

Panel 5: Involving citizens; influencing and legitimizing policy making at the local, regional, national and European level

Organizers:

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Traditionally, political participation research has focused on the unrepresentative character of citizen involvement. Not just those 'interested in' a political topic are joining demonstrations, participating in citizen consultative bodies, or reading and writing in political web chats, but mainly those interested citizens having the means to participate. Therefore, researchers have often focused on how 'bad' unequal social representation is for the representation of actual interests (can men represent the interests of women?) and on organizational means to avoid one-sided participation (does Internet lower levels of unequal representation?). This panel tries to go beyond the question of unrepresentative citizens participation by focusing on the consequences of political participation for (a) participating citizens and (b) the governing bodies citizens are trying to influence. Empirical and theoretical research questions to be addressed in the proposed papers were;

- Does participation have an effect on the opinions and attitudes of citizens?
- (How) are the results of participation incorporated in actual policies?
- (How) are representative bodies limited in their abilities to formulate policies because of citizens involvement?
- Are policies indeed more legitimized by citizens involvement?
- Are there any differences in this respect between the local, regional, national and European level?

In addition there was an interest in papers that tried to compare the effects of citizens involvement with the consequences of 'expert advice'. Are they different or similar?

Link between the panel and a sub-theme of the NIG research program

According to the schools research program, the aims of the research theme 'citizens and governance' are to describe, theorize and explain the changing relationships of citizens with those organizations that govern the public sphere. This theme therefore includes, inter alia, 'traditional' issues to do with citizen consultation and participation in public service provision (...). This is clearly the focus of our theme panel.