

Public Participation

Example: Berlin

Almuth Tharan

- 1995-1999 and again from 2001 member of Pankow district parliament in Berlin, member of the committees for environment protection, town planning and traffic&road planning
- 1999-2001 Member of Berlin City Parliament (Landtag), Speaker for Environmental Matters, Member of the Committee for city planning and Environment Protection and of the Committee for petitions
- 2003-2007 Chairwoman of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen Berlin
- Independent Institute for Environmental Concerns (UfU), Berlin. The institute is doing research and education in the field of climate protection and public participation

Berlin is a city and a state at the same time

Berlin Parliament
(Landtag)

Berlin Government
(Senate)

It is both –
a city council
and a state parliament

City and State
government
formed by a political
coalition

Berlin has 12 districts

District “Parliament”

Which is deemed “part of the district administration”

District Government (Bezirksamt)

Consisting of 6 members, formed according to a calculation method, not a political coalition.

Has the same term of office as the district parliament

Major competencies of the district

District parliament

- Supervision of and proposals for action to district government
- Deciding about the budget
- Deciding about district planning, building projects, road building projects...

Decisions can be overruled by Berlin City government “if general interests of the whole city are effected”

Members of the district government

are the political heads of the administration

Political constellations in Berlin

Berlin city government: Red-Red

Berlin district governments:

Constellations from different absolute majorities to 4-party constellations

Situation of the Greens in the Berlin District Governments

- Absolute majority in Friedrichshain/
Kreuzberg (3 MDG)
- One MDG in 6 districts
- No MDG in 5 districts

Some Forms of Public Participation

(only Berlin specific forms)

1. Referendums
2. Citizens Budgets
3. Example: District of Pankow
Special Forms of Participation in Street
planning and other matters without
formal procedures

1. Referendums

Referendums are quite a new form of participation in Berlin

Referendums on city level

On city level, there are two examples that got to voting stage so far

- 2008 to keep Tempelhof airport open
It failed.
- April 26, 2009 to abolish compulsory „ethics“ class by giving the choice to attend „religion“ instead
Result ???

Referendums on district level

Conditions are easier then on city level.

There are so far 3 examples that got to voting stage.

2 were on charging for car parking in residential streets.

- 2007 in Charlottenburg/Wilmersdorf. It was successful (and against a Green MDG)
- 2008 in Mitte – which failed due to low turnout.

Special case of district referendum:
**Greens loose against green voters
in green stronghold**

Referendum on a large development project
„Mediaspree“ on river bank

The district government (both mayor and head of building department are green) had already given the permit for the project.

The referendum – after a heated public discussion - was successful

Consequences of the result

If the projects is stopped, the district would have to compensate the developer with money the district does not have.

One way out for the district would be if the city government took over the project.

But this would mean the greens having to face the public dismay due to the result of the referendum not being put into practise.

The referendum created a Catch 22 - situation

The only way to avoid this would have been to have the referendum before giving the permit.

BUT

The public reacts when the first hole is dug – not earlier.

2. Citizens Budget

Berlin is not in the forefront of the Citizen's Budget movement.

The district of Lichtenberg has been using this instrument for some time.

Generally, most Berlin districts are on a very tight budget or don't have control over their budgets at all – so the options are very limited. This may be used as an excuse – but on the other hand, we have to be honest.

3. District of Pankow

Special Forms of Participation
in Street planning and other
matters without formal procedures

What is Pankow?

The district with the largest population in Berlin
(350 000)

Consists of fashionable Prenzlauer Berg in the inner city to former villages and suburban sprawl at the border with neighbouring Brandenburg

The Greens have one MDG responsible for road planning...

What have been the fields of most interest/necessity to involve people

1. Street rebuilding project under the law, that people living in the street have to contribute financially
2. Street rebuilding projects where people don't have to pay
3. A tree-saving initiative with mixed balance

Streets that have to be co-financed by citizens

The law was passed by city parliament without giving a procedure to involve the effected citizens

The Green MDG developed a procedure. Pankow district parliament supported the MDG. Procedure was generally successful.

This procedure was the basis for regulations for the whole of Berlin.

Two street projects where people don't have to contribute

Inner city streets, which were rundown. Houses have been renovated attracting newcomers, streets have not.

Street is to be renovated not to support car traffic, but to make the pavement barrier free and/or to make the situation safer.

The newcomers wanting to keep their run-down street because „it is so authentic“

versus

„Car lovers“ fight for having the biggest-possible parking space

Street A

Residential street under the authority of the district

Procedure after the outcry: all involved administrations,...and the citizens initiatives met for workshops.

Finally about 80% of what was agreed will be carried out.

Street B

Fashionable street with newcomers, tram, many bicycles, too little space and too many accidents.

Street is basically under city authority, but the district has to plan and build.

The ideas go from „do away with the tram and all other traffic“ to „give 90% of the pavement to parking cars“.

Procedure Street B

Similar to procedure for large projects:

- Several public presentations
- 4 weeks to inspect the plans and to hand in suggestions and complaints
- Evaluation of suggestions and complaints by district administration
- Public meeting to discuss the evaluation.

Possible result: no real agreement

A tree-saving initiative with a mixed balance

In the inner city area, there are 1000 trees of an unsuitable sort. The citizens initiative gets the administration to introduce a very expensive monitoring system before felling any of these trees.

The monitoring procedure costs as much as replacing the trees would have cost and results in the trees being cut down quicker.

Positive outcome: more awareness for inner city trees – even though only in a part of the population.

Which citizens are most active?

The well-educated, well-earning semi-young citizens in the inner city areas.

These are green voters.

A personal balance

Even Greens may tend to be opportunistic.

But we should resist telling people what they want to hear just to keep them happy.

If we do this, we undermine democracy.

A personal balance

The right of people to be heard, to get involved has to be supported 100%

The content of what people say and want has to be taken seriously.

Often good ideas come from the outside.

But some ideas are just unwise or selfish. In such cases we have to say „NO“ - even if a green voter gets upset by this.