement” (EU, 2019) states that research must be carried in line with the ethical principles, obeying international, supra-national and national law. Out of the nine principles, only four are relevant for this research project, as the other five consider environmental and medical and research.

The following four ethical principles have been applied in this research:

1. Respecting human dignity and utilising by treating every participant equally, independent from his/her race, origin, religion or gender. Furthermore, participants have not been judged based on his/her answers to specific questions during the interview.
2. Ensuring honesty and transparency towards research subjects and notably getting free and informed consent by sticking to the statements listed in the informed consent
3. Protecting vulnerable persons, utilising following the social distancing measures of the Dutch and German Government and therefore contributing to the containment of the Covid-19 virus.
4. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality by not sharing personal information on participants or publishing any results in the research without anonymising them before.

In addition to the ethical principles of the European Commission, this research included the moral principles by VSNU et al. (2018). “The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice” is a code of conduct set up by several Dutch academic organisations. This research conducted under the supervision of the University of Groningen, which makes it a part of the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). This was taken into account and meant following the principles such as honesty, scrupulousness by acknowledging sources and using the best method, transparency, independence and only pursuing a scientific interest. The formulated questionnaires aimed to minimise a socially desired answer. As Holmes (2020), state the vital notion that the positionality and the researcher's worldview influence research, the outcomes and the results, was also minimised to a minimum. No assumptions about others' perspectives and worldview were made during the interviews.

To act ethically and to be transparent, interviewees were sent a consent form (see appendix 4) via email. They were formally asked whether they agreed with the interview being recorded at the beginning of the interview. This document contained agreements regarding the purpose of this research, the data process, and the interviewees' rights. This also included the right to stay anonymous and the possibility to correct the transcripts for factual inaccuracies. By signing the document, interviewees confirmed that they agreed.

3.8. Reflection

It should be noted that qualitative methods have their limitations, mainly regarding external validity (Punch, 2014). At the same time, the following results are very context-specific and generalization is difficult (Longhurst, 2016). Moreover, the sample size (N=14) is considered small, and statistical analysis would be not helpful. Nevertheless, qualitative methods can reveal new insights to reflect the *whole* reality; this type of goal requires an innumerable number of interviews with various stakeholders and citizens, which is not feasible (Punch, 2014).

4. Results

This chapter summarizes the results of the qualitative interviews with citizens and planners. The outcomes are connected by the main concepts of this research. Not all statements from the interviews could be backed up by the academic literature due to the novelty of this research.

4.1. SQ1: Factors for citizen participation

“Ich interessiere mich für meinen Bezirk”

“I am interested in my neighbourhood.”
Citizen 1 (female, german, 27 years)

This statement was given by C1 and in other forms by other citizens as well. Spatial proximity is a significant factor to encourage citizens to participate. All citizens also stated this; they do care about their neighbourhood, the close spatial environment. They fancy a healthy and sustainable neighbourhood. As expected, this interest fades with more distant projects. The experts (E2, E3 and E4) confirm this factor and add that this is sometimes not helpful, as Citizens are biased and reject major change in their immediate environment. Critique on housing is mostly based on the fear of increased neighbourhood population and more traffic-polluted streets. Spatial proximity also influences affection, which was stated by all citizens, once a project affects their everyday life, citizens tend to participate.

Another major factor is pure interest by citizens towards any urban transformation subject, which was mentioned by all interviewees and confirmed by the experts. Citizens showed throughout the subjects their interest in the project. Fundamentally, spatial proximity is given. E2, E3 and E4 sadly noted, that relevant target groups for housing projects are never participating. E4 defines this group as a group of citizens, which do not live in Berlin yet, live in a

different district, are not born yet or are not aware that they will move away. Closing this participation gap is difficult according to the experts, because it is hard to pin point them.

According to E1, E4 and E5, citizens will always complain about something, based on an emotional and biased view on the subject. The so-called "*Marktschreier*" (E5, tends to be loud and pushy in offline meetings but seemed to have found a polite tone in the online environment. E1, E2 and E3 also state that this level of complaints gets dismantled once the dialogue starts and the information is fully transparently delivered.

4.2. SQ2: Role of citizen in housing projects

According to E3, "citizen participation for inner-city housing projects is illusory", as the impact on the outcome is limited. The representative of the Senate goes in line with this statement. E4 also added that the discourse is primarily one-sided, due to the lack of inclusion of particular groups, especially the marginalised groups of Berlin and non-marginalized groups, which do not show any interest. The declining patterns of citizen participation in the process, stated by Gaventa (2007).

Nonetheless, the experts are in line with the fact that during participation process for housing projects, the active participation comes from the citizens, which already show spatial proximity and are primarily biased because they do not see a necessity for new housing. E4 highlights the fact that citizens, who need this housing, are never participating. However, their voices and opinions are needed the most. E2 further states that these citizens are technically no citizens yet, as they are either not born yet or do not live in Berlin. Housing is and will always be multi-generational.

As E3 states, for specific housing projects, especially those with a higher magnitude, the biased participation by local citizens cannot be taken into account and the particular state and national interest of Berlin is more important. The overall goal and outcome are set for these projects, and nuances of these projects are open for debate. This undermines the role of the citizen and shows that, for some projects, its the so-called "*window dressing ritual*" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 219). This statement underlines the view of C6, C7, C8 and C9 that "*they will construct it anyway; I mean, it is important for the city, but then again, why are you asking us if we have no impact?*" (statement of C6).

Additionally, E2 stated that participation has its limitations, as, after "30 participants, every other participant does not bring new insights" due to the fact of low expertise in combination with a biased opinion.

Ignoring the interest of citizens goes against the theory of Habermas (1985), that decisions should be made through dialogue and communication. This neglect of consensus can lead to the mentioned "declining participation patterns" by Gaventa (2017). The citizens and the expert underlined that the participation numbers are low in the traditional participation methods and not high enough with the online tools. Low participation leads to institutional disregard, which then weakens the role of the citizen. According to E4, the offline meetings are less visited and always by the same milieu, leading to tiredness by the institutions. Especially when the projects start, and citizens complain about these projects. This non-participation needs to be avoided; E2 and E4, E5, state that all housing projects should include a pre-participation step. Citizens are included from the start and can influence the outcome. This also goes in line with Hiller (2002),

that the moderation between stakeholders, talking with and listening to citizens views and opinions is necessary.

4.3. SQ3: Advantages and disadvantages for citizens and planners

e-Participation is a fundamental tool to reach out to more citizens. The asynchronous nature of eParticipation also enables citizens to participate, even if they are not directly affected by the housing projects (Hacker and Dijk, 2000). E1 and E5 state that the meinBerlin.de tool is a good start, but there are more tools to reach a broader audience and increase awareness about the necessity of housing.

This underlines Aitken (2014) and Stratigea et al. (2015), which stated that eParticipation can strengthen and improve public participation. Presence and time will be obsolete to a certain degree (Hacker and van Dijk, 2000), enabling the opportunity for eParticipation to create a slight interest in projects with further distance. One citizen stated that participating in cultural projects in other districts of Berlin is now more likely, due to eParticipation. They were supporting other citizens with their input now. This confirms the theory by Höffken & Streich, 2011, Bonn, 2010 and Aichholzer & Rose, 2019. This also increases the independent participatory process, mentioned by Falco (2019).

Accessibility & language were significant differences amongst the citizens. Simultaneously, the respondents with a multicultural background stated that they struggled with the language or could see their friends and family members struggle with this type of language; mono-cultural participants did not experience this problem. They could increase the barrier for different groups. Here a collaborative language strategy for eParticipation is still missing (Ali et al., 2009). All experts underlined this view, as they noticed it is challenging to include mono-cultural Germans with low academic background and marginalized groups, and eParticipation alone will not solve this problem.

According to E4, the inclusion of marginalized groups and not interested citizens seems a difficult task to manage. As Biehl (2005) stated, the institutional authorities need to prepare a welcoming setting to participate, location and time-wise. According to LeFevre (2014) it is important to consider the needs of all citizens in this respect and to organize the participation process as inclusive as possible.

E1 and E2 state that no one forces citizens to participate. The tool meinBerlin.de has its limitations here. Although it provides a broader service and option to participate, the language barrier, previously mentioned, still affects the inclusion and the diversity of participants. E2, E3, E4 and E5 state that the average participating citizen is male, German, 45 years of age or older and has an academic background. McLaren & Agyenan (2019) and Provoost (2013) state that a one-sided milieu could take over the debate; therefore, participation amongst marginalized groups must be strengthened (Rottinghaus & Escher, 2020).

E1 and E2 highlight that direct physical contact is the best way of moving towards the citizens and increase inclusion. This goes in line with the methods of E2, which states that eParticipation is a good option, but if you want to increase inclusion, you need to go to schools and raise awareness early on.

“Ein siebenjähriges Kind, was sieht, dass ein Spielplatz gebaut wurde, nachdem es partizipiert hat wird in der Zukunft wieder partizipieren”

“A seven-year-old boy, which participated once and saw that the playground is indeed built, will never forget this experience and most likely participate again.”

Expert 2 (expert in moderation of participation events)

The lack of communication with the planning party also affects the level of transparency according to the citizens. When asked how they rate the transparency, seven out of nine citizens rated that most of the projects they participated in or took a look at were untransparent.

C3 even stated, “*there is never full transparency, as they never tell us everything.*” This can be fixed through the use of open data and more public discussions, according to Sivarajah et al. (2015). C4 proposed that it could have been made more evident through text and pictures to whom those projects are planned.

Transparency is seen as critical by citizens, but planners state that the information level is high, and citizens are getting informed. The expert state again that e-Participation is a reliable tool to increase information among citizens and gain more insight into the interest of citizens. However, direct contact plays a crucial role in planning.

When asked about the usage of text, pictures, and videos, citizens noted that for particular projects, text, pictures and videos highly differ from other projects. E4 and other experts stated that the input of data and information is office dependent, and the senate does not interfere. Planners do the extra work, and therefore citizens notice a higher usage of visuals and information for some projects, which attracts technological affine citizens (Tunsek, 2007).

All experts stated that eParticipation itself, also has its limits, as it will only reach citizens, which have a certain degree of digital competence. This may lead to the proposed digital divide by Porwol et al. (2012) and Mossberger et al. (2003, 2007).

The theory by Hacker and van Dijk (2000) states that e-Participation will trigger a higher participation rate due to the digital environment’s anonymity and privacy. Most citizens stated that they felt anonymous during the discourse, except for signature petitions; there was no difference to traditional participation methods, as they never ask for names. Some even used fake emails or spam emails to log in to the tool. While the Irvin & Stansbury (2004) and Pawlowska & Staniewska (2014) state that the use of eParticipation would lower the quality of discourse and slow down the process, it is obsolete and does not reflect reality. Thus, this might be a trend on particular social media platforms, thus not accounting for planning-related subjects. Primarily, previously mentioned spatial proximity, interest and complaints motivated citizens to participate. Therefore, a response by the relevant authorities is appreciated; a misuse would not lead anywhere. A factor that was not taken seriously, and no citizen mentioned, are privacy concerns. An aspect mentioned by Diamantopoulou et al. (2020). Most of the citizens used their spam emails or just purely did not mind. The view on citizen data property by Streitz (2019) did not affect any decision by the citizens.

All citizens rated the lack of instant communication with the planning party as a significant disadvantage compared to traditional participation methods. Direct contact and communication during physical meetings lead to more insight and answered questions; the process of writing an email or asking a question in the digital environment includes a delay. “*Sometimes the delay*

can be for years” as E3 and E4 stated that housing projects are in a planning process for sometimes +10 years. This is relevant, as the statements given by the citizens are collected and distributed to the planners in one go. Evaluating these statements and answering questions, if not asked directly, can sometimes take longer than expected. The experts agree that e-Participation is a complementary tool, and physical discussion would lead to a more direct outcome.

According to all experts, participation always means more work and higher financial expenditure. The ability to provide skilled personnel is regarded as not significantly different from traditional methods. The results are in line with the literature (Andersen et al. 2007; Bonn, 2010 and Omar et al., 2014). The fact that decreasing costs for providing information electronically (Le Blanc 2020), and previously mentioned asynchronous and accessibility advantages for planners, lead to a high appreciation of eParticipation. The critique of Irvin & Stansbury (2004) if participation is even worth the effort is rejected by all experts, as there are countless examples of projects, which did not include citizen participation or had low participation levels due to low awareness. After some projects were finalized, citizens raised their voice afterwards and showed their disaffection.

“Ein guter Planer, weiß das die eingegangenen Meinungen nicht die ganze Gesellschaft widerspiegelt. Genauso, weiß aber auch ein guter Planer, dass er soviele Meinungen wie möglich einholen sollte.”

"A good planner knows that the opinions received do not reflect the whole society. In the same way, a good planner knows that he should gather as many opinions as possible."

Expert 3 (Consultant in land-use planning)

E3 also states that the extra work that needs to be done. An interesting statement by E3 is that *“Participation is extra work, not only for the planners, citizens need to be present as well and do their work then”*. Which is also seen by C4 and C5.

According to Pawlowska & Staniewska (2014) eParticipation would slow down the process, but none of the experts confirmed this. Here again, the consensus is that a high participation rate from the beginning with the help of eParticipation can make a project more efficient in the long run. All planners go in line with the work of Habermas (1985), as the communicative approach is more helpful than top-down planning and the pure exclusion of citizens. eParticipation can play a vital role in constructing the discourse (Rose et al. 2007; et al. Le Blanc, 2020) and sharing the responsibility of decisions, is also highly appreciated by the planners, as in some cases it adds value to the discussion and spatial outcomes. Nevertheless, experts also stated, that to a certain degree experts are present for a reason in the decision-making process and this means collaboration and communication are important actions to interact in the public arena.

Resuming the sub questions, it can be stated that this research mostly confirmed the theoretical foundation. Certain aspects, as motivational factors for participation, such as spatial proximity, interest, affection and criticism, are the main drivers for participation. This did not change with eParticipation. The role of the citizen in Berlin, is also understandable. Depending on the magnitude of the project, experts will have control, while local citizens will need to accept that. Nevertheless, the role of the citizens, which do not participate, but are highly in need of housing could clarify the picture and show that there are also citizens who are positive amongst housing projects in their close environment. Advantages and disadvantages of eParticipation are mostly

rated similar between citizens and planners. Both parties stated that the tool offers a high-quality experience and is inviting to participate again (citizens) and use it for daily work (planners), but the feedback regarding language, overview and transparency showed room for improvement.

5. Conclusion

Overall, citizens and planners appreciate the tool created by the senate. The experience can be improved, but for a start, it fulfils its purpose. The discourse did not lose on quality; the workload for planners is similar to previous years, as participation always meant more work.

In general, the experience between citizens and planners does not differ. The tool provides a wide range of opportunity (Biehl, 2005) for citizens and planners to use this tool. The interest of both interest groups is included in the development plan procedures, although some projects, in fact, have a higher magnitude and therefore local interests cannot be included. Nevertheless, participation and therefore eParticipation is seen as a fundamental element for planning (Lane, 2005). Both parties showed that the experience is improvable and declining participation patterns need to be prevented (Gaventa, 2007). Planners see their central role in the communicative planning process (Richardson, 1996 and Healey, 1993) and using eParticipation helps to include even more citizens. Citizens also appreciate the communication possibilities with eParticipation, but state indeed the traditional method is more direct and time-saving in case of questions. eParticipation allows to move up Arnsteins Ladder (1965), away from only being informed and having this only “window dressing rituals” (Arnstein, 1969, p.219) towards a more placation role. This collaborative environment shows a certain appreciation between citizens and planners and creates a better experience with eParticipation. Both parties are profiting from this experience, which then improves the discourse. Both parties highlight the fact, that participation without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions (Hacker and van Dijk, 200), is a major influence for improving the experience of eParticipation. The accessibility for digital affine citizens is also improving the experience (Stratigea et al., 2015), while planners, after being confronted with the tool, are able to reduce costs for financial and personnel expenditure, which again improves the experience. Citizens appreciate anonymity (Diamantopoulou et al., 2020). They also respect the discourse (Rose et al. 2007; et al.; Le Blanc, 2020).

All in all, it can be stated, that the first step to improving participation in Berlin was a success. The experience of citizens and planners is positive, but still has room for improvement. Therefore, the process of improving participation and making the experience of eParticipation even better is not finished.

This research shows that the literature’s primary motivation goes in line with the outcomes of the interviewee. The relatively new e-Participation meinBerlin.de tool lacks representation in the literature. Therefore, this research was the first step to understand the actual impact.

Limitations and Further Directions

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was neither possible to conduct the interviews in person nor desirable to ask people on the street in person. To gain more insights than the close network of the researcher, social media groups were used to gather contacts. The aim was to get a broader

audience with different cultural backgrounds and belonging to Berlin and age groups. Still, the low number of interviewees makes it impossible to draw firm conclusions.

Contacting the experts was done through the researchers own network and contacting relevant companies in the field. A major theoretical and practical limitation is that there is no comparison between same projects, as projects are always context-dependent. Therefore, the actual impact of participation on urban transformation projects is not quantifiable.

Nevertheless, the qualitative design of this interview enabled the research to gain a deeper understanding of how citizens and planners experience e-Participation. This investigation can help stimulate further research on the potential of digitalisation practices and the associated benefits of shifting participatory tools into a more accessible environment.

For further research, it will be interesting to see how inclusion is continuing. Are marginalised groups safer in the digital space, and therefore are they able to participate better? The new wave of digital affine planners and citizens also contributed ideas for improvement, which needs consideration. The traditional participation process is host to one milieu, and that needs to change.

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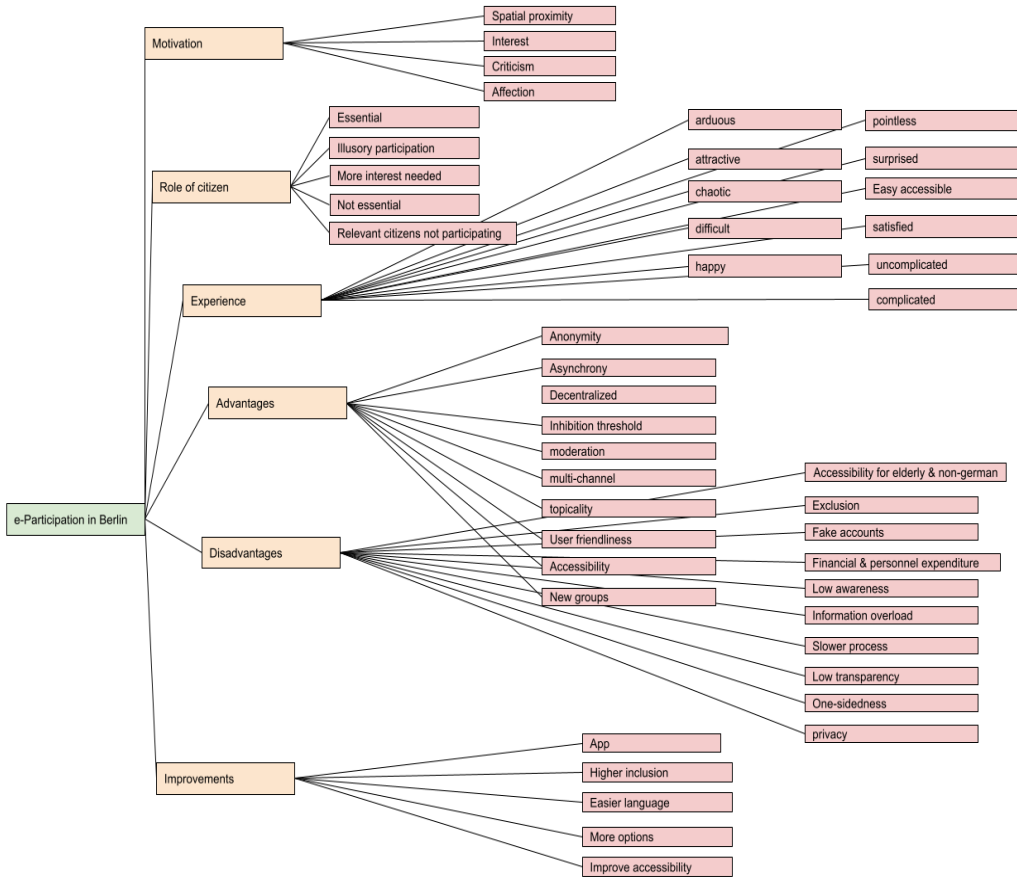
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Appendix

Atlas.Ti Report

Code tree



Interview questionnaire for citizen

Einleitung

Mein Name ist Serhat Bayrak. Ich möchte mich erstmal herzlich bedanken, dass Sie sich Zeit genommen haben mit mir über dieses Thema zu reden. Ich werde erstmal kurz erzählen was ich mache. Ich schreibe im Rahmen meiner Bachelorarbeit an der Universität Groningen meine Abschlussarbeit über ePartizipation und seine Anwendbarkeit für Berlinern. Berliner in diesem Kontext bezieht sich auf

- Menschen die hier geboren sind und noch hier leben
- Menschen, die hier aus anderen Gründen hergezogen sind
- Menschen mit und ohne Migrationshintergrund

Es würde die Auswertung des Interviews erleichtern, wenn ich es aufnehmen könnte. Wäre das für Sie in Ordnung? Die Auswertung erfolgt selbstverständlich anonym.

Sie können das Interview jederzeit abbrechen.

- Können sie bisschen was über sich erzählen
- Woher kommen Sie?
- Was ist ihr kultureller Hintergrund?
- Wie lange leben Sie schon in Berlin?
- Wieso sind sie nach Berlin gezogen?
- Was gefällt ihnen an Berlin?
- Was machen sie beruflich?

identifizieren sie sich mit Berlin?

Partizipation

- Haben sie jemals partizipiert?
- Ja: Warum haben sie partizipiert?
- Denken Sie, dass ihre Interessen ernst genommen wurden?
- Welches Projekt war es?
- Wie haben sie teilgenommen?
- Falls, nein, nie teilgenommen: Warum haben sie nie teilgenommen?

E-Partizipation

Die Stadt Berlin hat ein Service aufgestellt, in dem Bürger Berlins online ihre Meinung zu Projekten abgeben können.

- Haben Sie schon einmal E-Partizipation genutzt?

Noch nie benutzt: was können sie sich darunter vorstellen.

- Wie haben Sie E-Partizipation erlebt?
- Was sind die Vorteile von E-Partizipation für Sie?

Vorteile: wenn nicht genannt

Transparenz

Anonymität

Asynchronität = die Möglichkeit der Teilnahme, unabhängig von Ort und Zeit

Unterschied in der Hemmschwelle

multifunktionaler Einsatz von Text, Videos, Bildern

Zugänglichkeit für Junge

- Welche Nachteile sehen sie in der ePartizipation?

Nachteile: wenn nicht genannt

- Datenschutz
- Fake Accounts
- Wahrung der Privatsphäre und Anonymität
- Zugänglichkeit Ausschluss von älteren Menschen?
- erhöhte Beteiligung verlangsamt den Prozess
- fehlende Kommunikationsfähigkeit der planenden Partei
- negative Erfahrungen können dazu führen, dass zukünftige Beteiligung ignoriert wird

Abschließende Fragen

- Gibt es etwas, dass sie an diesem gesamten Planungsprozess ändern möchten?
- Haben sie noch Fragen?

Dann sind wir schon zum Ende des Interviews gekommen. Vielen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen. Ich werde Ihre Daten selbstverständlich vertraulich und anonym verarbeiten. Wenn Sie mögen kann ich Ihnen das Endergebnis zuschicken.

Interview questionnaire for expert

Introduction

I would like to first say thank you for taking time and participating in this interview. First, I would like to introduce myself. As part of my study Spatial Planning and Design at the University of Groningen, I need to write a Bachelor thesis about the usage of e-Participation during the planning process of Berlin by citizens and planners.

Consent

Mein Name ist Serhat Bayrak. Ich möchte mich erstmal herzlich bedanken, dass Sie sich Zeit genommen haben mit mir über dieses Thema zu reden. Ich werde erstmal kurz erzählen was ich mache. Ich schreibe im Rahmen meiner Bachelorarbeit an der Universität Groningen meine Abschlussarbeit über ePartizipation und seine Anwendbarkeit für Berlinern. Berliner in diesem Kontext bezieht sich auf

Die Aufzeichnung des Interviews wird meinen Datenanalyseprozess erleichtern. Sind Sie damit einverstanden?

Kann ich Ihren Namen in der Arbeit verwenden? Wenn das ein Problem ist, werde ich Ihre Daten vertraulich behandeln.

Sie können auch jederzeit aufhören.

Warmup

- Würden Sie sagen, dass Bürgerbeteiligung in Ihrem Arbeitsbereich eine wichtige Rolle spielt?
- Warum denken Sie, dass sich Bürger beteiligen? (muss nicht sein)
- Wie würden Sie den Einfluss von Partizipation auf den Planungsprozess einschätzen und wie wirkt sich das auf Ihre Arbeit aus?
- Gibt es irgendwelche Einschränkungen für das derzeitige Partizipationsparadigma?

Einschränkungen durch Literatur und wenn nicht erwähnt:

- Sprachbarriere für Migranten und nicht-deutschsprachige Berliner
- Erreichbarkeit

- Wie sieht es mit dem Nutzen aus?
- Wie wirkt sich eine niedrige/hohe Beteiligung auf den Planungsprozess aus?

Der Prozess der Digitalisierung findet auch langsam seinen Weg in die Planung.

- Wie erlebst du ePartizipation?
- Wie wirkt es sich auf die tatsächliche Beteiligung aus?
- Was sind die Vorteile im Vergleich zu Face-to-Face-Methoden?

Falls nicht erwähnt:

- Transparenz
- Anonym
- Asynchronität = die Chance zur Teilnahme, unabhängig von Ort und Zeit
- Unterschied in der Hemmschwelle
- multifunktionaler Einsatz von Text, Videos, Bildern
- Was sind Nachteile im Vergleich zu Face-to-Face-Methoden?

Falls nicht erwähnt:

Ausschluss von älteren Menschen?

erhöhte Beteiligung verlangsamt den Prozess

fehlende Kommunikationsfähigkeiten der Planungspartei

negative Erfahrung kann dazu führen, dass zukünftige Beteiligung ignoriert wird

- Glaubst du, dass die Nutzung dieses digitalen Tools Auswirkungen auf das Beteiligungsniveau hat im speziellen Projekte mit dem Fokus Wohnen?
- Inwieweit beeinflusst E-Partizipation die Qualität der Beteiligung?
- Wie wirkt sich E-Partizipation Ihrer Meinung nach auf die Kommunikation zwischen Bürgern und Planern im Planungsprozess aus?

Abschließende Fragen

- Gibt es etwas, was an der Rolle des Bürgers im Beteiligungsplanungsprozess verbessert werden muss?
- Gibt es etwas, das Sie hinzufügen möchten?
- Haben Sie noch Fragen?

Nochmals vielen Dank, dass Sie sich Zeit genommen haben. Informationen über den folgenden Prozess und wie Daten verwendet und weitergegeben werden können.

Consent

Einverständniserklärung zur Forschung über "die Erfahrungswerte mit E-Partizipation im Planungsprozess bei Bürgern und Planern aus Berlin"

Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Forschung erfolgt vollkommen freiwillig. Wenn Sie sich entscheiden, an dieser Forschung durch die Teilnahme an einem Interview teilzunehmen, können Sie die Teilnahme jederzeit beenden, ohne dass Sie einen Grund dafür angeben müssen.

Abhängig von Ihrer Entscheidung können die Daten, die Sie vor dem Abbruch ihrer Teilnahme angegeben haben, jedoch in dieser Studie weiterverarbeitet werden; es werden keine neuen Daten erhoben oder verwendet.

Einverständniserklärung

Durch Ihre Unterschrift geben Sie an, dass Sie mindestens 16 Jahre alt sind, dass Sie die Einverständniserklärung gelesen und verstanden haben, dass alle Ihre Fragen zu Ihrer Zufriedenheit beantwortet wurden und dass Sie sich freiwillig bereit erklären, an dieser Forschung durch die Teilnahme an einem Interview teilzunehmen. Sie erhalten eine Kopie dieser Einverständniserklärung, die von Ihnen und dem Interviewer unterschrieben wird.

Ich bin damit einverstanden, an der von Serhat Bayrak geleiteten Forschung teilzunehmen. Der Zweck dieser Einverständniserklärung ist es, die Bedingungen für meine Teilnahme an diesem Forschungsprojekt durch die Teilnahme an einem Interview festzuhalten.

1. Ich habe zufriedenstellende Informationen über das Forschungsprojekt erhalten. Der Zweck der Studie und meine Teilnahme als Interviewpartner ist mir klar.
2. Meine Teilnahme an diesem Forschungsprojekt erfolgt auf freiwilliger Basis; ich habe daher das Recht, meine Teilnahme an diesem Interview jederzeit zurückzuziehen.
3. Meine Teilnahme beinhaltet, dass ich von Forschern der Universität Groningen, Fakultät für Stadt- und Raumplanung, befragt werde. Das Interview wird +/- 20 Minuten dauern.
4. Ich erteile dem Interviewer die Erlaubnis, das Interview aufzuzeichnen (Video/Audio) und während des Interviews schriftliche Notizen zu machen. Darüber hinaus habe ich das Recht, meine Zustimmung bezüglich der Aufzeichnung und der schriftlichen Notizen jederzeit zu widerrufen.
5. Ich habe das Recht, bestimmte Fragen nicht zu beantworten, wenn ich dies nicht möchte. Dies kann ich ohne Angabe von Gründen tun.
6. Mir wurde zugesichert, dass das Forschungsteam, falls ich dies wünsche, weder meinen Namen noch andere persönliche Informationen in Berichten verwenden wird, die Informationen aus diesem Interview verwenden. Außerdem wurde mir zugesichert, dass meine Vertraulichkeit als Befragter in dieser Studie jederzeit gewährleistet ist.
7. Ich habe alle oben (1-6) genannten Punkte und Aussagen gelesen und verstanden. Alle noch offenen Fragen sind zu meiner Zufriedenheit beantwortet worden.
8. Ich habe eine Kopie dieser Einverständniserklärung erhalten, die vom Interviewer unterzeichnet wurde.

Name (Teilnehmer)

Unterschrift

Datum

Name

Unterschrift

Datum

