Online Participation from the Perspective of Local Representatives

Nadja Wilker • Political Science • Institute of Social Sciences • HHU

Research Question and Theoretical Approach

- On the local level, councilors play a crucial role as addresses, gatekeepers and representatives of citizens’ interests and demands.
- Online participation creates a new framework and new challenges for the relationship between citizens and their elected representatives.
- Online participation includes a range of top-down initiated, ICT-based practices that enable citizens to actively interact with (local) governments in decision-making processes in different policy domains by making use of different levels of participation.

What do representatives think about different scenarios of online participation and how do their role perceptions influence these attitudes?

Data Base

- Online survey among local councilors in NRW in Sept/Oct 2016
- Sample: 3,500 councilors from 76 different-sized municipalities
- Adjusted response rate: 32.8% (N = 1,148)

General Findings

- 87% of the councilors have heard about online participation before.
- One half of the councilors agrees that online participation is generally useful.
- Almost half of the councilors think that citizens do not know enough about local politics to really have a say.
- Only 20% of the councilors think that their own voters would participate online.

Empirical Analyses and Results

Explanatory Model for Councilors’ Attitudes

- Regarding oneself as an independent, ultimate decision-maker does not interfere with a councilor’s appreciation of citizen participation.
- The more important policy making is for a councilor, the more negative is his attitude towards online participation.
- Regarding control factors, neither the representatives’ age nor their own internet usage provide explanatory power, but gender and party affiliation do for some scenarios.
- Representatives’ individual role perceptions partly explain their attitudes towards online participation:

Conclusions

- Attitudes of representatives differ between scenarios of online participation: the more their own scope of action is concerned the more skeptical they are.
- Regarding control factors, neither the representatives’ age nor their own internet usage provide explanatory power, but gender and party affiliation do for some scenarios.
- Representatives’ individual role perceptions partly explain their attitudes towards online participation:

Supervision Team

- Prof. Dr. Stefan Marschall (Political Science, HHU)
- Prof. Dr. Brigitte Geißel (Political Science, University of Frankfurt)
- Prof. Dr. Michael Baermann (Sociology, HHU)
- Dr. Oliver Märker (zebralog, Agency for Crossmedial Public Participation)