LOSLAND

Building the Future in Communities

A model project on municipal citizen participation

Experiences – Reflections – Recommendations for Action





The LOSLAND municipalities

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A model project on municipal citizen participation

Experiences – Reflections – Recommendations for Action



"For me, citizen participation means shared learning for everyone involved."

Alexandra Abbrederis Simpson, Participation Officer of the City of Lindau


Entwurf
Unsere Anliegen und Bedürfnisse
hinter den Lösungsideen
Unsere Empfehlungen

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Introduction

Dear readers,

This is the final publication of the LOSLAND project. LOSLAND supported ten municipalities across Germany in working with citizens to make their communities fit for future generations. To this end, LOSLAND developed tailor-made participation processes in cooperation with municipalities, inspired by citizens' assemblies and other forms of citizen participation. The LOSLAND municipalities, the LOSLAND team and all project partners agreed that democracy needs an update and we want to start something new together.

The following pages outline the initiatives implemented in the municipalities. Through reports, interviews, photos, and contributions from project partners, this publication offers in-depth insights into the local LOSLAND processes. It also covers the implementation of recommendations from the citizens' assemblies and explores new forms of collaboration.

We have also formulated many useful tips for successful participation, asked stakeholders for their practical recommendations, compiled arguments in favour of citizens' assemblies, answered frequently asked questions and much more!

Whether you are a politician, an engaged citizen, or a process facilitator for citizens' assemblies, we promise you one thing – this is much more than just a project report! The experiences and insights gained in the LOSLAND municipalities that we have compiled here form a mosaic of democratic self-efficacy that should encourage and inspire you. Perhaps it will spur you on to safeguard your own region for future generations.

We hope you enjoy reading the report and trying the recommendations for yourselves!

The LOSLAND team


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Lottery and participation outreach

Participants in citizens' assemblies are randomly selected by means of a lottery. This is done either as a simple administrative act or at a ceremony like here in Lindau. Several hundred citizens are selected at random from the residents' register. They are then sent an invitation to participate in the citizens' assembly. That letter can be a transformative moment for many – particularly those with little to no prior experience in political participation.

Following the random selection process, some municipalities also pursue an outreach strategy in order to reach the invited citizens. Organisers speak with the randomly selected citizens at their doorsteps about their questions, doubts, and the relevance of their vote.



Children's participation – safeguarding a world for future generations

In keeping with the question posed by a citizens' assembly, the town of Ottersberg chose to include children in the process. To address the question *"How can we ensure that children, young adults and older people continue to feel at home in Ottersberg in the future?"*, seventeen Year-5 students gathered creative ideas, made plans and took part in a workshop to build *"models for a world fit for future generations"*. Ottersberg is possibly the first municipality in Germany to involve children in the processes of a citizens' assembly.

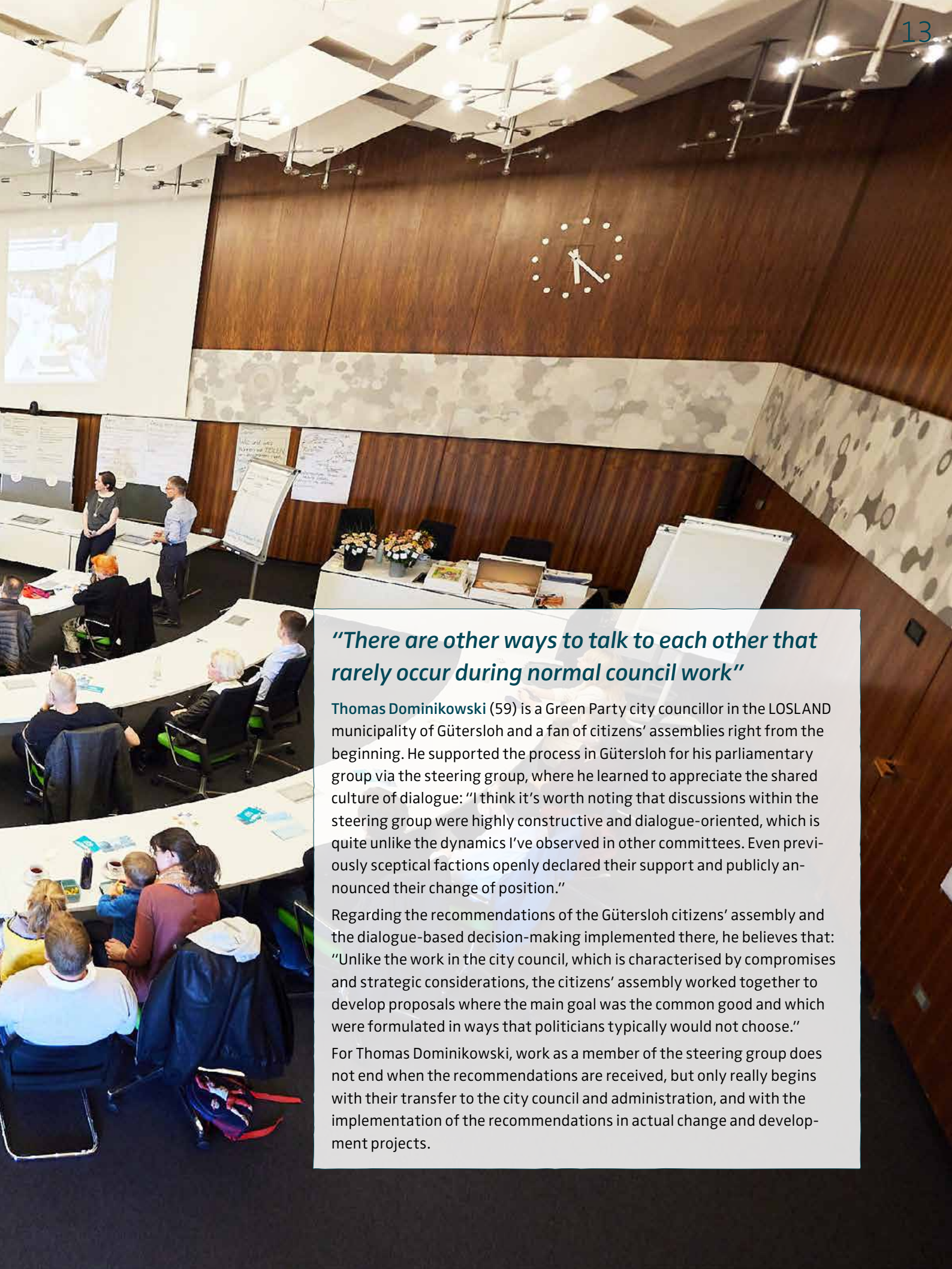
The children's answers impressed Mayor Tim Willy Weber. *"The children were more specific than the adults when it came to their recommendations on the issue of young and old in Ottersberg."* During the public presentation at the future forum, he emphasised to the children the importance of their perspective on a good life for all generations in Ottersberg and confirmed his intentions to use this method again.

The children's teacher also took a positive view of this: *"As a science teacher, it was important to me that the children were able to experience in a very real way that their wishes and suggestions were recognised and acknowledged by a broad public. Primary school children usually have very limited opportunities to experience this. In this respect, the children's participation in the citizens' assembly was a unique example of genuine participation and left a lasting impression."*

The town of Ottersberg is one of ten LOSLAND municipalities in which randomly selected future councils have drawn up recommendations for shaping a future fit for their community.


Verkzeugsatz A





"There are other ways to talk to each other that rarely occur during normal council work"

Thomas Dominikowski (59) is a Green Party city councillor in the LOSLAND municipality of Gütersloh and a fan of citizens' assemblies right from the beginning. He supported the process in Gütersloh for his parliamentary group via the steering group, where he learned to appreciate the shared culture of dialogue: "I think it's worth noting that discussions within the steering group were highly constructive and dialogue-oriented, which is quite unlike the dynamics I've observed in other committees. Even previously sceptical factions openly declared their support and publicly announced their change of position."

Regarding the recommendations of the Gütersloh citizens' assembly and the dialogue-based decision-making implemented there, he believes that: "Unlike the work in the city council, which is characterised by compromises and strategic considerations, the citizens' assembly worked together to develop proposals where the main goal was the common good and which were formulated in ways that politicians typically would not choose."

For Thomas Dominikowski, work as a member of the steering group does not end when the recommendations are received, but only really begins with their transfer to the city council and administration, and with the implementation of the recommendations in actual change and development projects.



Planning a LOSLAND process

The LOSLAND process includes the **planning phase**, the **future council**, the **future forum** and **transfer**. In many municipalities, these phases were supplemented by further events or process steps, such as a village walk, online participation, a city council workshop and much more. But how exactly are processes designed on the ground? LOSLAND advised and supported the participation processes in the municipalities from beginning to end. The goal was to ensure that processes succeeded both in terms of their implementation and their impact. The recipe for success, however, was not a standard model, but an open approach to each municipality, building on local knowledge and the best ideas on site. Co-creation!


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The Losland compass – Our guiding principles

The LOSLAND compass is intended to guide the LOSLAND community.
It describes our eight guiding principles:

#UnderstandingDemocracy #FutureGenerations #Future-oriented #Municipal #Co-creative #Self-efficacy #Inclusion #ActiveListening #Sustainable

The LOSLAND community includes the mayors of the participating municipalities, members of the municipal or city councils, administrative staff, the facilitation teams, the process facilitators and, of course, the citizens.

Working for a sustainable future

In a joint interview, the LOSLAND team discusses the project's inception, their collaborative work, and future plans following LOSLAND.

Lore ***Hello, LOSLAND team. What do you like about citizens' assemblies?***

Daniel *Citizens' assemblies enable us to take democracy further. They create a space that gives ordinary people with common sense access to democratic processes. This is great not only for those people, but primarily also for those who convene citizens' assemblies. Citizens' assemblies can give politicians a broader overview and help them make better decisions.*

Jonas *Citizens' assemblies also naturally shift the focus away from individual egos and towards the common good.*

Pauline *I'm excited that randomly selecting participants by lottery and the entire process for planning citizens' assemblies means that people who would probably never otherwise come together can meet and cooperate in a committee. From politicians to citizens.*

Marett *I feel the same way. I've rarely experienced spaces as diverse as citizens' assemblies. It's inspiring how respectfully people can deal with their differences and how shared visions and recommendations emerge despite all those differences.*

Rosa *Exactly! The lottery process enables inclusion. That magical moment when an individual learns they have been selected by lottery triggers amazement and joy, and often results in their own empowerment. Citizens' assemblies also encourage politicians and administrators to think in completely new ways about what makes sense for their community.*



Charlotte



Pauline



Jonas



Lore

LOSLAND TEAM



Daniel



Marett



Rosa

Lore ***How did LOSLAND come about?***

Charlotte *LOSLAND is the result of an initiative by political journalist Marie von Mallinckrodt and participation expert Patrizia Nanz. They wanted to address the question of how to strengthen social cohesion in Germany. They set up project workshops and invited mayors, MPs, artists and activists. This resulted in the idea for LOSLAND.*

Daniel *The "Mehr Demokratie e.V." ("More Democracy") association then became the sponsor of the project. The project concept was developed by the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS), in Potsdam, where I work.*

Jonas *And then our team came together and took on the project. We have had discussions with many municipalities and have adapted and explored the concept.*

Lore ***What else did you explore at the beginning of the project?***

Rosa *In the first phase of the project, for example, we made two fundamental decisions that were important for the sustainability of the project. These were the need for a council resolution in favour of the LOSLAND process and the establishment of a local steering group.*

Lore ***How were the municipalities selected?***

Jonas *Using our networks and research, we first identified around 50 municipalities and spoke to the mayors there. An important precondition for us was that they should demonstrate enthusiasm for participation and innovative democratic practices. We also looked at the general conditions to determine whether and what kinds of existing participation agendas were already in place, the available on-site capacities, the political majorities for a council decision in favour of the project, and geographical distribution across Germany.*

Lore ***How did your project team collaborate?***

Daniel *Because there were initially still many specific questions about the overall concept, we took the time to rethink and improve the project together. This meant that we all became fully invested in the project.*

Rosa *Also, everyone in the team brought this energy with them. We wanted to work together to make a difference. And each of us brought our different perspectives to the project on an equal basis. Another thing that made our collaboration so lively is the enthusiasm that everyone has for their work. I always enjoyed the many different meetings.*

Pauline *One of the reasons I felt valued as an individual is because I was given the space to arrive at my own conclusions. We take the time to think things through fully and co-creatively within the team. I find our collaboration to be mindful and attentive, including in terms of where our specifics skills and interests align.*

Jonas *I was able to work on this project simply as the person that I am. It enriched my whole life and I will take this experience with me into my future activities.*

Lore ***What does the concept of "fit for future generations" mean to your team?***

Jonas *The socio-ecological transformation is a great challenge and I'm personally very happy to be able to work towards its implementation. For the LOSLAND team, this was not just a goal to be achieved, but also our way of working. We have made it a point not to replicate exploitative structures within our own processes. Over the course of the project, the birth of my daughter brought me personally closer to the concept of caring for future generations. During my parental leave, I knew that the project was in good hands with the others.*

Rosa *In one of the municipalities, we also involved children in the process. Personally, I believe it's not possible to consider future generations without including them. The entire approach is about a state of mind. One of the first steps we took as a team was to agree on our stance and then to develop the LOSLAND compass. It was clear to us that it had to reflect our way of working.*



#LivingDemocracy

Democracy, as a form of government, is not set in stone. It must be a living system in order to meet the challenges of our time. Parliamentary democracy needs to be supported through social participation. We need more communal spaces where we can discuss how we want to live. Engagement between people who think differently can result in completely new ideas that resonate with everyone.



#FitForFutureGenerations

The phrase "fit for future generations" describes LOSLAND's focus on the future – a future that is within everyone's reach. We ask the question: What do "community" and "common good" mean in our local area? What do we have to decide today so that future generations can also live well?

We've been told that we have sparked inspiration in various places by openly practising a culture of mindful cooperation within our own team and demonstrating this to our partners in the municipalities. Ultimately, our goal is to encourage longer lasting sustainable processes.

Lore ***Where are you today thanks to LOSLAND and what are you planning next?***

Marett *LOSLAND gave me a year of intensive experience of working with administrators and politicians. In my adopted home of Leipzig, I approached the city administration with the idea of a citizens' assembly. I'm now an administrative employee there as a specialist for promoting democracy and political participation.*

Daniel *My work as a scientist has benefited from our practical experience with the emergence of new and relevant research questions. The opportunity to experiment with LOSLAND has enriched my knowledge significantly.*

Rosa *LOSLAND helped me to learn a lot at a micro level about the real, collaborative design of society. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have initiated something in the municipalities. I want to continue working for transformation and to focus on the issues of self-connectedness, resilience and peaceful societies, and I'm very happy to continue working in groups.*

Jonas *I learned how to make things happen. My toolbox expanded a lot here.*

Pauline *Yes, exactly, this is where we had the opportunity to implement and expand our expertise and interests. The personal responsibility given to us and to me also helped me to grow personally.*

Charlotte *For me, LOSLAND was also a reality check. It helped me to realise what it means to put something like this into practice and to be surprised, to experience completely new things and to be open to the process, to whatever comes out of it. Another thing I take away from LOSLAND is a belief that we need a culture of collaboration if we're going to tackle the great challenges of our time. Because it's primarily about how we interact with each other, how we listen to each other.*

''The whole process has helped me move forward''

Interview in Homberg (Efze), in the Schwalm-Eder district in northern Hesse: Anna Knieriem works here as an administrative specialist. She coordinated the entire LOSLAND process for the district town in this capacity.

Anna, what did you take away from the LOSLAND process?

It was exciting to learn new working techniques, to network and then to plan the Future Council weekend, to communicate with people and to coordinate the public relations work. We are now following up on the recommendations and distributing their implementation across the administration. I can't even say specifically what exactly was the most important thing for me. The whole process has helped me move forward.

What recommendations were developed in Homberg (Efze)?

The issue at hand was about the repurposing of a former fire station in the city centre. There was also a lot of discussion of the topic of ''age-appropriate housing''. The majority of the group that drew up recommendations on this topic were from the ''baby boomer'' demographic. They still live in single-family homes with stairs and gardens and would like to have the option of simpler forms of housing.

During the LOSLAND project, you coordinated locally between the steering group, the administration and the LOSLAND team. How was that for you?

Our mayor kind of threw me in at the deep end. He gave me a lot of responsibility and complete freedom. Having that independence saved time because I didn't have to go through the various authorities, which can be a slow process in an administrative environment. The work was great, it was exactly what I'm good at – structured work, networking, communicating. That's why it was such a rewarding task.

''You can combine theory with practical knowledge and really put things into practice. I can do what I enjoy here.''



#Co-Creation

The best ideas can arise from respectful collaboration between people from different backgrounds. We shape the LOSLAND rocesses together and as equals, engaging with one another openly and attentively – united by a shared purpose, but without predetermined answers

#LocalGovernment

Change cannot be imposed from above; change must also come from below. The municipalities serve as the foundation for political engagement. They are the cornerstones of our democracy, close to the people and their everyday lives. We act locally to shape the future – right on our doorstep!



Anna Knieriem

After completing her vocational high school diploma in the field of social work, Anna Knieriem (born 1997) completed an apprenticeship as an administrative assistant at the city of Homberg (Efze) in 2020. Since then, she has been working for the city of Homberg in the "KJ3S" (Children, Youth, Social Affairs, Sports and Seniors) department and as a trainer for the administrative assistants. She has been studying social work at a distance learning university since August 2022.

What does co-creation mean to you?

Speaking as a member of local government, it was an incredibly positive experience – especially considering that the participants didn't know each other. They came from different age groups and brought diverse personalities, yet they worked together remarkably well – and I wasn't even in the room.

What will happen after LOSLAND in Homberg (Efze) for you and the administration in terms of participation?

Since the LOSLAND project and especially after the Future Council weekend in September 2022, I now know how intense and incredibly valuable such a format can be for everyone involved. In Homberg, we will continue to offer citizen participation for all age groups and on various issues based on a random selection process conducted by the residents' registration office.

After LOSLAND, do you have any ideas about how the administration can and should change?

I would definitely like us administrative staff to have more freedom in how we work. And also in terms of communication. During the Future Forum, there were some discussions about a community centre. Some local politicians remarked that the recommendation was something they were already working on! We have to learn from this and become more transparent.

You are 25 years old and already the training manager in your administration. What advice do you have for young people who are interested in this work?

Teenagers and young adults are very interested in local politics, which is great. And they should bring that curiosity with them if they want to work in administration. It's somewhere you can combine theory with practical knowledge and really put things into practice. Administration doesn't have to be a dry and boring job at all. I can do what I enjoy here."

"I wish we administrative staff had more freedom in the way we work"

Citizens' assemblies: a global movement

What is a citizens' assembly?

A citizens' assembly is a randomly selected group of citizens that is tasked with dealing with a pressing political issue or societal challenge. The aim is for participants to work together to develop solutions or ideas based on their life experience. These ideas are then fed back as recommendations to politicians and administrators – the initiators of the citizens' assemblies. This creates a platform for open dialogue among citizens, politicians, and administrators, integrating citizens' knowledge into political decisions.

Citizens' assemblies can look very different depending on the political level at which they operate and the issues they address. They generally share the following characteristics:

Sortition

The central feature of citizens' assemblies is that participants are selected at random. The aim of this is to attract as diverse a group of participants as possible. These ''randomly selected citizens'' are not invited as advocates for particular groups or organised interests. Rather, they are expected to advocate for their own positions. Their diversity of experience and different perspectives on an issue increase the chance of achieving a balanced mix of recommendations that serve the common good.



Facilitation

The meetings of citizens' assemblies are organised and facilitated by professional facilitation teams. The same applies to upstream and downstream events such as planning meetings, presentation events and follow-up steps.



Agency

LOSLAND wants to bolster citizens' belief that they can make a difference and change things themselves. They can help to shape the communities and cities in which they live.



Integration

Another characteristic feature of citizens' assemblies is their integration into representative democracy as an advisory body. Citizens' assemblies do not make decisions and do not replace elected representatives. Rather, they complement their work with advice and thereby help them to make better decisions. To achieve this, however, citizens' assemblies need suitable interfaces between politicians, administration and citizens, which can strengthen cooperation. For example, this could be joint planning in a steering group, a public presentation event or workshops on transferring the results.

Expert knowledge

Depending on the question posed by a citizens' assembly, the involvement of experts, affected parties or representatives of stakeholders plays an important role. They are usually heard or questioned by the participants of the citizens' assembly at the beginning of the session.

Citizens' assemblies take many forms

Citizens' assemblies have been successfully implemented in many countries and at all levels of government. At the national level, they often follow the model established by the Irish citizens' assemblies. Large-scale assemblies with over 100 randomly selected participants have already been held in countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. However, the vast majority of citizens' councils take place at the local level, where typically 15 to 30 randomly selected individuals advise their city or municipal councils.''


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Empfehlungen

The LOSLAND Summit

At LOSLAND, ***#inclusion*** is not only practised in the local municipalities. After the local assemblies had taken place, the project participants from across the country came together at the LOSLAND Summit to explore what it takes to make dialogue-based citizen participation a meaningful tool for local politics.

The participants were not randomly selected but intentionally invited from all groups involved in the project. Among them were randomly selected citizens, municipal staff, members of city and municipal councils, and mayors – all contributing their perspectives on the LOSLAND process. Together, they developed six key messages and formulated recommendations for effective, dialogue-based citizen participation.

These were developed using the same methodology and attitude as those used by the LOSLAND future councils at their respective locations. There was space for encounters and communication, for experiencing dialogue and co-creation and for focused cooperation towards a common goal – the further development of citizens' assemblies. All perspectives were included equally – whether it was made by a member of the citizens' assembly or by a mayor.



''The six levers for effective participation are described in chapter III, ''Recommendations for Action''. They highlight how experiences gained through local participation can have an impact beyond the LOSLAND project.

''I realised once again that we have to work for our democracy. And that also includes reflection processes that enable citizen participation.''

Erika Janzon (Gemeinderatsmitglied Flecken Ottersberg)



Inclusion

In the LOSLAND community, it is important for us to include everyone and avoid excluding anyone – no matter what their political views, background, educational qualifications, gender or physical condition. Every voice deserves to be heard. Everyone can bring a different perspective and make a valuable contribution.

Citizen participation: strengthening democracy and communities

#Active listening at LOSLAND means adopting new perspectives and considering what others bring to the table – this is not something that can be taken for granted in politics. In Gütersloh, members of the city council and administration showed through their collaboration in the steering group that genuine dialogue and ***#active listening*** are still very much possible.

The project immediately faced a special challenge, namely the demands of the local citizens' initiative "Demokratie wagen!" ("*Dare Democracy!*"). This group has been campaigning for more transparency and citizen participation in Gütersloh for many years and submitted a petition for a citizens' assembly to the Gütersloh city council independently of the LOSLAND project.

Since the beginning of the LOSLAND process, "*Demokratie wagen!*" has criticised the lack of transparency and called for more inclusion. A joint discussion between a representative of the steering group, the LOSLAND team, citizens' assembly expert Thorsten Sterk (Mehr Demokratie e.V.) and the initiative created space for communication and understanding. Even though views on the LOSLAND process still differed at the end of the conversation, all participants left with the experience of having been heard.

This also shows that for LOSLAND, citizen participation is not a one-off event, but rather a sustained and continually practised approach that can bring us closer together as a society and strengthen our sense of community. To further promote this approach in Gütersloh, city council member Thomas Dominikowski would like to see more dialogue in the city council and increased use of these "*other ways of talking to each other*".



#ActiveListening

The basic requirement for communication within a group is active listening. This is because the participation processes are not primarily about making your own voice heard. They're about taking in new perspectives and responding to what others bring to the conversation. Real listening is the foundation for developing one's own views.



#Sustainability

With LOSLAND, we want to initiate changes that will have a long-term impact on how we interact with one another. Citizen participation is not a one-off event. We see it as an approach to democracy that brings us closer together as a society and strengthens our sense of community.

Initiating public participation

Convincing sceptics with effective arguments

A "how to" for citizens' assemblies: five steps to success – really?!

Of course, it's not quite that simple... Planning and implementing citizens' assemblies requires close collaboration between politicians and administrators – and ideally, the active involvement of citizens from the very beginning.

Isn't instituting citizens' assemblies the same as declaring the failure of representative democracy?

No, citizens' assemblies complement and strengthen local representative democracy rather than replace it. Together, we can create new democratic spaces that embrace everyday expertise and foster meaningful dialogue."

Surely only those selected in the lottery benefit from the citizens' assembly?

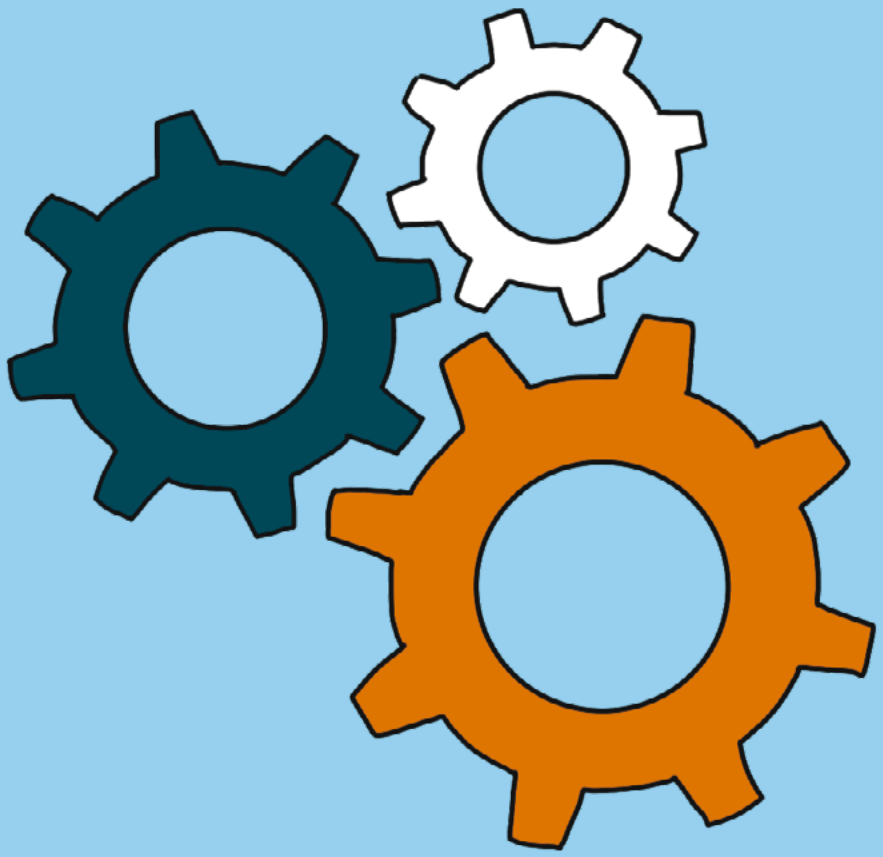
Random selection brings together a group that is as diverse as possible, including voices that might otherwise go unheard. Citizens' councils thus generate fresh visions and new perspectives on future challenges affecting the whole community.

Since not everything can be implemented – isn't it just fake participation?

It's not about implementing every single recommendation, but about ensuring clarity and transparency about what the results are for and how they are implemented.

"Yes" to participation, but not like this!

Fine! Citizens' assemblies are not the only form of participation and are not appropriate for every issue. Citizens' assemblies are about shared responsibility for issues that affect the common good. They can help to overcome divisions and enable participation in shaping the result – unlike a referendum, for example. And positive experience with political participation can encourage greater political engagement among the population.



LET'S GO!

The experiences and insights gathered in the LOSLAND municipalities form a rich political mosaic - one that vividly illustrates democratic agency in practice. Across our ten municipalities, participants have contributed a wealth of knowledge and experience, gained through initiating, organising, and learning together.

The following pages will introduce you to the LOSLAND municipalities and describe the four phases of the participation process. You will also find facts and figures, interviews, reports, process diagrams, outcomes from local citizen participation, insights into the working methods of the facilitation teams and the LOSLAND team - and much more!

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What LOSLAND is all about

The LOSLAND concept of future councils made up of randomly selected citizens is based on citizen's assemblies inspired by the Vorarlberg model. These participation processes go far beyond simply gathering citizens' opinions. At their core, they ask how democracy itself can be revitalised – beginning at the local level.

The current political climate is full of challenges

Politics today is largely in reactive mode. Ongoing crises demand the full attention of governments, administrations, and citizens alike. At the same time, doubts are growing about whether our administrative systems are still fit for purpose in the face of today's complex challenges. Can existing government structures truly meet the demands of the future?

Studies show that trust in democracy has declined.[1] At the same time, many of those who are dissatisfied with democracy also feel that opportunities for participation in Germany are inadequate.[2]

Democracy is not just a form of government, but also a way of life

Although democracy has long been considered a form of government that creates the conditions for social cohesion, today more than ever we need people to lend their innovative power and their motivation to stand up for the community. The question is, how can citizens' ideas reach the institutions so that politicians can benefit from the collective intelligence of the population (i.e. from the wisdom of crowds)?

Municipalities are the heart of democracy

The restructuring of society, the much-vaunted socio-ecological transformation, is happening in practice at the municipal level. As a result, municipalities offer valuable lessons that have so far been largely overlooked. One of LOSLAND's key goals is to spotlight the importance and potential of municipalities in driving this transformation.

Citizen participation – for a sustainable future for the next generations

Administrations are severely overworked and, in many regions, they can barely muster the resources to initiate effective and sustainable participation processes that exceed their required duties. That's why we created LOSLAND. We set out to support ten municipalities across Germany in implementing local participation processes on a step-by-step basis together with the various stakeholders.

Participation processes provide a special opportunity to cooperate to shape the future. This is especially true for citizens' assemblies. Randomly selected participants are invited to draw on their own real-life experiences to develop their own solutions and recommendations in response to pressing questions. This is what distinguishes citizens' assemblies from opinion polls or referendums. Citizens' assemblies enrich political processes at a substantive level and can give decisions greater legitimacy.

1 See study by the Bertelsmann Foundation 2019: "Schwindendes Vertrauen in Politik und Parteien: Eine Gefahr für den gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt?" ("Dwindling trust in politics and parties: A threat to social cohesion?") and the Bertelsmann Foundation survey 2022: "Erschöpfte Gesellschaft: Auswirkungen von 24 Monaten Pandemie auf den gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt" ("Exhausted society: The impact of 24 months of the pandemic on social cohesion")

2 See study by the Frierich Ebert Foundation 2019: "Vertrauen in die Demokratie: Wie zufrieden sind die Menschen in Deutschland mit Regierung, Staat und Politik?" ("Trust in democracy: How satisfied are people in Germany with the government, the state and politics?")

Participants in a citizens' assembly are randomly selected from the residents' registers of the cities and municipalities, creating councils that represent a broad and diverse range of perspectives. And they make an impact. Quite a few participants in the future councils (LOSLAND's name for councils comprising randomly selected citizens) remain active and committed after LOSLAND. They want to shape their cities and communities for themselves, their fellow human beings and future generations.

LOSLAND – a project as a plea for enabling politics

LOSLAND sees itself as a learning and testing space for a form of participation that can complement the existing political system. We hope the enthusiasm and trust in the local processes that carried us and our local partners through the process will ignite the same commitment in others. After all, today's problems arise to a large extent at the local level and are also solved and handled locally. We advocate for giving local municipalities greater freedom to shape and make decisions. To achieve this, it is also necessary to change or reinvigorate the political c onditions defined by the federal and state governments for local decision-makers.



Citizens' assemblies as tools for strengthening democracy

Citizens' assemblies are recognised as having great potential to strengthen democracy, not just in theory but also in practice. Citizens' assemblies are often set up quite deliberately in the hope of improving democratic culture. And indeed, empirical studies of citizens' assemblies suggest that they can, for example, increase the political engagement, commitment and self-efficacy of participants and help to overcome polarisation.

However, certain conditions must be met in order to unlock the full potential of citizens' assemblies. The most important thing is that the citizens' assemblies are only used for issues where there is a genuine interest in the citizens' responses. The participation process must therefore first and foremost actually create added value by producing results that politicians and administrators need and can use to their advantage with their implementation. Above all, citizens' assemblies also need good communicative ties with mayors, city and municipal councils and the relevant administrators. When these ties are effective, the processes of a citizens' assembly can help to foster the local culture of cooperation and catalyse further engagement from citizens leading to broader impacts.

How a LOSLAND process works

LOSLAND initiates dialogue with motivated mayors. Once the city or municipal council, along with the administration, is on board and a council resolution has been passed, the process can begin. The starting point is the question:

How do we make our local area fit for future generations?

Professional process facilitators support the municipalities and facilitate the participation events. They also help to make the results attractive for the local political stakeholders.

Once a municipality and LOSLAND have decided to work together to find ways to create a future fit for the next generations, the following four steps are set in motion:

Future workshop with children

In Flecken Ottersberg, a group of Year 5 children developed their own vision for the area in a facilitated workshop. They worked together to design models based on their ideas for a shared future in Ottersberg.



In the planning phase, a steering group is put together from within the municipality. Together with the LOSLAND team, this team develops the format and the exact questions for the participation event(s) and decides on the lottery procedure.



This is the core component of the process. Around 20 citizens randomly selected from the civil register discusses the question of a community fit for the future and – aided by a professional facilitation team – develops recommendations for politicians.

Village walk

In Leupoldsgrün, the future council kicked off with a walk through the village. The randomly selected citizens and all interested parties were able to get to know each other and assess their village from the perspective of its suitability for future generations.

See interview with Annika Popp and Jonas Korn, page 77

Linking participation processes

At the future council in Rietschen, participants assessed the results of village workshops from a previous participation process that had been held there. They checked those results together for their relevance and included them in their recommendations for Rietschen.

See info: Tailored participation for challenges in rural areas – the LOSLAND process in Rietschen, page 51

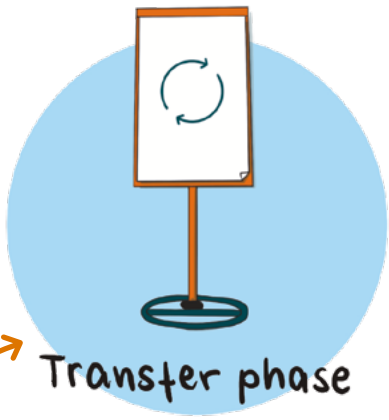
Online participation

Following the future forum, citizens in Ludwigsfelde, Gütersloh and Varel had the opportunity to comment online on recommendations of the citizens' assembly via the Consul online participation platform.

See Online participation in the LOSLAND Project, page 67



The results of the future council are presented at a public event. In a relaxed atmosphere, all citizens of the municipality have the opportunity to discuss the results and add to them with their own ideas.



In the final step, the steering group addresses the question of how the results of the participation events should be incorporated into political decisions. The city or municipal council publishes a statement and provides information about which new projects can be initiated and which ideas can be pursued further.

Results exhibition

In keeping with the question in Gütersloh of what can be shared locally for a more sustainable future, the results of the citizens' assembly and future forum were put on display in the city library – next to a "library of things" that enables shared use of objects.

See report: Gütersloh – citizens' assembly in a big city, page 57

Workshop for the city council

In Lindau, the city council took the time for two separate workshops. At the beginning of the process and after the future council meeting, the city council members discussed the importance of the issue and the results for city policy. After the future forum, they looked at the citizens' recommendations and developed a draft resolution for the city council meeting.

See interview with Alexandra Abbrederis Simpson, page 48.

LOSLAND in figures

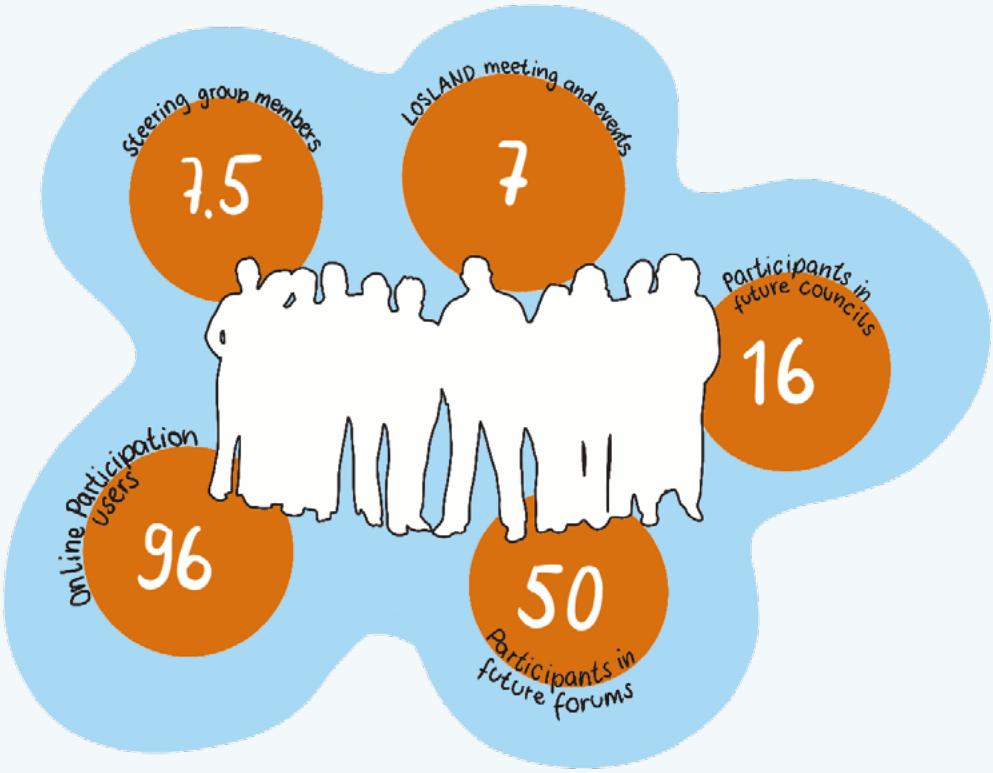
Project period
1 March 2021 to 30 April 2023

Project sponsor
Mehr Demokratie e.V.
(a project in cooperation with the RIFS Potsdam)

Colleagues
5

LOSLAND processes

A participatory process involves the participation of many people at different events and gatherings. The average LOSLAND process is as follows:



Digital Fun Facts

>1500
Hours spent in online meetings

>10000
Number of emails written

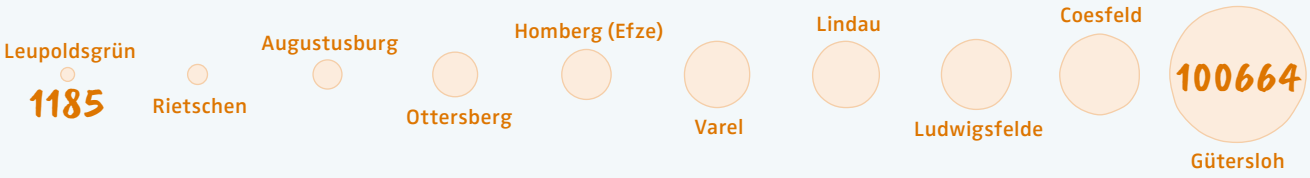
>7500
Number of files in the cloud

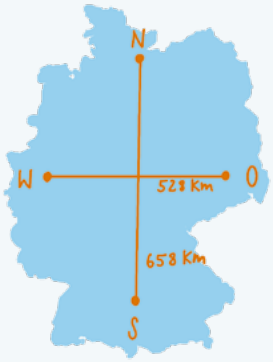
A mosaic of municipalities

An important goal when selecting the ten LOSLAND municipalities was to achieve as much diversity as possible. The selected locations vary in terms of their location on the map, their size, their (participation) history and their political majorities.

25470

Population of municipalities (average)





Longest distance north-south / east-west

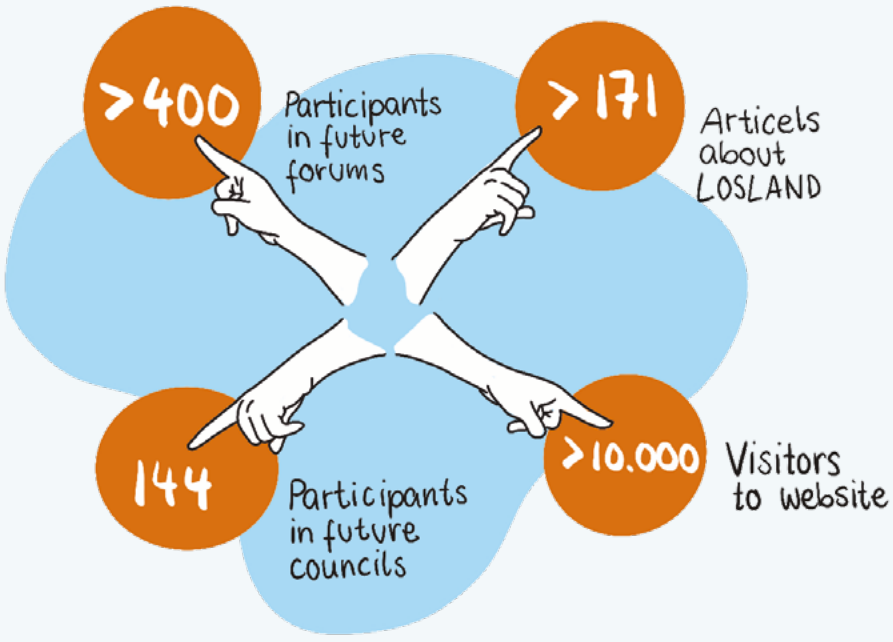


Mayors

29

Parties in the municipalities

LOSLAND range




Das mehr
wilder Ansehen
ganz werden
Ein Zoo mit tierchen
damit wir Tier besser
en
Man könnte eine
Müllsammeln Aktion
machen
Es wäre gut wen
es in Ottersberg noch
einen Park gab.
Park


Iryna
10 Jahre
Ecaterina
11 Jahre
Viktoria
9 Jahre





The young citizens assembly in Flecken Ottersberg

The LOSLAND municipalities

Young and old in Ottersberg. How can we ensure that children, young adults and older people continue to feel at home in Ottersberg in the future?

What kind of event space does the city of Varel need in order to meet its cultural and social obligations? What is a good way to continue managing the Tivoli building?

For a sustainable Ludwigsfelde: How can we foster healthy growth for Ludwigsfelde that supports future generations – balancing the needs of people, the environment, the economy, and society as a whole?"

Keeping Gütersloh fit for future generations. How and what can we share in order to live together more sustainably?



How can we work together to develop Rietschen for future generations so that coexistence, good work opportunities and attractive housing ensure that people enjoy living here? How do we reach local people so that they have a say?

What does happy coexistence mean for Coesfeld and what can we do to enable it?

Augustusburg 2050 – what do you want?

Making Homberg (Efze) fit for future generations: How could the old fire station be repurposed?

How do we keep our community alive for future generations and what can we contribute towards this?

How do we preserve and shape living spaces to promote the coexistence of current and future generations in our city?

The future councils' recommendations - What could already be implemented?

Plant a wildflower meadow · Revitalize the village shop · Support for recommendations from politics, public administration and participants · Develop a community app · Discuss recommendations in a municipal dialogue · Develop concept for new hiking network · Creative spaces and workshops · Ride-sharing benches · Continue the future council · Establish a youth forum



Coesfeld

In Coesfeld, in the region of Münsterland, the city's mission statement was the focus of the LOSLAND future council. The recommendations developed by the participants are intended to expand on the mission statement developed by administrators and politicians with the perspectives of the citizens. Participation outreach enabled the creation of a diverse future council in the westernmost LOSLAND municipality.



Flecken Ottersberg

The future council in the Lower Saxony municipality of Flecken Ottersberg took up the question: "Young and old in Ottersberg: How can we ensure that children, young adults, and older people continue to feel at home in Ottersberg in the future?" In line with this wide-ranging mission, a group of Year 5 students also engaged with the question during a future workshop. The recommendations from the future council, together with the models created by the children, were later presented and discussed at a public forum.



Gütersloh

In keeping with the "sharing" theme of of the Gütersloh citizens' assembly, the results were not only presented at the future forum, which is open to all, but were also exhibited in the public library of the city. Around 100,000 citizens were also able to comment on the recommendations online via the Consul participation platform.



Homberg (Ezfe)

The future council process in Homberg (Efze), a rural municipality in the Schwalm-Eder district of northern Hesse, revolved around the question of how to reuse and redesign the city's former fire station. The randomly selected citizens of Homberg took a walk to the fire station and then worked on their recommendations. These were discussed at the future forum in the Homberg youth centre with citizens and representatives from politics and administration.



Augustusburg

Augustusburg, a small town in Saxony near the Czech border, was one of the first two LOSLAND municipalities. Due to Mayor Dirk Neubauer's transfer to the District Authority (Landratsamt) and staffing constraints, Augustusburg City Council decided to postpone the citizens' assembly process and possibly continue it at a later date.



Leupoldsgrün

The Bavarian municipality of Leupoldsgrün (population 1,185) is the smallest LOSLAND municipality and also started its journey with a future-focused village walk. The participants of the future council and other interested parties at the event were able to get to know each other and exchange ideas on how the community can be kept alive for future generations.



Lindau (Bodensee)

The municipality of Lindau (Bodensee) already had experience with citizen participation and had conducted a citizens' assembly prior to joining LOSLAND. During the LOSLAND future weekend, randomly selected participants developed recommendations on the theme of "togetherness," which were later discussed with the wider public in a future forum. In the subsequent transfer phase, the city council dedicated a separate workshop to reviewing and considering these recommendations.



Ludwigsfelde

At the future council in Ludwigsfelde, a fast-growing municipality south of Berlin, the focus was on sustainability. The participants worked together to develop recommendations, which were subsequently discussed publicly in the future forum and online. In keeping with the city's development, the question was about how to ensure healthy growth for future generations in Ludwigsfelde.



Rietschen

Rietschen is the easternmost LOSLAND municipality, located in the Sorbian area of Oberlausitz near the Polish border. The future council was able to take into account local challenges as well as the results of a previous participation process. The participants developed recommendations for a Rietschen suitable for future generations and on the question of how local people can be motivated to have their say.



Varel

In Varel, the northernmost LOSLAND municipality located in the district of Friesland, the citizens' assembly dealt with the future of the event venues in the city with a particular focus on the town's vacant Tivoli building. The city organised an information evening to publicly launch the participation process. In Varel, in addition to the future forum, the public had the opportunity to support and comment on the proposals online.



LOSLAND - participation in a mosaic of municipalities

How did the ten municipalities become part of LOSLAND?

The LOSLAND team selected ten municipalities to take part in the model project, guided by the idea of a mosaic and aiming to create a diverse range of experiences. The LOSLAND municipalities vary in size, are geographically dispersed, and are led by mayors of various genders and political affiliations. Their previous experiences with participation are different at every location. The more diverse the mix, the greater the chances of learning and identifying what's needed for successful participation.

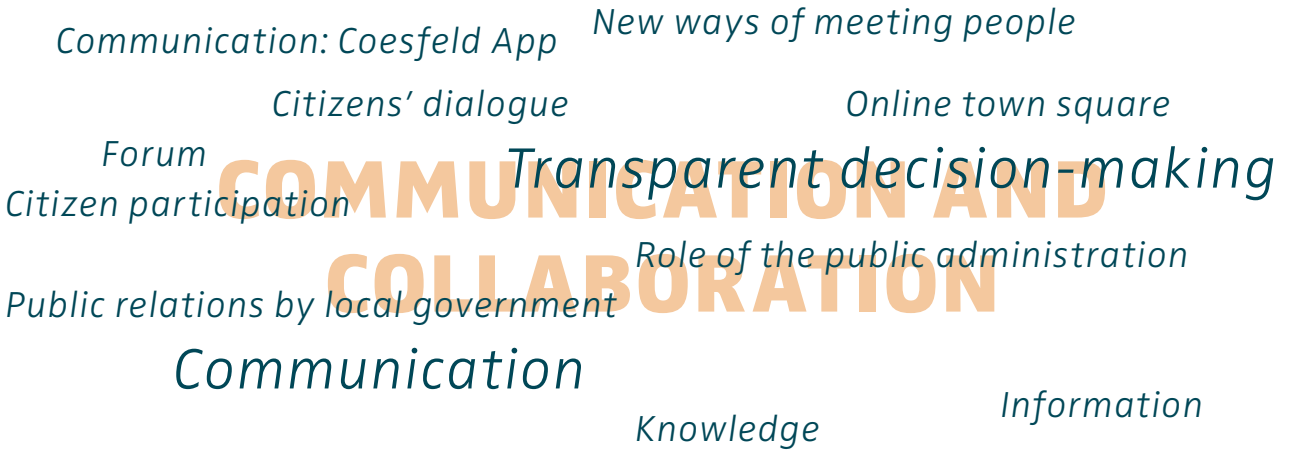
It was important for us to work in areas where there was clear consent for the participation process. This is why we contacted mayors who we knew wanted to strengthen participation at the local level in order to then coordinate with the city and municipal councils.
In all preliminary discussions, we discussed whether there are current issues in the municipality that are suitable for citizen participation, whether there was available capacity, and whether the timing was right. Last but not least, the most important condition was whether there was sufficient political will.

The participation processes supported by the LOSLAND project were legitimized and commissioned in all ten municipalities by resolution of the respective elected city or municipal council. This enabled us to ensure that the local stakeholders had full ownership of the process.

Topics covered by the assemblies and future councils

The LOSLAND municipalities have engaged with the challenge of creating a world fit for future generations, setting a diverse range of priorities. Across ten future councils, ten key questions were explored. In each council, the participants chose to focus on specific issues, discussing between four and eight different topics and generating multiple recommendations per topic. To offer insight into how these municipalities envision a sustainable future, we have reviewed and thematically grouped the topics from all of the LOSLAND future councils into clusters.






Sustainable residential planning
Housing
Renewing city centre
Fire retention pond
Repurposing unused buildings
Creating attractive housing
HOUSING AND
Cityscape
Tourism
Fire brigade museum
Liveable town for all ages
URBAN PLANNING
Attractive
Living well together
Offers for children and young people
Growing old in Leupoldsgrün
Youth programmes
Youth participation
Sustainable housing for young and old
Next generation
TOWNS FOR ALL AGES
Youth
Coesfeld
Supporting and strengthening social engagement
Living together, sharing, and helping
Cultural centre
Housing and ageing well in Coesfeld
Sustainable mobility
Local public transport
Traffic
Accessibility
Mobility
Energy
Weekly and regional markets
Skilled trades
Developing the industrial estate
INFRASTRUCTURE
Village shop
Drinking and spring water
Transport links
Requirements for spaces
Event formats
Public safety
Publicising events
Renewable energy cooperative
Flexible planning
Ecology
Energy
ENVIRONMENT
Eco Park
Urban Garden
AND CLIMATE
Climate protection
Biodiversity
Leupoldsgrün energy concept
Leupoldsgrün revitalized



The planning phase

Thorough preparation is essential for successful citizen participation. It's important to clarify from the outset why participation is taking place and what goals are being pursued. Defining the expected outcomes also means identifying the target groups to be engaged and understanding how the project aligns with the work of the city or municipal council, the mayor, and the administration. From formulating the initial question to managing the results, the process must be carefully integrated into existing political structures and decision-making.

LOSLAND set up specific **steering groups** for this purpose. Their composition was decided by the city or municipal council. As a rule, they consisted of the local mayor plus members of the various political groups represented in the council, the municipal administration and, depending on the initial situation, citizen representatives. The steering groups hammered out the local participation plan with the LOSLAND facilitation teams and the LOSLAND project team and decided on key questions regarding its design: What exactly should the question for the future council be? Who should be involved and how should the random selection process be carried out? What should the invitation letter say? Which participation steps are suitable for the topic and the current situation in the region? And what happens with the results of the future council? The steering groups also decided whether online participation should complement the analogue future council. It also discussed and organised another essential component of successful participation – the public relations work associated with the process.

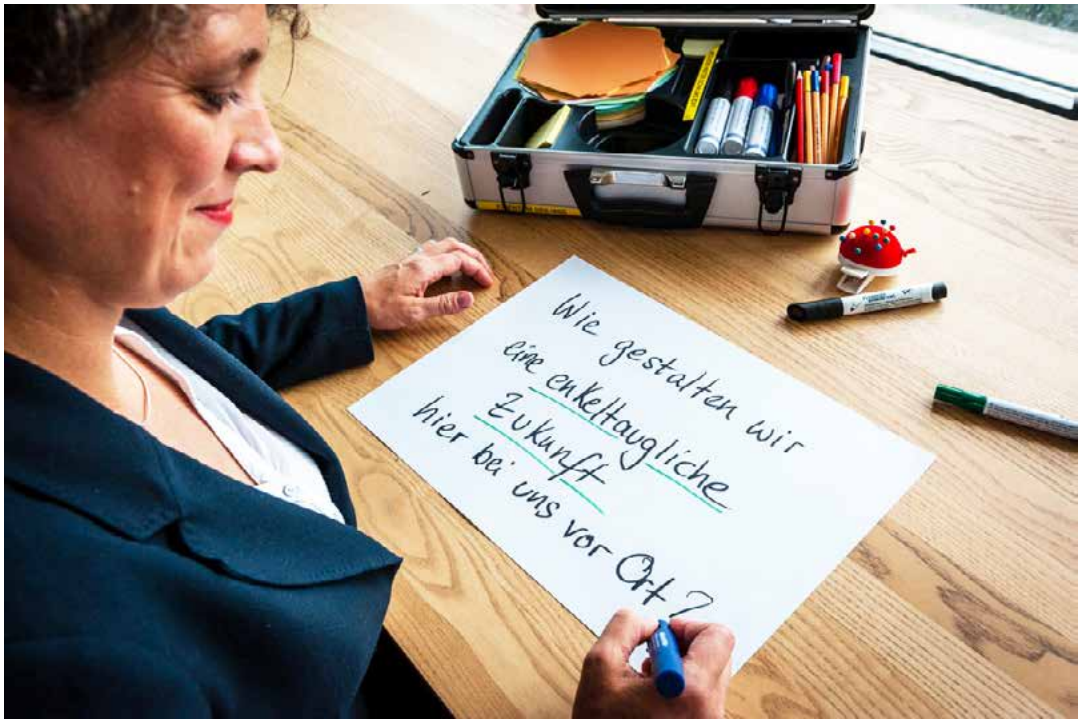
The process before the process

Who should be involved in what and how? Careful planning of a participation process is crucial to its success. The LOSLAND municipalities show that even at this early stage, citizens can have a say in a project's design.

Citizens' assemblies are intended to improve our society's ability to deal with the challenges of social transformation. At the same time, given their impact, they are also seen as a means of revitalising our democracy. As with any successful project, thorough preparation is half the battle for effective citizen participation processes. This is especially true since there is no blueprint or checklist that can be easily worked through in order to ensure effective participation for specific cases. Instead, each participation process must clearly define its specific purpose from the outset – i.e. what the process should address. Based on this, the next question is about which population groups are affected by the participation issue – who should be involved. And then, of course, there is the issue of embedding participation into the democratic system – how exactly the participation process should be implemented and how it will be linked to ongoing discourses, existing bodies, decision-making processes and actors.

The planning phase therefore sets the foundation for the process's effectiveness. Integrating it with local democratic structures is essential for ensuring that the recommendations of a citizens' assembly are incorporated into political decision-making. It is important to communicate with the local stakeholders in politics, administration and civil society and to clarify as far as possible in advance their willingness to participate in the process and to engage with the recommendations. In practice, however, a participation process and its integration can rarely be designed completely from scratch. This is because whenever the decision is made (e.g. by the town mayor) that an issue could do with more public participation, there is always a story behind that choice. And this must be connected to the idea of participation.





Regardless of the overall conditions, it has proven to be a good idea to open up the planning of the process on a participatory basis. In addition to the key local stakeholders – such as mayors – other (local political) actors should also be brought on board to plan the process. This means that those invited to the initial planning process should include those who already play a role in discourse relating to the topic, who will later have to make a decision on the topic, or who are affected in some other way and can influence the success of the participation. In the LOSLAND processes, this included the city or municipal council, local administrators (particularly from participation departments, public relations and citizen services), as well as, where appropriate, active public initiatives and individual stakeholders, such as citizens who had already taken part in previous participation processes and who were able to contribute their experiences. Supported by process experts, such a group can identify useful answers and clarifications to the questions mentioned above and develop a shared view of what should happen during and as a result of the participation process.

In the LOSLAND project, these planning committees were set up in all municipalities. They were called steering or supervisory groups. They were always implemented in response to a resolution by the city or municipal council, which usually also defined who should be involved and what other resources would be made available for the process. The decision of the city or municipal council was also important in order to give the citizens' assembly an official mandate to advise the city or municipal council. A look at the LOSLAND municipalities shows how creative the planning process can be. In Varel, a citizen was selected by lottery to work in the steering group in order to bring the target group's perspective to the table, starting at the process planning stage. In Lindau, after the decision was

made to participate in LOSLAND, a separate workshop was included in the planning phase. At this session, local politicians had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the citizens' assembly format, which had been used once before, and to contribute to its design. This proved valuable for the city council's involvement in the planning process, especially since not all eleven factions could send representatives to the planning committee. The session reinforced the city council's responsibility as the initiating body for the process. Moreover, involving city councillors allowed them to experience and appreciate cooperation based on mutual understanding. Another special characteristic of Lindau was that a randomly selected citizen from a previous citizens' assembly was included in the planning committee. The way the city council in Lindau dealt with recommendations further demonstrates the value of these participation opportunities in the planning phase. After city councillors showed great interest at the future forum and the transfer workshop, the recommendations of the future council (as citizens' assemblies are called in LOSLAND projects) were adopted almost unanimously by the city council. In ongoing local political work, they will now be associated with existing projects or provide the basic guidelines for them.

The LOSLAND municipalities thus emphasize the importance of collaboratively planning participation processes and embedding them within political structures and the local context to ensure that recommendations lead to real impact – laying the foundation for municipalities fit for future generations. However, this special type of process integration impacts more than just the results. In the LOSLAND processes, deliberation was practised not just in the future councils, but also in the planning phase. Collaboration on an equal footing, mutual understanding, and consensus as tools for collaboration and participation were experienced and learned together in the diverse planning groups. This can have a long-term impact on the culture of participation in the entire municipality – and in the best-case scenario it can lead to a revitalisation of local democracy.





"The goal was to embed the processes within the DNA of the administration."

Interview with Alexandra Abbrederis Simpson, Participation Officer of the City of Lindau (Bodensee)

In Lindau (Bodensee), citizen participation is a living culture. Even before LOSLAND, the city had already used the citizens' assembly format to address an issue of concern to the people of Lindau. In an interview, the city's participation officer Alexandra Abbrederis Simpson describes the mood in the community and provides her insights into successful participation.

Ms. Abbrederis Simpson, you've headed up the "Citizen Participation Project Office" in Lindau since 2020, which is located at the mayor's office. How did this position come about?

The position was established in 2020 to support a major participation process on a parking issue. It was an externally facilitated process. It soon became clear to the administration that we need a contact person in a supporting role who could advise colleagues in the various departments. This resulted in the creation of my position. Right from the beginning, my role was important for building bridges between the city council, administrators and, of course, the citizens. Following the parking issue, my position was extended to reflect the recognised need for someone who can plan and facilitate participation processes and provide technical support.

Lindau had already implemented participation formats and gained experience with specific processes prior to LOSLAND. What kind of attitudes did LOSLAND encounter in Lindau?

Lindau is always said to be one of the Bavarian municipalities with the most referendums. The parking issue arose because a referendum overturned a city council decision. The city council then decided to commission a participation process to give citizens a voice. So I would describe the prevailing attitudes as follows: Citizens want to get involved and contribute – Lindau is very important to them and they are confident in expressing their opinions and getting involved in political decisions.

Given this previous experience, how did the planning phase of LOSLAND start in Lindau?

For me, citizen participation means learning together from everyone involved. That learning is possible when you gather experiences, reflect on them and then incorporate them into the next process. We wanted to take into account the insights gained from the previous process around the parking issue and our experiences with a citizens' assembly.

''It's important that we don't just produce highlights or events, but that we focus continuously on citizen participation.''

What were those insights?

To name a few: To ensure that there is plenty of lead time and to plan the overall process as well as the corresponding milestones. We also focused on the support team, which included members from a wide range of political groups (which was very valuable), as well as engaged citizens and people from the administration, including me as the project manager. A very important topic was not only the process itself, but also planning how we can best translate the results into political reality.

How important is it to plan this?

The reality of a city council is different from that of a citizens' assembly. It's important to bring these two worlds together by mediating between their different realities. You have to take time, create space and make it possible. Because everyone wants the same thing – to achieve something good for the community, for the common good. Effective citizen participation also means that the issues developed can have an impact and do not disappear into a drawer somewhere. That's why we made a special effort to focus on this.

How exactly did things go in that intensive meeting between the city council and the future council?

Right at the beginning of the LOSLAND process there was a kick-off workshop with the city council, which was conducted by the LOSLAND facilitation team. All city council members were invited and many turned up. The aim was to give the city council a comprehensive picture: What can you expect from the LOSLAND process? What are your preferred issues, your concerns?

And how did the results transfer go?

In Lindau, we added a second transfer phase to the LOSLAND process. This was, of course, extremely well prepared with the facilitation team. The city council then had an intensive discussion about the recommendations of the future council and the question of what we can learn from them and what the recommendations mean for our specific work. In addition to the city council, three future councillors also attended this meeting. They were then asked: How did you come to this conclusion? What did you mean by that? Ultimately, we can look at the many recommendations in different ways.

You talk about citizen participation as a shared learning process. With your experience in the administration, what was the learning process like there?

Citizen participation is still a new field within administration. And as for all new things, colleagues don't initially know what to expect and what it means for them. Citizen participation represents a paradigm shift toward greater transparency and more communication – it also entails an additional set of responsibilities alongside our day-to-day work. This also brings uncertainty – people wonder what it means for their everyday work.

And how did they handle that uncertainty?

After the initial uncertainty, you gain confidence in the process once you realise that things are actually getting started, that there is a contact person, and that many of the stumbling blocks are known and are being handled professionally. And doing this enables us to achieve positive results together. Citizen participation is not an end in itself; we want it to have an impact. My colleagues were open to this. They recognised that if the issue was supported and implemented professionally, it would also provide added value for them, both within the administration and personally.

How was this confidence within the administration expressed?

The processes became more familiar and became systematised, so to speak. The goal was to embed the processes within the DNA of the administration.

In addition to the LOSLAND team, you also provided this professional support in your role as participation officer.

I have facilitated external participation processes for many years. I'm familiar with the role of an external consultant. Now I'm very close to the internal processes. I consider this mediation role as part of the administration role to be of great added value within the participation context. As an external consultant, I wasn't as aware of this as I am now through my daily collaboration with my colleagues.

So did it help that you were working within the administration during the transfer?

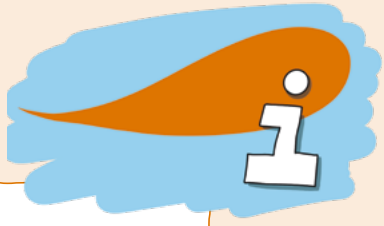
Absolutely. However, a position like mine is not a requirement for successful participation. Not every municipality has the resources to view this position as just one piece of the larger participation landscape. Equally important are engaged citizens and civil society organisations who actively advocate for, contribute to, and help shape citizen participation. Additionally, the external perspective provided by the facilitator is crucial for making meaningful progress on the issues at hand. What is probably special about a position like mine is that it can provide continuity. It's important that we don't just produce highlights or events, but that we focus continuously on sustained citizen participation.



Alexandra Abbrederis Simpson

is a business and communications consultant, author and participation expert. She works as a Citizen Participation Officer for the City of Lindau (Bodensee).

"For me, citizen participation means shared learning for everyone involved."



The LOSLAND process in Rietschen

Around 2,500 people live in the LOSLAND municipality of Rietschen, a small community in Lusatia on the edge of the Reichwalde lignite open-cast mine. Major issues include structural change, strained municipal budgets, and public services – alongside a strong desire for open dialogue about the future of the municipality. Rietschen took part in LOSLAND thanks to Mayor Ralf Bremer's interest in a randomly selected future council and after approval by the local council. The planning phase presented stakeholders with several challenges. From the outset, the goal was for the process to have a meaningful impact. A previous participation effort, conducted through village workshops, had remained incomplete – so there were particularly high expectations for the LOSLAND process.

A further challenge was the small town's very limited administrative capacities. This meant that the mayor himself, in addition to his many other obligations, was primarily responsible for the process and was in charge of all organisational matters. Last but not least, recruitment of participants for the future council in Rietschen did not go as planned. The aim was to invite everyone locally to apply for one of the lottery places via the municipality's traditional communication channels. The participants of the future council would then be randomly chosen from the resulting pot. The idea behind this two-step approach was that everyone should have heard about the participation process. Unfortunately, only a handful of people registered this way by the deadline. A lottery system to form a group of at least 12 participants made no sense. The mayor, the relevant administrators and municipal councillors, together with the process support team therefore decided together to change the process. To respond to the shortcomings of the initial recruitment strategy and turn the experience into a learning opportunity, Rietschen added a second guiding question. This focused on how to shape Rietschen's future in a way that engages its residents: "How do we reach local people so that they can have a say?" The future council was also opened up to all interested residents, allowing broader participation.

The process also built on the outcomes of earlier village workshops, reviewing and updating the data to ensure its continued relevance. This enabled the LOSLAND process in Rietschen to go ahead and also led to a recognition that finding the right fit means being both flexible and creative in the planning phase. The LOSLAND municipality of Rietschen shows that openness to learning in the participation process can create a real opportunity to identify actual challenges on the ground and enable future participation.

"Many people often have a detailed, structured participation design in mind, but it is always advisable to take a step back, and to respectfully acknowledge that 'OK, these people do things differently than I do, so let's make some adjustments together'. And it works."

Manuela Kohlbacher, Facilitation Team East and Process Support in Rietschen



Sortition — random selection is all well and good, but in the end only those who want to participate will do so, right?!

That's right, participation in the LOSLAND future councils was voluntary. This principle of voluntariness can, however, distort the intended randomness of the selection process and make it harder to achieve a truly diverse group. Fortunately, there are ways to counteract this and help ensure diversity within the future councils. But how can that be done?

- By defining criteria for the group's diversity (such as age, gender and place of residence), which are taken into account during the selection of participants and allocation of places on the future council.
- With thoughtful planning and careful consideration. Which potential randomly selected citizens can we inform about the participation process and where and how do we reach them? For example, with:
  - Adverts for the process in schools to reach young people
  - Multilingual information services and the removal of barriers by actively providing information on interpreting services
  - Childcare at the future council
  - Information on accessibility
- Commitment to outreach and invitations to participate posted to private letterboxes.
- With creative ideas: Involve young people and enthusiastic participants of previous participation processes in outreach strategies and in promoting the citizens' assembly.
- With an expense allowance for participants.

Random selection, participation and outreach

Who should be involved? Random selection is often a good approach when a citizen participation process focuses on issues or questions that potentially impact everyone and that can be addressed by everyone based on their life experiences.

The principle of random selection was used in the democracy of ancient Athens to fill public offices with members of the citizenry selected by lottery. While the drawing of lots is also used in modern democracies (e.g. to determine the winner in the event of a tie in elections, or for the selection of lay judges), it has only recently been rediscovered on a larger scale through its use in citizens' assemblies and related procedures.

The opportunity to make a difference

Selecting participants by lot has several advantages. Random selection is intended to reduce problems of bias and exclusion that often occur in self-recruiting groups. For example, events to which the general public are invited usually only attract the "usual suspects." Other parts of the citizenry, however, rarely or never appear. In these cases, a random selection process can deliver more heterogeneous results.

Citizens' assemblies need diverse participants

When a group is determined at random, this creates special conditions for cooperation within that group. No-one is under pressure to represent anyone other than themselves. Everyone can contribute their views, experiences and thoughts as experts based on their personal reality. For citizens' assemblies, these are prerequisites for enabling an exchange of ideas on an equal footing based on mutual understanding, and in order to find the best solutions and ideas for approaching a challenge.



The moment of the draw: In the LOSLAND municipalities, as here in Lindau, members of the steering group or the administration carried out the random selection procedure using the civil register.



This form of participation differs fundamentally from interest-driven participation processes, where the aim is either to convince others of the superiority of one's own arguments or to reach compromises based on the lowest common denominator.

Random selection doesn't guarantee representativeness or diversity

For the relatively small groups that typically participate in citizens' assemblies, random sampling cannot produce a representative group in the statistical sense. This can only be achieved with the help of randomness within much larger samples. But citizens' assemblies do not need to be an exact reflection of society as a whole, but simply a diverse group of people who would probably not have come together otherwise.

But there is one big hurdle. Participation in citizens' assemblies is voluntary and those selected can also decide not to participate. Response rates are often low, depending on the form of invitation used to address the randomly selected persons. If the invitation is issued only in writing, for example, the probability of a response is usually only around five percent. Self-selection – which is unavoidable because participation is voluntary – impairs diversity within the random group. For example, people with ample or flexible schedules (such as students and pensioners) and people with a higher level of education are more likely to participate than, for example, people in full-time employment or people who have not completed (higher) education.

Using criteria to control diversity

For this reason, it has proven useful in practice to intervene in the random selection process in order to compensate for the resulting systemic distortions. This is achieved by defining clear, understandable criteria for allocating the available places in advance. The minimum diversity of the group is therefore defined in advance. Frequently used criteria are age, gender and place of residence, since these data are already available in the resident's register. Depending on the question and the goal of the citizens' assembly, it sometimes makes sense to define further criteria and, for example, to take into account the lived experience of migration or educational qualifications.

Setting incentives and establishing direct contact

Other ways to increase the diversity of participants include using straightforward strategies for reaching out to participants and providing incentives. Many people can be persuaded to participate if, in addition to a written invitation, they also receive a telephone call (e.g. from the mayor who issued the invitation) or even a visit to their home. When organisers make this additional effort, it is possible to achieve response rates of 50 to 100 percent.

The same applies to making the conditions of participation as attractive as possible. Adequate reimbursement of expenses, free childcare, interpreters or pre-written requests for time off to the participant's employer can be decisive in ensuring that the invitation is accepted.

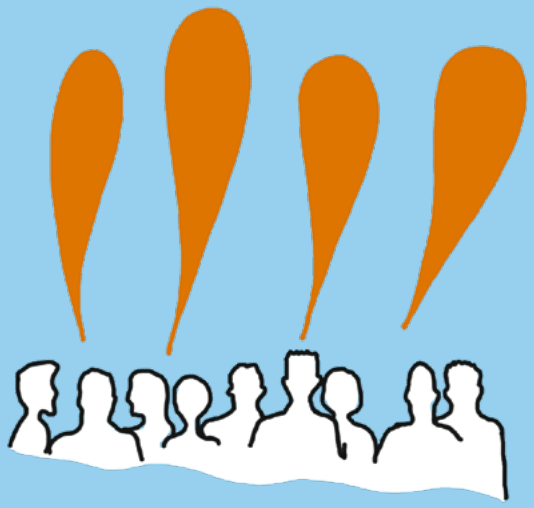
Random selection as an expression of a specific approach to participation

A random selection can be achieved using very different strategies. The options listed above can be easily combined. It is important that, as in the rest of the participation process, the chosen approach is communicated transparently to the public. This is the only way to ensure that the procedure is easy to understand and perceived as legitimate.

The goal of random selection is to bring together a wide range of perspectives in shaping how we live together as a society. This participatory approach relies on trust in the process – trust that can only be built through open and transparent communication.



This figure depicts the random selection procedure as it was used in the LOSLAND municipality of Homberg (Efze).



The future council

The LOSLAND model project aimed to create hands-on experience with dialogue-oriented and lottery-based participation. The citizens' assembly format served as a reference point, with inspiration drawn from the Vorarlberg model. Another goal was to support municipalities in becoming more sustainable and fit for future generations. That's why the citizens' assembly in the LOSLAND project is referred to as a "future council" (Zukunftsrat).

The future council is at the heart of the LOSLAND process. It comprises a group of randomly selected citizens who have been invited to work together to develop recommendations for making their municipality fit for future generations. To do this, they tackle a question prepared by the steering group.

The members of the future council are closely supported by a professional facilitation team, which helps the group to work together on an equal footing as it formulates joint recommendations. In addition to providing specific recommendations for politicians, the future council often generates other outcomes: Participants gain insight into effective collective decision-making, experience self-efficacy and focus on fostering the common good. They also form new interpersonal connections. This often results in a desire to continue to be actively involved in politics, culture and society.



Citizens' assemblies and future councils

As part of LOSLAND, citizens' assemblies were launched in ten municipalities. In line with the goal of creating a future fit for coming generations, these assemblies are referred to in the LOSLAND project as future councils (Zukunftsräte). Some municipalities, however, continued to use the term "citizens' assembly" (Bürgerrat) even within the LOSLAND context.

Gütersloh: A citizens' assembly in a big city

Report **Gütersloh in East Westphalia (NRW) is located to the northwest of the Teutoburg Forest. In addition to an historic city centre and a park with an award-winning botanical garden, the city is also the headquarters of the two global corporations Miele and Bertelsmann. With just over 100,000 inhabitants, Gütersloh has another unique selling point among the LOSLAND municipalities: Gütersloh is the only major city that took part in the model project.**



Berliner Platz in downtown Gütersloh, for which recommendations were developed by the citizens' council.



Participants discussed a total of six topics and recorded their results on flipcharts for presentation at the future forum

Citizen participation in big cities – completely different from smaller communities or comparable?

In Gütersloh, 25 citizens developed six recommendations in response to the question "How can we keep Gütersloh fit for future generations?". These were presented and discussed with other interested residents at a "future forum" held by the city council. At a transfer workshop and a city council meeting, politicians and administrators accepted the recommendations and discussed their implementation – just as in the other LOSLAND municipalities. City councillor Thomas Dominikowski, who supported the process as a member of the steering group, does not consider implementing a citizens' assembly in a large city to be particularly challenging – and yet the Gütersloh process, like the other LOSLAND processes, has its own peculiarities deriving from its size.



Maik Schrey, the Gütersloh administration employee responsible for the local LOSLAND process.



The future forum provided space for encounters and dialogue, between representatives of the citizens' initiative "Demokratie wagen!" and the city council.

A rooftop bar for Gütersloh? Citizens' assembly recommendation on the use of the Karstadt department store

As in many larger German cities, the former Karstadt building in central Gütersloh has become symbolic of the changing face of the city centre. The members of Gütersloh's LOSLAND future council used the building as a model project to develop ideas for a new vision of the city centre. According to city councillor Thomas Dominikowski, the "citizens' unfiltered views" made them quite unconventional. Ideas ranged from a rooftop bar, co-working spaces and a community meeting point, to opportunities for leisure use in the basement. These ideas were discussed together at the future forum and during the subsequent transfer phase.

Maik Schrey, the Gütersloh city official responsible for this topic, describes the recommendations for the city centre and the Karstadt building as a genuine "intersectional issue." He also highlights how these l recommendations showcase the potential impact such processes can have for other major cities.

Palpable enthusiasm for citizens' assemblies in Gütersloh

Long before LOSLAND came to Gütersloh, the establishment of a citizens' assembly was already a much-discussed topic. The citizens' initiative "Demokratie wagen!" ("Dare Democracy!") has been campaigning for more participatory projects for years, including for the Gütersloh citizens' budget. At the beginning of 2020, the initiative used a citizens' petition to put the issue to the city council – sparking lively discussions among the members and factions. Gütersloh's recently elected (2020) mayor Norbert Morkes was also a long-standing proponent of citizens' assemblies. The establishment of a citizens' assembly had been one of his campaign issues – and his enthusiasm also energised parts of the administration. However, things didn't get started until the city council decided to hold a citizens' assembly in November 2021 after several rounds of discussions in faction meetings and committee meetings.

With regard to this special initial situation in Gütersloh, Rosa Hoppe, who supported Gütersloh as part of the LOSLAND team, emphasises how important it is to consider all stakeholders in a municipality, to initiate communication with one another and to create a transparent process. ''The atmosphere in the cross-party steering group was consistently positive and the cooperation went surprisingly well. The constructive cooperation as well as the engagement with the topic left the participants eager to repeat the experience.'' They had taken the first steps towards citizen participation. ''But there's room for improvement'', says Thorsten Sterk, citizens' assembly expert at Mehr Demokratie e.V.

Nothing works without the administration!

The implementation of the LOSLAND process, which was attached to the ''Council Affairs and Citizen Dialogue'' department – and also the tasks taken on by Maik Schrey in particular – were fundamental to the LOSLAND process in the city. In addition to coordinating the project, he also provided a much-needed point of contact for the mayor and administrators, citizens and politicians. Schrey is currently focused on fine-tuning the transfer and the follow-up process. This means ''getting the citizens' assembly back to the table'' even after the end of the LOSLAND process and promoting ongoing work on the recommendations by politicians and administrators. Rosa Hoppe describes the importance of coordination by the administration. ''The collaboration with Maik Schrey and the involvement of multiple departments made it possible to implement the future council in a large city with this level of quality.'' Despite the enormous amount of work involved, Maik Schrey is positive about the results. ''The fact that there was such a high response rate during the random selection procedure demonstrates citizens' interest in helping to shape their own city and gives us hope for the next citizens' assembly.''



A Gütersloh fit for future generations. In keeping with the theme, people from different generations came together at the future forum.

The citizens' assembly: Rewarding teamwork and a spark for civic engagement

Interview Kathrin Hirnschal lives in Gütersloh – and is an enthusiastic "randomly selected citizen". As a participant in the future council in Gütersloh, the only major city among the LOSLAND municipalities, she reports on her impressions and how her participation in the future council has inspired her civic engagement.

Ms. Hirnschal, you are one of Gütersloh's 25 randomly selected future councilmembers. What were your experiences with the LOSLAND future council in Gütersloh?

First, I received a letter from the mayor, which was a bit of a surprise. Then I learned from the newspaper that 750 people had been randomly selected to take part in a citizens' assembly. I didn't really know much about what that was, because I had only heard of my city council. After a little research I realised that this was something I was interested in because if I can get involved and we can help change something here for Gütersloh, then I would like to be part of that.

We then met in the citizens' assembly for two days over a weekend. There were 25 of us. Some were already quite politically engaged, others less so or not at all. I already had a topic in mind for the citizens' assembly: Caring and sharing for young and old. The great thing was that we were able to work on it in the citizens' assembly – and we're still doing that today, even after our participation here in Gütersloh.

You were randomly selected from 100,000 people in Gütersloh — how did that make you feel?

We were all randomly selected—it felt like the first day of school. We had to find new ways to communicate so that everyone could be heard and understood. The group represented a wide range of ages, from the very young to the very old. I was especially impressed by the young people, who were enthusiastic and deeply committed. That was truly inspiring.

How did mindful communication in the citizens' assembly influence your cooperation and the results developed in the citizens' assembly?

I worked in a group with four women on a recommendation that, uncannily, applied to all of us, both on a personal and professional level: Living, sharing and helping together. That's why we had no problem communicating within the group when drawing up the recommendation or during the more stressful parts of the citizens' assembly, and things went relatively quickly. We had some nice conversations with other participants, learning from the perspective of a person with an immigration background and from an elderly lady about her experience of living in Gütersloh. Those were great encounters.

"We had to speak with each other in different ways so that everyone could be understood. Everyone was represented – from very young to very old."

"I felt my own motivation was validated because I saw that others also wanted to get involved."

What role did the facilitators play and how did that influence your collaboration in the LOSLAND future council?

Both facilitators were very nice to deal with. Very understanding, very positive. We worked with cards, then worked together to summarise our progress, then worked on the points again. This was the only way to do this – otherwise with so many ideas you will end up in a complete mess after two days.

Apart from your project, what did you take away from the citizens' assembly?

I felt validated in my commitment because I saw that others also wanted to get involved. Of the 25 original participants, only the four of us women are left. The four of us still meet regularly to make sure that the projects we advocated for keep moving forward. One example is the city centre in Gütersloh.

What opportunities and challenges do you see in implementing citizens' assemblies in even more municipalities in Germany?

One challenge is the possibility of rejection by the council, and I've encountered considerable scepticism in discussions with councillors outside Gütersloh. But the point is that democracy is meant to be lived – and why not do that through a citizens' assembly that makes recommendations and works for the city? I see no reason not to. On the other hand, the benefits of establishing a permanent citizens' assembly are as clear as day to me. It provides a space where politically engaged people can come together and showcase the level of commitment within the municipality.



Kathrin Hirnschal

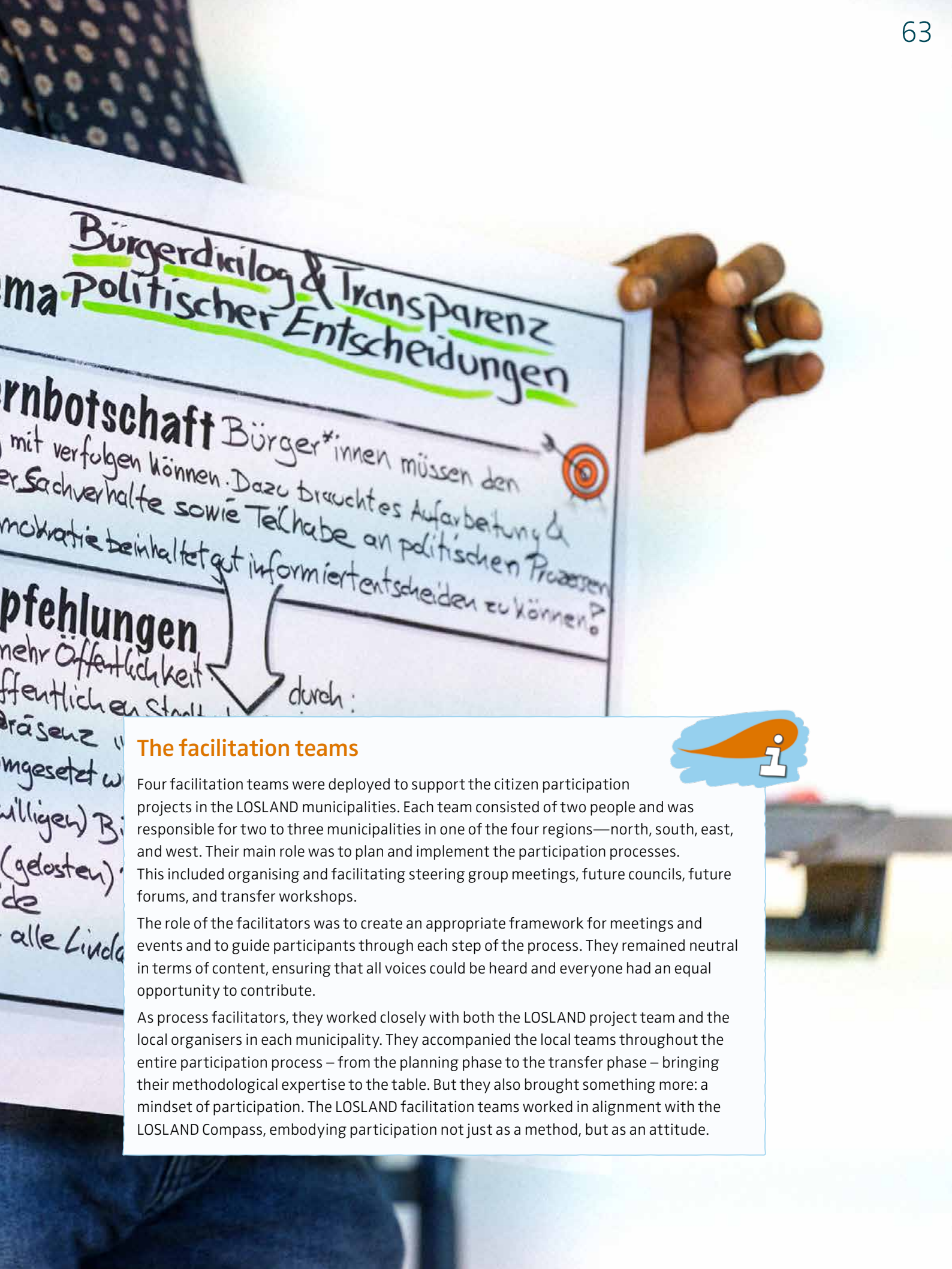
moved away after growing up in Gütersloh. She returned to East Westphalia a few years ago to care for her parents. Since then, she has been particularly committed to the question of how younger and older people in Gütersloh can better share living space and support services – she is now doing this together with fellow former members of the citizens' assembly.



I think citizens' assemblies are great, but do we really need all these different methodologies?

Of course, it's possible to exchange opinions, discuss, and reach compromises without relying on specific methods, flip charts, or cards. However, progress is usually much smoother when a neutral facilitator guides the discussions and ensures that constructive ground rules are followed. Using different methods and materials also allows communication beyond just spoken words, helping to clarify key messages and outcomes.

A methodological framework is therefore indispensable to citizens' assemblies that seek to promote understanding, co-creation and communication on an equal footing between very different individuals. All participants should be able to support the group's recommendations without serious objections. Achieving this level of valuable collaboration requires trained facilitators and methods such as dynamic facilitation combined with associated materials such as flip charts and moderation cards.



The facilitation teams

Four facilitation teams were deployed to support the citizen participation projects in the LOSLAND municipalities. Each team consisted of two people and was responsible for two to three municipalities in one of the four regions—north, south, east, and west. Their main role was to plan and implement the participation processes. This included organising and facilitating steering group meetings, future councils, future forums, and transfer workshops.

The role of the facilitators was to create an appropriate framework for meetings and events and to guide participants through each step of the process. They remained neutral in terms of content, ensuring that all voices could be heard and everyone had an equal opportunity to contribute.

As process facilitators, they worked closely with both the LOSLAND project team and the local organisers in each municipality. They accompanied the local teams throughout the entire participation process – from the planning phase to the transfer phase – bringing their methodological expertise to the table. But they also brought something more: a mindset of participation. The LOSLAND facilitation teams worked in alignment with the LOSLAND Compass, embodying participation not just as a method, but as an attitude.

LOSLAND from a research perspective

Who are the individuals who participate in citizens' assemblies? What is the age, educational level and economic situation of the participants? Are they long-standing residents or newcomers? Would they participate in a citizens' assembly again? What effects do citizens' assemblies have on the participants? What effects do they have on politics and the administration?

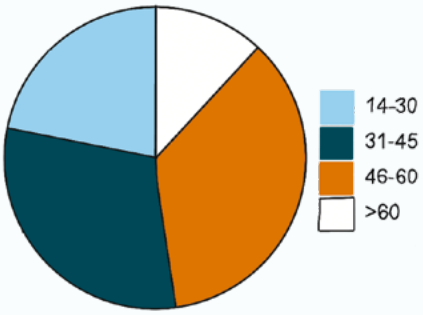
A team of researchers was assembled for the LOSLAND project to get to the bottom of these and many other questions. LOSLAND offers unique conditions as a model project for research into dialogue-oriented citizen participation. This research group collected data throughout the project. Data collection activities included observation at almost all meetings of the future councils, as well as individual future forums and transfer workshops in the municipalities. Furthermore, a series of interviews were conducted with process managers from the LOSLAND municipalities such as mayors and relevant administrators. In addition, anonymous questionnaires were used to survey participants of the LOSLAND future councils both before and after their participation. A further survey of participants on the impacts of the participation processes is planned for 2023.

An initial look at the data shows that the future council participants who completed the survey represent a broad cross-section of society. The preliminary survey, with a response rate of 69 percent, gathered biographical information. The diagrams below present a first evaluation of this data across all LOSLAND future councils, revealing a high overall level of participant diversity. However, the data also make it clear that random sampling does not produce representative groups in the statistical sense. Not all individuals are equally inclined to accept invitations to citizens' assemblies or future councils. For example, people with a university degree enjoyed significantly greater representation in the future councils than people with a secondary or elementary school diploma. It is also interesting to note that of the 42 percent of participants who answered the second questionnaire, a large majority would participate in a citizens' assembly again.

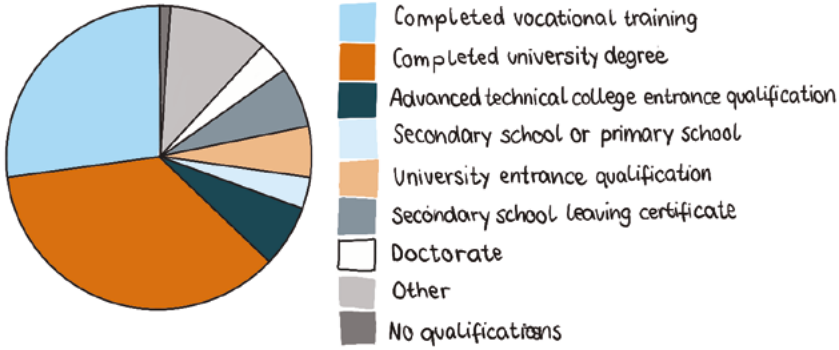
The end of the LOSLAND processes marks the start of data analysis, evaluation, and interpretation for the researchers' various projects. The planned scientific work will take place in the next few months and the resulting publications will be available on the LOSLAND project website.

The LOSLAND team is happy to provide other researchers the opportunity to work with the collected data. All you need to do is send a message to: daniel.oppold@rifs-potsdam.de.

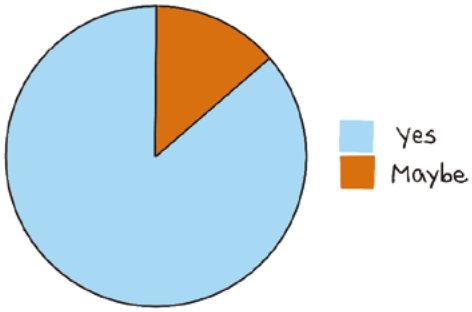
Age distribution of respondents



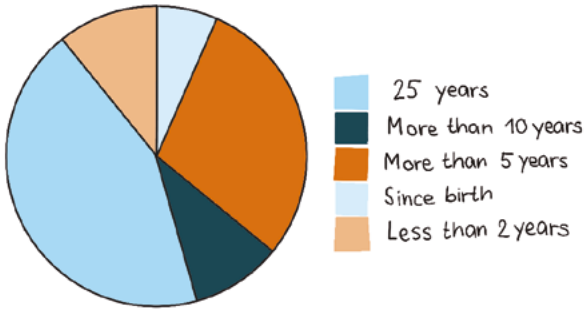
Level of education of the respondents



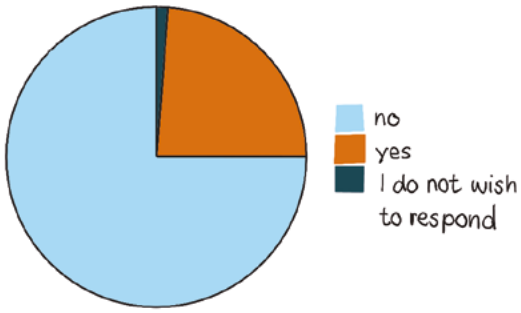
Motivation to participate again in a future council / citizens' assembly



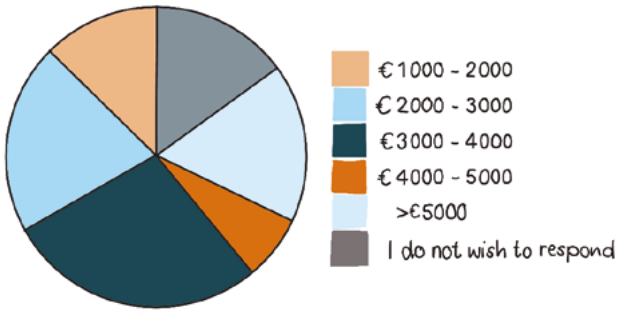
Duration of residence



Migration experience of the respondents



Household income of the respondents





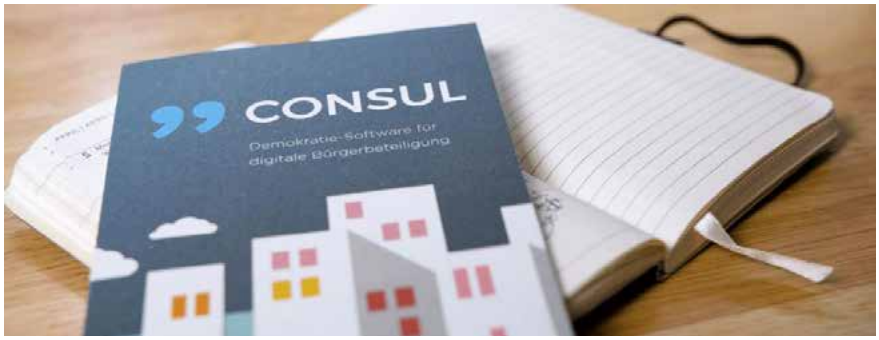
The future forum

Shortly after the future council has met, the participants come together again in the **public future forum**, where they will present their results to the city or municipality. The mayor, members of the city or municipal council, representatives of the administration and all interested citizens are invited to attend. The event provides a forum at which the future council's recommendations can be discussed and expanded with further ideas or details. The future forum also provides an opportunity for the mayor, council members and administrators to speak directly with interested members of the public and to exchange ideas on issues related to keeping their region fit for future generations.

Online participation in the LOSLAND project

In addition to analogue participation events (future council and future forum), the LOSLAND project also offered the opportunity to supplement these with online participation. The LOSLAND project created an online participation platform based on the CONSUL software (more information in the info box) and shared it with those municipalities that did not already have their own platform.

The decision to include or forgo online participation was made by each municipality's planning committee during the initial planning phase. Among the LOSLAND municipalities, Gütersloh, Homberg (Efze), Ludwigsfelde, Rietschen and Varel opted for online participation. In practice, it was implemented in Gütersloh, Ludwigsfelde, and Varel. In Homberg (Efze) and Rietschen, the idea was dropped over the course of the process. In Homberg (Efze), there was not enough time between the in-person events to enable meaningful online engagement. In Rietschen, online participation was no longer a good fit due to a shift in the municipality's overall approach.



All municipalities that opted for online participation via the LOSLAND platform received prior training in the use of CONSUL. Course attendees learned how to set up online participation, add content, facilitate online participation and how to evaluate it. They were also advised on the importance and available options for public relations regarding online participation. The municipalities were guided and supported by the LOSLAND team during implementation.

Combining analogue and digital participation requires good coordination between the two participation approaches. How important were the contributions arising from digital participation compared to the results from the analogue event? And at what point in the process should we make use of online participation? Should we ask open questions and collect new suggestions or should the results of the citizens' assembly simply be evaluated or commented on?

What is CONSUL?

Consul is an open-source platform for digital citizen participation, developed collaboratively by governments, public administrations, universities, and citizens. It enables people to engage with local politics in an informed, transparent, and up-to-date way. The software is available to all cities and municipalities free of charge and can be adapted to their respective needs. CONSUL is currently used by municipalities at regional and national level by political parties, NGOs and citizens' initiatives. 135 institutions worldwide already use the platform, including cities such as Madrid, New York and Buenos Aires. In Germany, over 30 cities and municipalities use CONSUL.

In the three LOSLAND municipalities (Gütersloh, Ludwigsfelde and Varel) that used CONSUL for online participation, this occurred between the future forum and the transfer phase (i.e. after the public presentation of the future council's recommendations). Just as participants at the future forum were able to comment on the recommendations of the future assemblies, this was also possible for online users (i.e. around the clock and from any location) over a period of 14 to 23 days. Online participation in the three municipalities was not designed to generate any new questions or recommendations. Instead, the goal was to expand and evaluate the recommendations of the future council.

When we compare the number of participants in the online participation and the contributions (see table) with the population numbers of the three municipalities, the level of participation seems rather low at first glance. However, it should be noted that online participation is a new format in the political landscape and therefore also for administrations and citizens. The online participation in the three LOSLAND municipalities should therefore be valued as a bold new step in citizen participation and as a learning experience for future participation projects.

Figures on LOSLAND online participation

	Gütersloh	Ludwigsfelde	Varel	TOTAL
Time of online participation	26.9 – 9.10.2022	01. – 23.10.2022	08. – 25.10.2022	14 – 23 days
Number of suggestions posted online	7	38	4	49
Number of participants*	Min. 42	Min. 53	Min. 22	288
Number of comments	20	90	68	178
Number of ratings submitted	183	1029	71	1283

*This is the minimum number of participants per municipality. The exact number cannot be determined precisely because all three municipalities use a central platform.

Transformation in Coesfeld

The future forum as a mosaic of new participation concepts

In the future forum, randomly selected citizens come together with interested members of public and present their recommendations. The recommendations can be publicly discussed and further developed there before politicians decide how to act on the results. In the city of Coesfeld, the recommendations and inspiration from the LOSLAND process provided new impetus for long-term citizen participation.

Coesfeld in Münsterland has a population of around 36,000. The town lies west of Münster, not far from the Dutch border. Since the start of the LOSLAND process in Coesfeld in 2021, two dedicated women have played key roles in driving and supporting its progress. One of them is Kathrin Rick, a social worker and activist; the other is Eliza Diekmann, the mayor of Coesfeld. Both share a vision for a new culture of participation–one that has the power to transform how we live together in urban society.

LOSLAND comes to Coesfeld

In November 2021, the city council in Coesfeld decided to hold a future council. A steering group was formed. A question for the future council was agreed upon: ''What does it mean to live together happily in Coesfeld, and how can we make that a reality?'' This question was added to a mission statement process in Coesfeld. While mission statements are usually associated with companies or clubs, city mission statements come from city marketing and cover all areas of life in a city. When Coesfeld elected its independent mayor Eliza Diekmann in 2020, she initiated the development of a mission statement as part of a facilitated process. Through the future council, she hopes to receive additional ideas and requests from the citizens.



There are plans to continue with citizen participation in Coesfeld in Münsterland. ''It will be exciting to see the outcome if this is extended to the whole city in a few years. What would the impact be?'' says Mayor Eliza Diekmann.



Eliza Diekmann, Coesfeld's mayor, on LOSLAND: ''We want to learn how to use it as a tool and ensure it can be reused across multiple political consultation processes.''



You can use ''Participation outreach'' to follow up with people who do not respond directly to an invitation. These are often individuals who are most under-represented in politics.

LOSLAND comes to Coesfeld

In November 2021, the city council in Coesfeld decided to hold a future council. A steering group was formed. A question for the future council was agreed upon: ''What does it mean to live together happily in Coesfeld, and how can we make that a reality?'' This question was added to a mission statement process in Coesfeld. While mission statements are usually associated with companies or clubs, city mission statements come from city marketing and cover all areas of life in a city. When Coesfeld elected its independent mayor Eliza Diekmann in 2020, she initiated the development of a mission statement as part of a facilitated process. Through the future council, she hopes to receive additional ideas and requests from the citizens.

Participation in Coesfeld – a priority for the new mayor

Eliza Diekmann (born 1986) is one of Germany's few female town mayors. The mother of two is particularly committed to new forms of participation and civic engagement. Immediately after taking office, she introduced a monthly ''city dialogue''. This was intended to promote communication between citizens and the administration while enabling participation. Diekmann explains that the desire for participation processes in Coesfeld also came from the administration: ''This is not a given, but it was the case with us.'' What did she initially hope to achieve with the citizens' assembly and LOSLAND? ''We wanted to learn how to use it as a tool and we wanted to be able to reuse it in multiple instances for political consultation processes'', she says.

Participation outreach

When LOSLAND was initiated, the city sent out 600 invitations to randomly selected citizens. Seven people responded, including one rejection. The fact that the future council went on to be held with sufficient participants is thanks to Kathrin Rick, a committed Coesfeld citizen. The 63-year-old social worker has an interested, open and warm-hearted demeanour. During the pandemic, she used online formats to maintain social connections and engage with political developments. She learned about ''degrowth'' approaches, the doughnut economy and randomly selected citizens' assemblies as elements of future policy approaches.



Social worker Kathrin Rick embarked on a participation outreach campaign with a vision for a new democratic culture



Future council member Michael, 53, a cemetery gardener by profession, discussed social issues at the future forum.

"That really got me motivated", she says. She joined a public interest economy group and "Coesfeld for Future" and approached the mayor to propose a citizens' assembly. Talks with LOSLAND were already underway. The LOSLAND team suggested that Kathrin Rick become part of the steering group and support the implementation of the participation process.

In response to the low level of uptake of invitations to the future council, LOSLAND adopted a participation outreach concept. "I immediately said that I would do it", says Rick. "I was already eager to get started." She set off and rang the doorbells of over 60 randomly selected people. She explained, encouraged, and learned about what made people hesitant to take up the invitation. She promised that the future council would be provided with an interpreter and childcare. She describes her feelings at the time. "I felt I was an ambassador for something really great. It was actually a privilege." She succeeded in winning over seven more participants for the future council.

Talking, listening, room for concerns

But it is not only the randomly selected citizens who experienced her powers of dialogue and persuasion. Coesfeld city council was initially sceptical. The Christian Democrats, in particular, doubted the feasibility and usefulness of a citizens' assembly in Coesfeld. One city council member feared that this type of participation tool might reinforce tendencies towards "outrage-driven democracy." This led to heated debate in the central and financial committee in December 2021 before it finally decided in favour of LOSLAND.

During Kathrin Rick's door-to-door conversations, some people also thought that they would have to be experienced in politics in order to participate in the citizens' assembly. Many were surprised when they learned about the facilitated sessions, which are about sharing and listening, with a set speaking time for everyone. "A safe space where thoughts, concerns and solutions can be freely shared with no fear of judgement", says Rick. "That's the vision." Taking the concept further, she wonders what it would look like if such spaces for listening and communication existed everywhere in politics.

Recommendations to politicians on youth, housing, communication, accessibility

In September 2022, the Coesfeld future council met and formulated its recommendations to local politicians. One recommendation was the development of a Coesfeld app to facilitate communication between the city and its citizens.
On the topic of housing, the participants of the future council proposed the establishment of a housing exchange. The idea of a ''different type of broker'' emerged, one that focused on social aspects. New multi-generational concepts were formulated, which were also intended to create different venues and meeting points. This included a language café, for example. Youth services were also addressed. The city lacked publicly accessible and non-commercial meeting places for young people. The fact that young people in Coesfeld have no voice in the council was to be addressed by setting up a youth forum. And last but not least, the topic of accessibility was included in all recommendations.

The future forum

One week later, the Coesfeld future council presented its results to the public at the future forum. In addition to the members of the future council, Mayor Diekmann, several members of the city council and many interested citizens were also present. In total, around 70 people attended, and many of them brought their families along. There was a lively discussion of the future council's recommendations. More ideas were added. Each topic was covered in detail. Micha, a cemetery gardener by profession and participant in the future council, brought his girlfriend along and discussed the topic of housing with an FDP politician. Ingeborg, a pensioner, stayed at the future forum for a long time, despite being tired. And Marco Land, a 46-year-old occupational safety specialist, wrote everything down and typed up the ideas put forward in the future forum. Land was one of the participants motivated to take part by Kathrin Rick's participation outreach efforts. ''That was a real highlight! I went to knock and fell through a wide-open door'', Rick laughs. ''He actually wanted to participate but had forgotten to answer. That was one of the best moments! It's so great when someone is so enthusiastic, gets involved and stays involved.'' According to Kathrin Rick, the participants of the future council are very proud of their results. According to Kathrin Rick, the participants of the future council were very proud of their results. According to her, the atmosphere at the future forum was pleasant, lively, friendly and open. That included the city council members. A member of the steering group from the city council commented: ''We're amazed to see so much comes out of a single weekend. Excellent food for thought!''



Following a visit to his front door by Kathrin Rick, 46-year-old Marko Land was inspired to join the future council and went on to become a key figure in Coesfeld's participation process.



Future council member Ingeborg, 74.

Transfer: From recommendations to political decisions

As planned in collaboration with the LOSLAND team, a transfer meeting with the steering group took place in November to outline the next steps and decide which projects to launch. It quickly became clear that the future council wanted to continue its work beyond the formal end of the LOSLAND process. According to the mayor, it was agreed that the council and the city administration would meet every six months. She also emphasizes, however, that the council operates independently of municipal structures. A committed group of members now convenes regularly without the administration's involvement. In addition to the biannual meetings with the city, collaboration is also facilitated through topic-specific sponsorships. "Building on the issues raised during the LOSLAND process, we've now established the Youth Forum as a new format in the city," says Diekmann.

It is important to Kathrin Rick that the implementation of individual projects does not depend on the ongoing commitment of the future council members. "During my door-to-door visits, I promised that the council would only require us to make our recommendations before going our separate ways." She is all the more impressed by the levels of continued personal commitment. She thinks it's wonderful. Some city council members have also signalled their personal willingness to participate. "I'm really happy about the energy of some of the participants. They're ready to make a difference right now, fearless!" This commitment goes well beyond the future council.

Transformation in Coesfeld: what's next?

Further meetings are planned. The city dialogue initiated by Eliza Diekmann before LOSLAND is used as a forum to discuss the recommendations of the future council, for example on special forms of housing. The transformation in Coesfeld sets a precedent. The city is in close communication with Moers, where citizen participation is also due to be initiated. Moers is also taking advice from the city of Aachen, which has set up a "permanent citizens' assembly" whose members are selected by lottery on an ongoing basis.

How has Coesfeld changed with LOSLAND? For Mayor Eliza Diekmann, LOSLAND appears to be just the beginning of a new democratic culture in Coesfeld. She considers her role to encompass supporting citizens in participation formats until they are able to operate independently and naturally in the political process. "We don't want this flame to go out", she says. The fact that the LOSLAND process was supported and facilitated by professionals from start to finish was a huge boon. The effort required for good citizen participation is immense. But it has a major impact. "If just one person comes into contact with the administration and is able to make an impact and experience self-efficacy, that makes it a complete success that was well worth it." Such experiences would multiply if citizens' assemblies were to be implemented over the long term. Diekmann says: "If this is extended to the whole city in a few years, it will be exciting to see the outcome. What would the impact be?"



Public presentation of the results: Around 70 people attended the future forum to discuss the recommendations of the future council.

Democracy as a way of life

Kathrin Rick has also observed that the randomly selected citizens discovered a sense of agency and engagement through the process. She knows of at least three participants who have continued their involvement beyond the project. ''This is wonderful! If citizens' assemblies can achieve this, it's really fantastic.'' Marco Land, whom she convinced to join LOSLAND during a door-to-door visit, has joined Ricks in her campaigning activities for ''Coesfeld for Future'' beyond the future council and future forum. When asked about success stories in Coesfeld, Rick emphasised the power of slow communication and the value of changed perspectives that this provides. After discussions about accessibility, for example, a member of the future council said that he now sees the city with new eyes. He rode his bike through Coesfeld and saw nothing but curbs everywhere. Appreciation for one another has created a sense of community and a culture of mindfulness in the future council. ''Some members have described to me how incredibly enriching it is to talk with each other instead of against each other'', she says. Kathrin Rick is also convinced of this, which is why she is taking further training in facilitation techniques (dynamic facilitation) as used by the LOSLAND facilitators. And the mayor recently also offered her administrative staff further training in dynamic facilitation. Kathrin Rick has a vision for this facilitation method. ''If we train citizens and people within the administration and the city council in this facilitation technique, if we can show others how this creates a different kind of communication, that it's about finding a solution and not about creating divides, then I hope that we will be able to cultivate a more deeply rooted democratic mindset.'' She envisions the integration of citizen participation into Coesfeld's governance practices.





I support participation in principle, but as a politician, I don't have the time to get involved!

That's understandable! Citizen participation is important, but it's one of many different voluntary municipal activities.

However, enthusiasm is an important requirement for a municipal citizens' assembly, because participation can only succeed when there is willingness from both the city council and administrators. A citizens' assembly is not a one-person show and the mayor cannot and is not expected to manage it alone – especially not with limited time resources.

You can find further valuable practical insights in the **Recommendations for Action** from our Losland municipalities.



The transfer phase

How can we adopt and implement the recommendations from the future council and future forum? This task is the focus of the transfer workshops. Members of the steering group and other key individuals come together for this purpose, particularly the administrative departments responsible for the areas impacted by the recommendations. Participants of the future council are also invited to the workshop to answer questions about the recommendations and to convey the ''messages between the lines''. Supported by the facilitation team, the whole group develops specific and meaningful steps to address the recommendations. They work together to examine what is feasible and what is not and who is needed to implement it. The transfer phase is another opportunity to promote understanding between politicians, administrators and citizens. We are all responsible for creating a world fit for future generations.

''The better we plan, the better the results''

*LOSLAND's first participation process took place in the smallest LOSLAND municipality: **Leupoldsgrün** in Upper Franconia. It initiated numerous projects in the village, such as designing a community app, greening the village and public relations work to protect springs and drinking water. In a joint interview, Mayor Annika Popp and LOSLAND colleague Jonas Korn report on the process, the implementation in the municipal council and the joint effort to create a village fit for future generations.*

LOSLAND ***Annika, you're a very active mayor and have already implemented many ideas in Leupoldsgrün. What did LOSLAND provide that expanded on your own efforts?***

Annika Popp *It took a completely different approach. I've been trying to include citizens for many years. But this often just involved sending out surveys, putting up posters or holding town meetings. Individuals who wouldn't usually get involved in local politics have become consistently engaged – not just the usual suspects from associations, the church council, and local council.*

You worked together in the support group for Leupoldsgrün. How were things at the beginning?

Annika Popp *At first we didn't know what to expect. Some people in the steering group had their reservations. But the facilitation team did their job perfectly and dispelled any misgivings. We got to see how much something like this relies on the specialist staff involved.*

Jonas Korn *The first planning meeting of the entire LOSLAND project took place in Leupoldsgrün. Among other things, we took a walk that day to reflect on what sustainability means to us, using our impressions as a basis for developing questions on the topic.*

What made the participation process in Leupoldsgrün successful?

Annika Popp *First of all, it was the openness. Both the local council and residents agreed to the process. Secondly, there is the good work of the facilitation team, which we're still benefiting from today. People still smile when they talk about the future weekend! And thirdly, that people got involved. In a village as small as ours, it's clear to everyone that the administration can't do everything alone.*

How does that joint approach work?

Annika Popp *We identified issues that we wanted to work on in the future. One member of the future council and one member of the municipal council were jointly responsible for each issue. This connection was also extended to the municipal council meetings. The future council, which consists of twelve people, still meets every three months and is open to new members.*

Jonas Korn *Of course, taking on this level of responsibility requires advance preparation. Everyone has to feel included in the process in order to be able to identify with the results. That worked really well in Leupoldsgrün.*

Speaking of preparation, how important was the planning phase for the transfer?

Annika Popp *The better we plan, the better the results. We rarely have time for intensive planning in our everyday lives and that alone made the planning phase really great.*

Jonas Korn *Taking time to plan creates space for everyone to grow together. The fact that the support group took so much time to prepare and that the municipal council now regularly takes time to monitor the progress of the results underscores how the process received the recognition it deserved.*

How did the municipality approach implementing the recommendations?

Annika Popp *The goals were presented and we handed over responsibility to the future councils with a feeling of: Go ahead, we support you! For example, our citizens are currently designing a new hiking network and a community app. Any costs incurred can be paid for by the municipal council.*

How important is citizen participation beyond the results?

Jonas Korn *Citizen participation drives engagement and integration. This is sometimes dismissed as just a side effect, but it can be a core aspect! An invitation to the future council brings many people on board for the long term. There are consistently engaged people in all LOSLAND municipalities.*

Annika Popp *Elsewhere, municipalities have been merged, resulting in even the smallest local authorities having populations of around 10,000. Yet, working as locally and decentrally as possible tends to be more effective. As municipal politicians, we're the foundation and nucleus of democracy. At the same time, we're the first point of contact and problems at local level are also bad for overall policy. Participation is especially beneficial in rural areas where citizens often feel abandoned and can help to counteract political disenchantment. Municipalities need guidance and support to cope with this additional work.*



Annika Popp

born in 1987, was elected the first female mayor of Leupoldsgrün in Upper Franconia in 2014. She had previously been a member of the municipal council for the CSU for six years and worked there as youth representative. She is married, has two children and lives with her family in a three-generation household.

"There are consistently engaged people in all LOSLAND municipalities."

Citizens' assemblies for a sustainable future

What are the challenges and what does our system need?

Over the course of the project, the LOSLAND team repeatedly exchanged ideas with colleagues from RIFS Potsdam and Mehr Demokratie as well as with partners from the field of citizen participation in order to reflect on their own approach and to enrich it with the knowledge and experience of others. Florian Wieczorek got to know LOSLAND as part of the research team supporting the project and has been an employee at Mehr Demokratie e.V. since November 2022. The LOSLAND team invited him to give his assessment of the challenges and opportunities of assemblies and their role in striving for a world that is fit for future generations.

The LOSLAND project combines randomly selected citizen participation with the objective of making the world "fit for future generations". On the one hand, this approach stems from the belief that the existing political system must be complemented in order to support the transformation toward a more sustainable society and encourage the necessary political decisions to achieve it. On the other hand, it is assumed that randomly selected citizens' assemblies are an effective tool for promoting the common good and encouraging future-oriented thinking within the democratic system. Both points are convincing. We know from practice and political science why it is so difficult to pursue effective sustainability policies in our political system. Maintaining a focus on the common good is difficult under the constraints of electoral cycles, party competition, and the need to represent diverse interests. To put it bluntly, it is difficult to decide in the interests of future generations when the immediate short-term interests of current generations determine the next election.

This is where the principle of random selection is useful, as it can bring together a diverse group of people who are invited to tackle a shared task at a remove from election campaigns and interest groups. The randomly selected citizens initially bring their individual experiences, perspectives and interests to the citizens' assembly. Over the course of the process, members tend to open up to new information and perspectives, form a community and work with great commitment to solve a common challenge. In this way, participants in the random selection and citizens' assembly process develop a shared and valuable perspective which they can apply to future issues.

The LOSLAND approach—promoting future-friendly politics through citizens' assemblies—offers promising potential in this context. However, its practical implementation faces a range of challenges. The first important challenge is that the outputs of a citizens' assembly should also have a real political impact. As described above, the aim is ultimately to make politics more sustainable at a systemic level. To achieve this, citizens' assemblies must also be able to participate in decision-making. So far, however, these have had no more than a formal advisory role, although plenty of advice is provided in many areas. One way to ensure the influence of citizens' assemblies is to grant them formal powers.





At the municipal level in particular, the first step is to ensure that citizens' assemblies can exert informal influence through clear agreements and the purposeful involvement of citizens in shaping plans and decisions. To achieve this, it is helpful to task assemblies with concrete issues and to closely link the work of randomly selected citizens with that of experts, politicians, and administrators through integrated procedures. Clear, upfront agreements are essential to define how the outcomes of these assemblies will be considered in the formal political decision-making process.

The second challenge becomes clear when we apply the principle of future-oriented thinking to the citizens' assembly as a tool itself. Just like at LOSLAND, most citizens' assemblies elsewhere have so far taken place within the framework of a project. In other words, as a one-time procedure carried out over a limited period of time and with a limited budget. However, this contradicts the aim of making political processes fit for the future in the long term. This contradiction can only be resolved if such a participation project actually becomes a transformative stimulus on the ground. That was the goal of the LOSLAND processes. Cross-party steering groups, future councils, presentation events and transfer workshops as well as supra-regional reflection meetings are intended to help establish a political culture of open communication and far-sighted cooperation. In the long term, however, the aim must be to institutionalise this political culture, for example by establishing citizens' assemblies. We are currently seeing the establishment of permanent citizens' assemblies in Brussels and Milan. However, we need tailor-made solutions that fit the respective community and its specific challenges and that do not necessarily always have to involve a randomly selected citizens' committee.

The third point concerns the impact of citizens' assemblies on sustainability within society itself – that is, on preserving the community and promoting political engagement, especially in times of great change. Citizens' assemblies have great potential here because they ensure that participants are politically engaged, learn professionally and socially, develop an understanding of the work and constraints of politics and administration, and see themselves as an effective

part of a community. However, these positive impacts initially only affect the small group of individuals involved in the process. To create an impact on society as a whole, it is advisable, on the one hand, to involve more people – that is, to expand random selection of participants so that it becomes an everyday reality for citizens. On the other hand, the public impact of citizens' assemblies should be enhanced. This works well, for example, when citizens' assemblies are initiated by well-known politicians or when they tackle high-profile issues.

Randomly selected participants in citizens' assemblies can make an important contribution to advancing sustainable policies in communities. For this to succeed, we must have the courage to allow citizens' assemblies and future councils to have a say. It is also important to consolidate future councils and the political culture they exemplify. Because ensuring sustainability and a sustainable world for future generations is an ongoing task.





A world fit for future generations

Throughout the LOSLAND project, the concept of **a world fit for future generations** served as a useful point of reference for initiating discussions about **shaping the future**. It helped everyone to relate the project's overarching concern (**"How do we help to create a world fit for future generations here in our local area?"**) to their own lives, because we are all the product of previous generations and many of us may go on to create future generations one day. Asking how we can make our area a place in which future generations can lead a good life prompts us to consider what that "good life" might look like. It is not possible to answer this question in full because we do not know what future generations will understand by a good life. But we can **create conditions now**, that will enable the **children and grandchildren of this world to create their own good lives**. So a world fit for future generations can therefore mean a world in which those generations can benefit from the full potential of a functioning ecosystem and democratic freedoms

What progress has been made on the future councils' recommendations?

At the heart of the LOSLAND process were the future councils and the recommendations they developed for a more sustainable future – recommendations that were passed on to local authorities and stakeholders. But what came out of these efforts? And what has happened to the recommendations since then? LOSLAND project team member Jonas Korn followed up with four of the participating municipalities (Varel, Ludwigsfelde, Homberg (Efze) and Leupoldsgrün) to find out.

The cities and municipalities are making every effort to follow up quickly on the recommendations. All the municipalities are currently giving priority to implementing them. In Ludwigsfelde, for example, the recommendation to install ride-sharing benches has been taken up and will probably be implemented soon, as this measure had been planned for some time in the city's marketing department. In **Homberg (Efze)**, there was a recommendation to set up a cultural and meeting centre. No permanent location has been found for this yet, but creative workshops are being offered at various locations and an empty building is being used as a temporary "workshop".

The foundation for the next steps – the transfer session

The systematic review, preparation and implementation of the recommendations needs time and a suitable framework. To this end, the **recommendations** were assessed in terms of their feasibility, primarily in **transfer sessions** with the respective mayors, city or municipal council members, administrators and participants of the future councils. This laid the foundation for subsequent steps in the administration and the city and municipal councils.

How the recommendations reach the administration and the committees

Responsibility for the subsequent steps usually lies with those who were already responsible for the planning and implementation phase of the participation process. For Homberg (Efze), Ludwigsfelde and Varel, this is the **administration in consultation with the mayor**. In the municipality of Leupoldsgrün, **"tandems" were formed, consisting of one member of the future council and one member of the municipal council**, with each tandem dealing with a specific issue. In cities, administrative workflows are longer than in a small community like Leupoldsgrün. Depending on the issue, the recommendations are then forwarded to the relevant administrative departments and council committees. Due to the wide range of issues covered by the recommendations, they cannot all be dealt by a single department or committee. Recommendations for developing the city centre, for example, would be handled by the city marketing department, or by the departments responsible for promoting the local economy or tourism. The relevant administrative staff prepare documents for the political bodies or for the entire council in cooperation with the relevant departments.

From recommendations to projects

The administration prepares summaries in order to systematically incorporate the recommendations into municipal policy projects and also to provide feedback on the entire set of recommendations to the future councils and the public. The municipalities have different procedures for this.

In Varel, the summary was made public at a **public meeting** of the committee for schools, culture and sports, to which the participants of the citizens' assembly and residents were also invited. In **Ludwigsfelde**, the administration prepared the summary in the form of a list of recommendations with a traffic light system, showing that many of the topics were already on the city's agenda, regardless of the LOSLAND process. According to the traffic light system, green indicates that the recommendation has already been implemented, amber that the recommendation is currently being processed, red that the municipality has no (or insufficient) authority to implement the recommendation, and blue that the topic is new or does not exist in this form in the administration. A special characteristic of Ludwigsfelde is that the project is linked to the city's sustainability criteria. The future council's recommendations are managed by the **city's sustainability committee**, which also set up the future council. The committee considers how citizens' assemblies and their recommendations can support decision-making. In **Leupoldsgrün**, due to the small number of inhabitants, there is no broad-based administration. Here, the recommendations were **sent back to the future council** with the message: "Get organised and implement the recommendations yourself. Get back to us if you need support or funding from the local council."

Projects are being implemented

Some of the recommendations have already been acted upon since July 2022. The projects **implemented directly in Leupoldsgrün** were a **floral project** based on the future council's core message "The village is blossoming" and the rebuilding and development of the **village shop**. A **hiking network** and a **community app** are currently being developed. The future council meets once per quarter and is now open to other interested residents in addition to those who were selected at random. The future council's recommendations and progress on their implementation are discussed at almost every municipal council meeting.

In all municipalities, those responsible are making every effort to maintain contact with members of the future council and to keep them continuously informed about progress on the recommendations. Future council members can continue to track the effectiveness of their participation, act as contact persons for the recommendations and disseminate knowledge about the participation process in their community. Jonas Korn notes that while results are implemented differently in the various communities, all municipalities take a more networked approach to ensuring a sustainable future since the LOSLAND process.

Public participation and its impacts

The LOSLAND Future Councils advised politicians and administrators with their practical recommendations to help ensure that municipalities remain attractive and sustainable for future generations – an important achievement in itself. But their influence goes beyond the recommendations: citizens' assemblies leave a lasting mark, shaping political culture and civic engagement in meaningful ways.

- Participating in a citizens' assembly often gives people the feeling that they are valued and taken seriously, both politically and personally.
- Politicians and administrators learn new ways of working together and become accustomed to a facilitated process where decisions are made by consensus.
- Shaping your own living conditions and the future of your home region become seen as feasible goals. This can lead to active participation by civil society in many important municipal issues that go far beyond the scope of the citizens' assembly.

We have gathered impressions and opinions from the LOSLAND municipalities, the facilitation teams and the project team:

Agency and engagement

Daniela (Ludwigsfelde): *I must say, I had some preconceptions. My husband said that nobody listens to you anyway, but it turned out to be a lot of fun. I came here with some ideas from home and soon realised that there were other people with the same ideas. I felt "at least someone is listening to us".*

Theresia Rothe (Rietschen): *I've been here in Rietschen since 2014 and got involved in the future council because I want to see things change and improve in the community. The ideas the future council put forward are diverse but they should be expanded beyond a local scope to have broader impact. I would like to be involved in that. My experience with participation has made me want to do more volunteer work again – I'm looking forward to it.*

Marett Klahn (LOSLAND project team): *LOSLAND gave me a year of intensive experience of working with administrators and politicians. In my adopted home of Leipzig, I approached the city administration with the idea of a citizens' assembly. I now work there as a specialist administrator for promoting democracy and political participation.*

Democratic skills & participation culture

Sascha Beer (Lindau): *It was a meaningful and enriching experience that gave me fresh insights and perspectives. I was surprised at how quickly we were able to reach a consensus on important issues, despite the diversity of the group. I'm very pleased with the results.*

Thomas Leppert (northern facilitation team): *The participating citizens in both municipalities greatly appreciated the fact that there was room for different points of view as well as for dialogue addressing them. We began to realise that, despite sometimes having different positions, everyone had the same interest in developing our community sustainably.*

Robert Pakleppa (southern facilitation team): *We were able to observe proceedings, and we also heard from city councillors from all parties about the value they saw in this method for finding solutions and preparing decisions during guided pre-process and post-process sessions with the mayor, city council and top administrators. This allowed them to experience for themselves how much more it is about shared concerns and cooperating to tackle challenges. This gives us hope for a culture of dialogue in everyday politics and administration — at local, state and federal levels.*

Experimenting & learning

Claudia Alfons (Mayor of Lindau): *What I particularly liked was that one of the basic principles of the future councils was to be bold when trying things out even if we might need to improve or revise them later.*

Manuela Kohlbacher (eastern facilitation team): *In Rietschen, hardly anyone in the future council group was able stay there from start to finish, apart from us as facilitators. At first we thought this wouldn't actually be possible, how were we supposed to facilitate in such circumstances? Did people not think it was important? In the end, it was a really nice experience because it turned out that almost all the participants had left the event early due to volunteering commitments. And clubs and participation culture have a strong tradition in the region. The process ended up working because participants supported each other and were able to collaborate with newcomers to further develop the topics.*

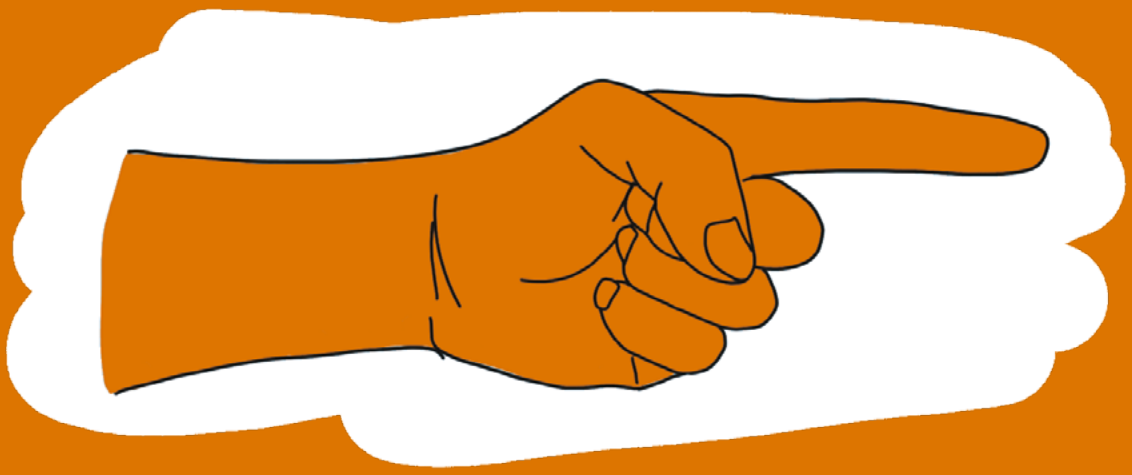
Daniel Oppold (LOSLAND project team): *My work as a scientist has benefited from our practical experience here with the emergence of new and relevant research questions. I definitely learned a lot.*

Inclusion & empowerment

Tim Willy Weber (Mayor of Ottersberg): *For me, the children made a valuable contribution to the citizens' assembly by introducing the idea of shared spaces and activities for all generations. If we address another question in the future, we would gladly use this method again.*

Rosa Hoppe (LOSLAND project team): *The random selection method enables inclusion. That magical moment when an individual learns they have been randomly selected triggers amazement, joy and often leads to their empowerment. Citizens' assemblies also encourage politicians and administrators to think in completely new ways about what makes sense for their community.*

Marco Land (Coesfeld): *I haven't found participation in political processes to be easy in Coesfeld so far. I was very happy about the invitation to the future council and when I was visited in person at my front door, I thought: "There's no turning back now! You have to get involved!" And I'm so grateful that I took part.*



After LOSLAND ...

''Past! A stupid word'' – wrote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. LOSLAND may have come to an end as a model project, but the political processes, human relationships and activities it initiated continue to have an impact. The LOSLAND municipalities are still experiencing a new culture of cooperation, and a new form of democracy is being tested!

From the beginning, it was important to the LOSLAND team that the concepts and methods developed for the implementation of citizens' assemblies could **stand on their own and continue to manifest beyond the LOSLAND project**.

... onwards to the next participation process!

We invite all interested parties from politics, administration, and civil society to support the implementation of citizens' assemblies. On the following pages, we present **key insights and recommendations on citizen participation**, drawn from the experiences of the LOSLAND processes. This collection serves both as a practical guide for getting started and as a broader reflection on participation. It includes recommendations from the LOSLAND Summit, perspectives from process facilitators, the ''Potsdam Declaration'' adopted by the LOSLAND municipalities in December 2022, insights from a mayor on the role of local governments in participation and much more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Lessons for participation from practical experience and reflection

Recommendations from a model project

The main goal of the LOSLAND project was to implement effective participation processes in the participating municipalities. But the project aims to go further. As numerous municipalities across Germany carried out participation processes as part of this model project, a collective, retrospective assessment by those involved has become a central component of LOSLAND.

Learning effectively from others is the central challenge of dialogue-oriented citizen participation. The vast majority of processes take place at the local level and the experiences gained there are rarely widely disseminated. This is also due to the fact that the participation processes are so different and can only be well understood in their local context. As a result, the same challenges and mistakes often recur. As a model project, LOSLAND deliberately integrated structured reflection on the various – yet comparable – processes into its overall approach.

The highlight of this was – as the name suggests – the ''LOSLAND Summit'', which took place on the first and second of December 2022 in Potsdam. Participants from the future councils, mayors and administrative professionals from the LOSLAND municipalities came together for the summit to exchange ideas over two days. The participants compiled the results of this joint review as a set of recommendations for action. The aim is to enable other municipalities, organisations, and facilitators of citizens' assemblies to benefit from the experiences of the LOSLAND project and apply them to the future design of local participation processes. The original wording of the recommendations is presented on the following pages.

Another group that gained valuable insights from the LOSLAND processes were the facilitation teams, who supported the participating municipalities throughout their respective participation processes. Each team worked with two to three municipalities, giving them a broad perspective on the project's implementation. To capture their practical experience and expertise, the facilitation and process support teams met with the LOSLAND core team for a full-day retreat to reflect on the processes. Together, they developed recommendations specifically aimed at those involved in designing and organising citizen participation—such as facilitators, process support professionals, and municipal administrators. The following pages include these recommendations from the perspective of process support.




Unsere Lernbereitschaft
Unsere Lernbereitschaft

Making dialogue work: Six levers to enable meaningful citizen participation

Lever 1

Practical experimentation and testing spaces for cooperation culture

Our core message

Democracy is not just a form of government but also a way of life. This requires practical experimentation and testing spaces combined with a planned approach (strategy!).

Our recommendations

- Create testing spaces adapted to specific situations with maximum possible accessibility
- Develop a custom structure for each of the different processes. It is important to ensure that there is enough time and space for dialogue and conversations in addition to the core topic.
- Provide appropriate resources for this (e.g. facilitation, organisation, rooms)
- Ensure transparency (clear communication) and trackability (from expectations to implementation)
- Ensure evaluation and continuous development
- Develop generation-specific formats (e.g. in schools, clubs, etc.)
- Provide legal exemptions for employees, students and pupils to enable them to participate in democratic processes

Lever 2

Provide appropriate questions and ensure transparent implementation of the results of the participation

Our core message

Ensure credibility from the question to implementation, regardless of the form of participation.

Our recommendations

Which is the right participation format? (Preliminary review)

Criteria for determining the right question:

- Serious, authentic questions that really mean something to citizens, politicians and administrators
- The question needs to be appealing, understandable and concise
- What results need to be achieved? (Target vision, pool of ideas, unambiguous yes/no, planning and implementation decision, help in the event of conflict)

Criteria for implementation:

- What will be done with the results must be clear from the outset (integration with the political decision-making process)
- Good expectation management
- Make results permanently available and communicate them



Working in coordination on practical participation projects with all stakeholder groups from the LOSLAND municipalities, we have identified six key levers.

The levers are listed in random order. The wording corresponds to the formulations used by the working groups at the LOSLAND Summit.

Lever 3

Easy access, including to process design

Our core message

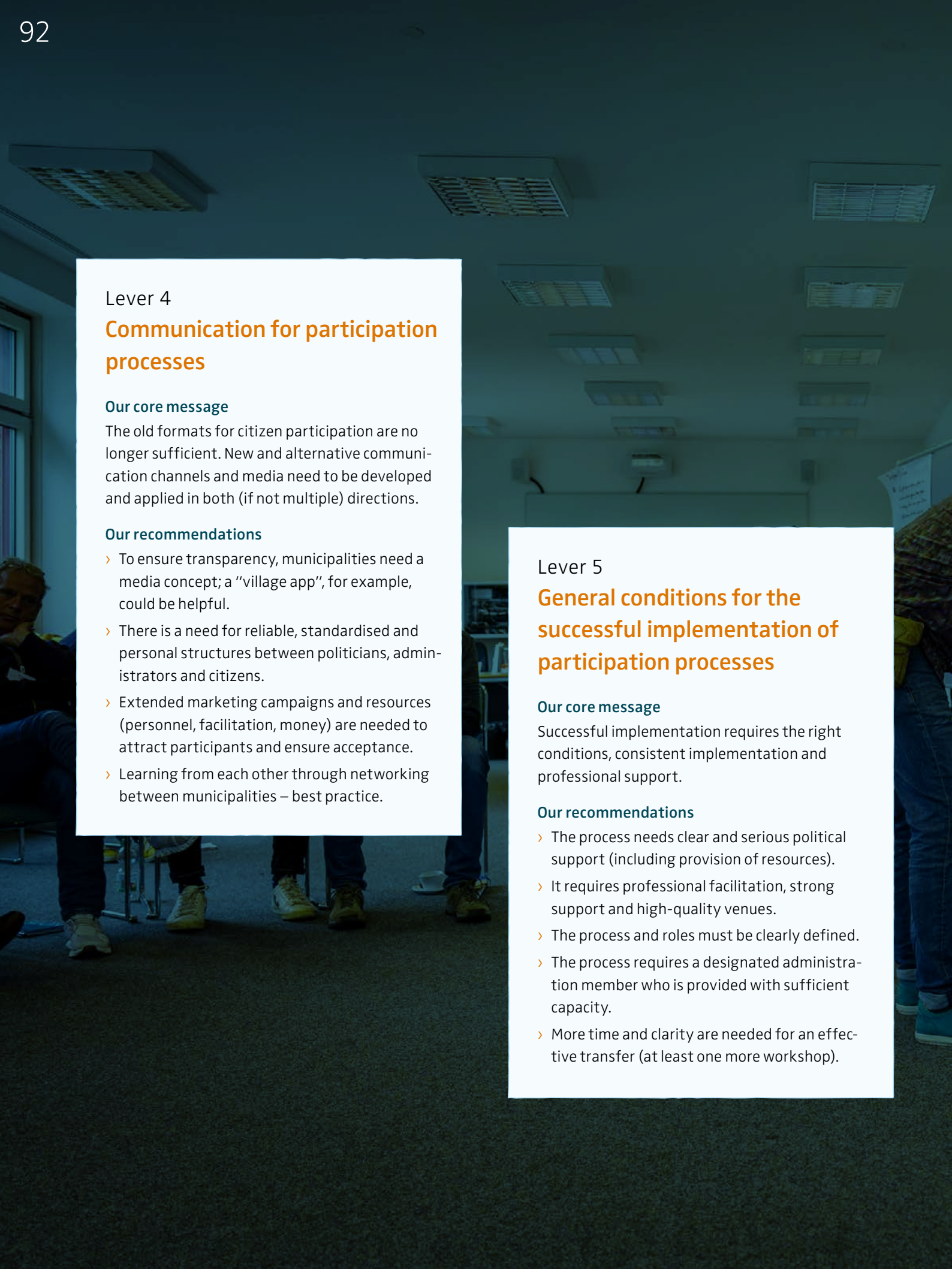
We must find ways to involve all citizens. If we succeed in involving citizens (including those who have not previously had access to citizen participation), this makes their participation all the more valuable for the overall process and decision-making. Citizens do not need to have (decision-making) power in many participation processes, but they have a fundamental desire to be included and to be able to provide their input based on their significant everyday expertise.

Our recommendations

- Participation must be easily accessible to all – both digitally (through appropriate technical infrastructure) and culturally. This includes using clear, inclusive language, designing "migrant-friendly" formats, and ensuring accessibility across all generations.
- It is essential to develop and offer participation formats that are targeted at specific groups (or at specific municipalities or issues) and/or to involve as many people as possible in general topics.
- Participating citizens need opportunities for local participation and well-prepared communication (see the "Communication lever")
- Participation should be time-bound with a clearly defined scope and workload to make involvement feasible for as many people as possible.
- For individuals with more challenging barriers to participation, one idea could be to give them the option to attend the process events with a trusted person.

Further insights

- Personalized formats and familiar meeting spaces are essential. Digital communication alone does not reach or motivate everyone; a personal, face-to-face approach is also necessary.
- It is also important to enable easy access for participation in everyday political processes (committees, bodies, parliamentary group meetings, etc.). To this end, the rules for the procedure should be reassessed accordingly and new approaches should be tried with confidence. To ensure that participation remains constructive, it makes sense to focus on dialogue-oriented process management and facilitation.



Lever 4

Communication for participation processes

Our core message

The old formats for citizen participation are no longer sufficient. New and alternative communication channels and media need to be developed and applied in both (if not multiple) directions.

Our recommendations

- To ensure transparency, municipalities need a media concept; a "village app", for example, could be helpful.
- There is a need for reliable, standardised and personal structures between politicians, administrators and citizens.
- Extended marketing campaigns and resources (personnel, facilitation, money) are needed to attract participants and ensure acceptance.
- Learning from each other through networking between municipalities – best practice.

Lever 5

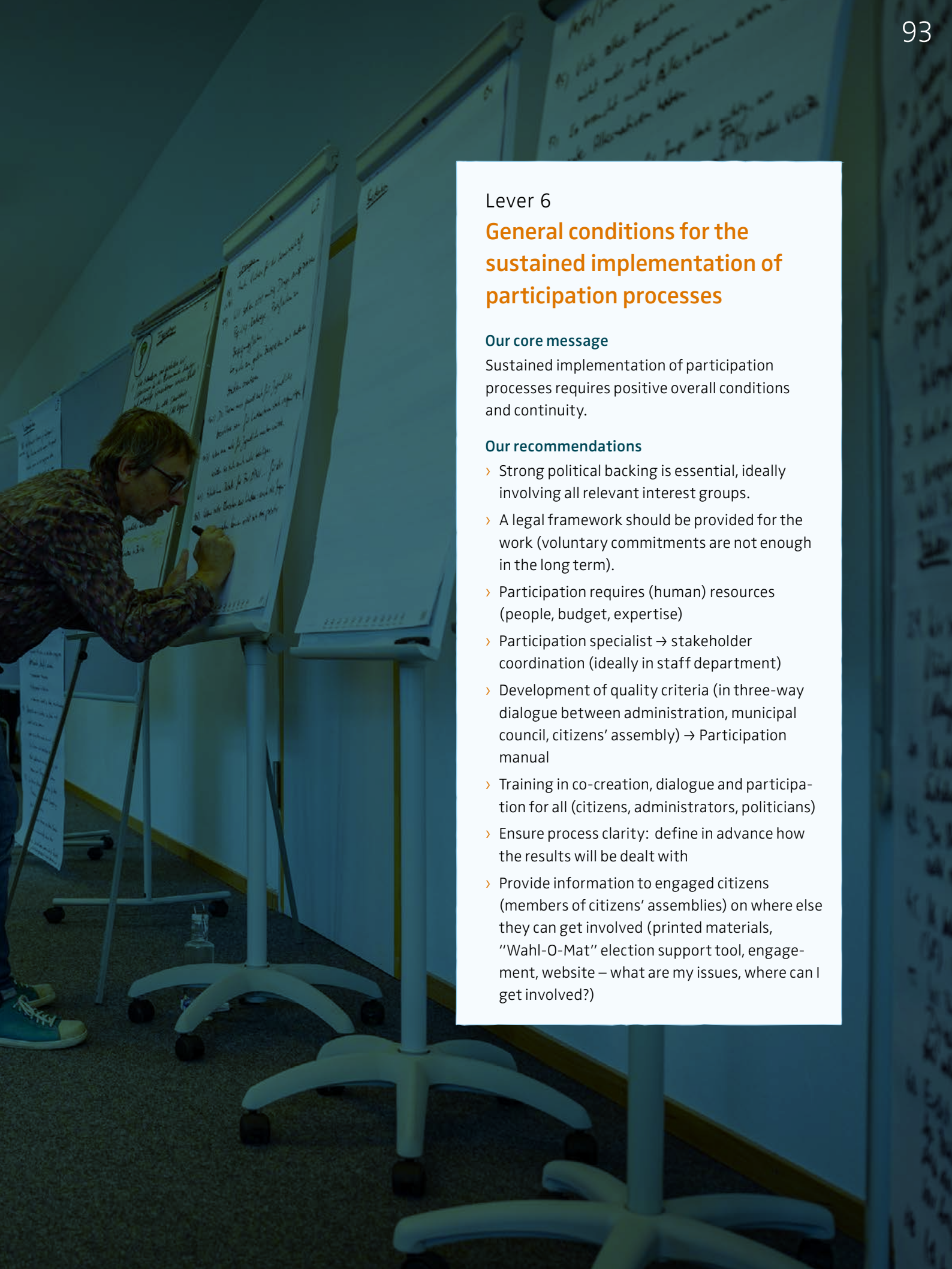
General conditions for the successful implementation of participation processes

Our core message

Successful implementation requires the right conditions, consistent implementation and professional support.

Our recommendations

- The process needs clear and serious political support (including provision of resources).
- It requires professional facilitation, strong support and high-quality venues.
- The process and roles must be clearly defined.
- The process requires a designated administration member who is provided with sufficient capacity.
- More time and clarity are needed for an effective transfer (at least one more workshop).



Lever 6

General conditions for the sustained implementation of participation processes

Our core message

Sustained implementation of participation processes requires positive overall conditions and continuity.

Our recommendations

- Strong political backing is essential, ideally involving all relevant interest groups.
- A legal framework should be provided for the work (voluntary commitments are not enough in the long term).
- Participation requires (human) resources (people, budget, expertise)
- Participation specialist → stakeholder coordination (ideally in staff department)
- Development of quality criteria (in three-way dialogue between administration, municipal council, citizens' assembly) → Participation manual
- Training in co-creation, dialogue and participation for all (citizens, administrators, politicians)
- Ensure process clarity: define in advance how the results will be dealt with
- Provide information to engaged citizens (members of citizens' assemblies) on where else they can get involved (printed materials, "Wahl-O-Mat" election support tool, engagement, website – what are my issues, where can I get involved?)

"Easy to access, uncomplicated, and above all effective"

Interview **Gerd-Christian Wagner has been the mayor of the city of Varel in Friesland, Lower Saxony, since 2006. In this interview, he describes his experience with the local LOSLAND process and outlines the key factors for successful public participation.**

Mr. Wagner, looking back – how did you experience the beginning of the process? Would you do anything differently?

Gerd-Christian Wagner *Yes, there's one thing I would do differently. I would take a lot of time to ask the project question. What's the actual problem, the topic that you want to address? Because the more precisely you define this, the better the question that the citizens' assembly has to deal with. And in retrospect, we now hear accusations such as: Did you deliberately ignore this problem? Actually, we wanted to talk about this problem. But that wasn't the case. And looking back, I can see that made the whole thing more difficult, but we can handle it.*

The whole participation process took place in the autumn of last year. What's your opinion on the overall time frame of the process??

Good things take time. I think it's always a good idea to take the time needed, because some things have to sink in first. It's better not to rush into things too quickly. You really have to say "OK, it could take two, three weeks or even a month" before setting things in motion. However, you always have to communicate from the outset that these processes can sometimes take six months or even a year. We know a lot of people get impatient. But it's better to take the time, because otherwise some people will feel excluded, leading to questions that can disrupt the whole process. Always let people know when the next step will take place, perhaps without setting a specific date, but also while staying clearly on track and sticking to the overall schedule. That's important.

The current conditions for participation are quite restrictive, especially in local politics. My question is: Which general conditions did you find beneficial to the citizens' assembly project and which ones were a hindrance?

Of course, it was very helpful that the mayor was fully behind the whole process, as was the administration of a municipality of 25,000 people — who, by the way, are also uniquely engaged here in Varel. I really have a great team – young people who enjoy trying things out and experimenting. In particular, those who have become active in the citizens' assembly themselves have come to value this greatly. I didn't find anything to be a hindrance in that sense.



Gerd-Christian Wagner

supports citizen participation beyond his own city. Together with other participants in the LOSLAND process, he believes that the conditions around municipal citizen participation need to change – as seen in the LOSLAND declaration on page 96.

Of course, there are always communication issues with individuals who aren't fully supportive of citizen participation formats, so to speak. There's always interference in the form of comments such as: "Why do we even need this? We councillors were elected..." etc., all those things. But I believe society favours these formats. And there will always be comments like that, maybe from people who are stuck in the past, but you don't necessarily have to respond to them. You have to pick your battles.

From this perspective when it comes to possible future citizen participation projects that might be introduced in Varel, what conditions would be needed to ensure ongoing citizen participation?

It's like this: Citizen participation as such is codified very differently in the individual municipal constitutions of the Federal Republic of Germany. So I think it would make sense to create a legal basis for this – whatever that might look like. In my opinion, it must always be voluntary. I would consider it very difficult to standardise something like this by law and to make very specific demands. It should be noted that a citizens' assembly only makes sense when the issue clearly originates from the citizens themselves and is one that the municipal council can realistically address through such a participation format. I think it's a positive step when, as in Lower Saxony, the state government declares that these formats should be given greater prominence and when municipalities are encouraged to try out citizen participation formats and put them into practice. If we received more support in the initial phase, with manpower and advice, this could produce very good results.

Perhaps you could give us one more piece of advice for your colleagues. How can people in positions of authority who are still critical of citizens' assemblies be convinced to trust themselves and their municipalities to implement such procedures?

I think it's about communication, communication and communication. Those are the three essential factors – although of course it's really just one (laughs). But there need to be many different kinds of communication. We have to come up with something that makes it interesting – I would say, make it easy to access, uncomplicated, but informative, content-rich and above all effective.

The LOSLAND Declaration

Motivated by the deep conviction that democracy as a form of government and way of life in the Federal Republic of Germany must be strengthened and further developed through greater local citizen participation, we the undersigned make the following declarations based on our experiences within the framework of the LOSLAND project. We demand that these be taken into account in upcoming political discussions, consultations and decisions.

In recent months, we – mayors, members of city and municipal councils, municipal employees and randomly selected citizens – had the opportunity to test citizen participation on various future issues in our local area as part of the LOSLAND project. Our shared experience is that the implemented **future councils, citizens' assemblies and other participation steps**, which we implemented locally within the project framework, represent **a great enrichment for democracy** and recommendations from randomly selected citizens are very valuable for political decision-making processes.

It has also become clear within our LOSLAND processes that **dialogue-oriented citizen participation requires reliable organisational frameworks** in order to be effective. However, these are often outside the influence of local authorities. Action is needed from state and federal politicians! Therefore we declare:

- Forms of dialogue-oriented citizen participation, such as randomly selected citizens' assemblies require **legal integration into municipal constitutions**. This requires changes to the respective state municipal constitutions. Appropriate draft legislation must be initiated or existing legislation must be supported.
- As municipalities, **we need support to independently expand our participation capacities at the local level**. This includes shared spaces for learning and reflection involving politicians, administrators, and citizens; the promotion of relevant measures such as training programmes; and broad public information campaigns on citizens' assemblies and other forms of participation. In addition, municipalities must be given greater financial flexibility—for example, to allow for the long-term employment of participation specialists.

The **LOSLAND declaration** is another product of joint reflection by various stakeholders from the LOSLAND municipalities in December 2022 in Potsdam. Citizens, mayors and administrative staff formulated this declaration based on their experiences. It is also an invitation to politicians at the federal, state and local levels and to other stakeholders who could help to improve the conditions for citizen participation at the local level.

- We need **contact points at state and district level** that can provide practical advice on designing, implementing and following up on citizen participation processes.
- We need **streamlined access to (funding) resources** to enable the timely implementation of projects, ideas and recommendations that arise in participation processes.
- We support the **legal integration and regulation of randomly selected citizens' assemblies** in order to expand the opportunities for democratic participation at all political levels.
- We support the initiation and financial support for further pilot projects such as LOSLAND.

The process initiated by the federal government in 2019 to test dialogue-oriented citizen participation in the form of random-based citizens' assemblies was also explicitly included in the current coalition agreement between the SPD, the Greens and the FDP[1]. We are already implementing this vision at the municipal level in our LOSLAND municipalities. But we need your support to sustainably establish this useful democratic development in our municipalities and elsewhere. We therefore wish to enter into dialogue with you over the points mentioned.

The list of signatories from the LOSLAND municipalities can be viewed at www.losland.org/die-losland-erklaerung.

Thank you very much for your support for the benefit and further development of our democracy!

1 Page 8 of the coalition agreement 2021-25: We want to improve decision-making by using new forms of citizen dialogue, such as citizens' assemblies, without abandoning the principle of representation. We will set up and organise citizens' assemblies on specific issues through the Bundestag. In doing so, we will ensure equal participation. We will ensure that the Bundestag is informed of the results.
Page 163 of the coalition agreement 2018-2021: Citizen participation. We will convene an expert commission to draw up proposals as to whether and in what form our tried and tested parliamentary representative democracy can be supplemented by further elements of citizen participation and direct democracy. In addition, proposals should be developed for strengthening democratic processes.

"Citizens will only become engaged if they have a sense of achievement"

We asked participants of future councils to give us their recommendations for politicians when it comes to participation.
Interview: Clementine Kraus and Matar Cisse from Lindau (Bodensee).

You were randomly selected to participate in the future council in Lindau. What did you both think when you received the invitation in your letter box?

Matar Cisse *It was a real surprise for me. I never thought I would be selected for this. It was a nice feeling. I actually didn't know anything about citizen participation.*

Clementine Kraus *I was happy about it and thought: This is exciting! And it was. It's a very exciting process.*

What were your experiences with the LOSLAND future council in Lindau?

Matar Cisse *Some participants initially campaigned passionately for their own concerns but ultimately supported proposals put forward by others. It was great to see. Overall, I was very surprised by the pleasant atmosphere.*

Clementine Kraus *The diverse group worked quickly, purposefully and with a focus on the issues. At the beginning, it was agreed with the facilitation team that everyone would have their turn to speak and that we would not interrupt anyone. Then, surprisingly, after the third or fourth contribution, you noticed: That's actually what I wanted to say.*

Matar Cisse *I talked about integration and shared my experiences here and in Senegal. For example, on the topic of housing in old age. I grew up in Dakar and there the older and younger people live together.*

How did you perceive the composition of and cooperation in the future council?

Matar Cisse *The idea of random selection was very good. It meant that different age groups and cultures were included. Everyone was open, everyone tried to cooperate, there was a lot of honesty.*

Clementine Kraus *The limited time available for the future council also allowed people with many other commitments to get involved. It's a shame that we don't really get a cross-section of the population when only around 80 to 90 of the randomly selected individuals responded to 1,000 invitations. More public relations work would be important.*



Clementine Kraus

was born in Lindau. After graduating from high school, she left the city and returned after 40 years. She is retired and involved as a trainer at a sports club as well as in school and youth education.



Matar Cisse

was born in Dakar (Senegal) and has lived in Lindau since 2015. He has three children and works in sales for an industrial group in Friedrichshafen.

What has changed for you as a result of the future council?

Clementine Kraus *In terms of my engagement, nothing has actually changed. I think the value for most people lies in this accessibility.*

Matar Cisse *I learned a lot about the city, including its cultural offerings. And I thought: "Oh, so that's Lindau?" I've lived here since 2015. However, I've rarely been to the centre of the island before and I have no connection to it, partly because I commute for work. The future council changed a lot of things for me. I feel more at home in Lindau now.*

How would you like to see the recommendations handled and participation further developed in Lindau?

Matar Cisse *We worked hard to draw up those recommendations. They shouldn't be left on a shelf somewhere. They should implement whatever they can. Citizens like us see things that politicians aren't always aware of because they aren't so close to the ground.*

Clementine Kraus *I think Lindau is already on a good path. The main conclusion of our core messages was that there is a communication problem between the city council and the city's population, especially when it comes to complex decisions. The younger city councillors in particular are now trying to bring decisions and deliberations closer to citizens, for example by visiting the districts.*

When it comes to participation, if you could make a recommendation to higher political authorities, what would it be?

Clementine Kraus *Citizens will only become engaged if they have a sense of achievement. We will only be ready for even more complex and time-consuming projects when participation is seen to achieve something.*

Matar Cisse *There should be more future councils!*

Clementine Kraus *Introducing more future councils would require a team of facilitators to support the processes, because this is not possible from within the administration. If it were possible at the state level to have facilitators that municipalities could request – that would be good for democracy.*

Insights on facilitation and process support

What makes for an effective participation process? The regional LOSLAND facilitation and process support teams reflected on this question together based on their work with the ten LOSLAND municipalities. They compiled a list of the key aspects and specific recommendations for the successful planning and support for a citizens' assembly. You can find a selection of them here:

Process design

- Consider the local context. Take past participation processes into account and identify, tap into and expand existing communication structures between the relevant stakeholders.
- Create clarity on the goal and purpose for the process, the required resources, the involvement of the various stakeholders and how to handle the results.
- Remain open to adjustments so that those involved on site can see the process as their own and can respond to unforeseen events.

Results, issues & questions

- Attend proactively to the quality of the result. During the planning phase, it is essential to define how the results of the citizens' assembly will inform the existing political and administrative process.
- The question or goal of the participation must be formulated as clearly and understandably as possible and be geared to the objectives of the project initiator.

Process control

- Establish a broad steering group and clarify its responsibilities. The steering group should represent the municipal system and include both highly motivated drivers and critical stakeholders.
- Promote local contributors' ownership of THEIR process.
- Proactively strengthen the culture of dialogue. Emphasize the value of understanding other perspectives and incorporate this into communication processes.

Impact and activation levels

- Promote personal responsibility. Provide support for citizens to make the ideas they generate throughout the process a reality.
- Enable dialogue and learning for the municipal committees. Develop the process design together and iteratively with those responsible from the outset and ensure that it supports the political process.
- Use the current participation process as a learning process for the next one.

Facilitation Team: North



Svenja Mix



Tom Leppert

Facilitation Team: South



Kristina Henry



Robert Pakleppa

Facilitation Team: East



Markus Füller



Manuela Kohlbacher

Facilitation Team: West



Ralf Grötker



Tina Meckel

Inclusion

- Use random sampling to expand participation outreach and target group-oriented communication.
- Encourage participants to get involved by proactively providing supportive options (e.g. accessibility) and using varied (i.e. not just text-based) methods.

Facilitation

- The guiding attitude towards all participants should be one of consistent appreciation. It is essential to remain aware of power dynamics (including one's own position) and to ensure that all participants have a say.
- Never host alone: Always work in a team with other professional and experienced facilitators.
- Plan your time frame carefully and bear in mind that the dialogue elements in the process take priority and require time. It is equally important to have sufficient time for the formulation and discussion of joint recommendations.

Own role

- Focus on creating and maintaining the framework. Remain clearly impartial but also put yourself in the shoes of the participants and encourage self-reflection among them as part of your methodology.
- Create recognition for the added value of the procedure itself and for the (desired) additional impacts of "empowerment", "trust" and "transformation".

Transfer of the results

- Ensure effective expectation management among all the parties involved before the start of the transfer phase. It is sufficient to gain clarity about the next steps in the transfer process.
- Make concrete agreements on how to deal with the results, for example with political/administrative partnerships for individual measures.
- Develop the transfer concept. Establish other forms of cooperation with political and administrative partners.

The role of political and administrative partners as framework providers

- Realistically anticipate required capacities/resources and communicate them to municipalities as initiators so that the required process support and administrative needs can be realistically planned.
- Create the clearest and most reliable framework possible for the implementation of citizens' assemblies at the local level.

Tips & Tricks: How to organise citizens' assemblies

While reading this publication, you've likely noticed that there is no universal, step-by-step manual for citizens' assemblies. However, based on the experiences of the LOSLAND project, we have distilled key insights and practical guidance to help get started. **So, what does it take to initiate a local citizens' assembly?**



Who do I bring on board in my municipality?

Without the support of the various local stakeholders, a citizens' assembly is difficult to implement and will certainly not have any impact on the ground. It is therefore important to contact (at least) the following local stakeholders, to invite them to consider value of a citizens' assembly and to involve them closely in the planning and implementation:

- **Mayors** are key persons to contact in order to achieve political legitimacy in the council, streamline administrative implementation, and garner public interest at the municipal level.
- **City/municipal council:** Local elected representatives must be invited to the citizens' assembly in advance as an advisory body and must commit to seriously considering the recommendations of the citizens' assemblies.
- **Employees in the administration:** Clear responsibilities are essential for successful implementation. Sufficient capacity and strong commitment help ensure the citizens' assembly runs smoothly and that its recommendations are put into action.
- **Stakeholders in civil society** can enrich citizens' assemblies through their expertise, perspectives, and their networks.





Where do I start planning?

First of all, it must be clear that a citizens' assembly is actually the appropriate participation format. The following questions can help you make your decision:

Engage with the stakeholders to determine the issue they want to address and assess whether a citizens' assembly is the appropriate approach.

What issues are suitable for citizens' assemblies?

The following is often true: A randomly selected citizens' assembly is suitable for issues which potentially affect everyone and to which everyone can contribute based on their life experience or perspective. Another prerequisite is that the political class must be genuinely interested in the response of citizens on a particular issue. Only when we have defined the scope and expected results can we determine who will be involved (selection process) and how it is to be achieved (process design).

Determine how and according to what criteria you intend to select participants and which tools you want to use to engage with them.

During the selection process: Who should be involved?

Participants in citizens' assemblies are randomly selected. Depending on the topic, criteria such as age, gender, or place of residence may be applied to ensure diversity. Additional strategies to maximize participant diversity include directly reaching out to selected individuals and offering financial or non-material incentives and support.

You need to enable an understanding-oriented, co-creative process via professional facilitation of the citizens' assembly.

Facilitation: What kind of participation should we implement?

Dialogue-oriented participation requires communication on an equal footing between all participants, with a focus on finding the best approaches and ideas for mutual challenges. Therefore, it is not a question of discussing or voting on existing positions. One (facilitation) method to enable this type of communication is dynamic facilitation, for example.

During the citizens' assembly process: What are the key factors?

Requirements can differ depending on the type of participation process. The following has proven successful in the LOSLAND process:

- Support from politicians and administrators, or at least their willingness to take on board the recommendations of the citizens' assembly
- Allocation of the municipality's financial and human resources to the process
- A steering group tasked with guiding and shaping the entire process (diversely staffed with people from the local council, administration, process facilitators and, if necessary, other citizens)
- A team of professional process facilitators to support planning and implementation – from the start of planning to the completion of the transfer workshop
- Enhancing public awareness and fostering inclusion through press outreach and events such as the future forum.

During the transfer: What impact do the recommendations have?

In the end, it is the impact of the citizens' assembly process that counts. The focus is on enriching political decision-making processes with the recommendations of the citizens' assembly, but there are numerous other diverse effects that operate on many levels. The foundations for this are established during the process design. To ensure a successful transfer of the results beyond the citizens' assembly, we also recommend:

- **Clarifying the recommendations of the citizens' assembly**, for example, by having participants present their recommendations to the city or municipal council and the administration itself and by translating these into specific projects and resolutions in consultation with citizens.
- **Joint issue-specific sponsorships with all stakeholders** so that administrators, politicians and other interested parties cooperate continuously on implementation.
- **Regular updates on the processing and implementation of the recommendations** to ensure that the impact of participation via the citizens' assembly is visible to the participants and to the public.



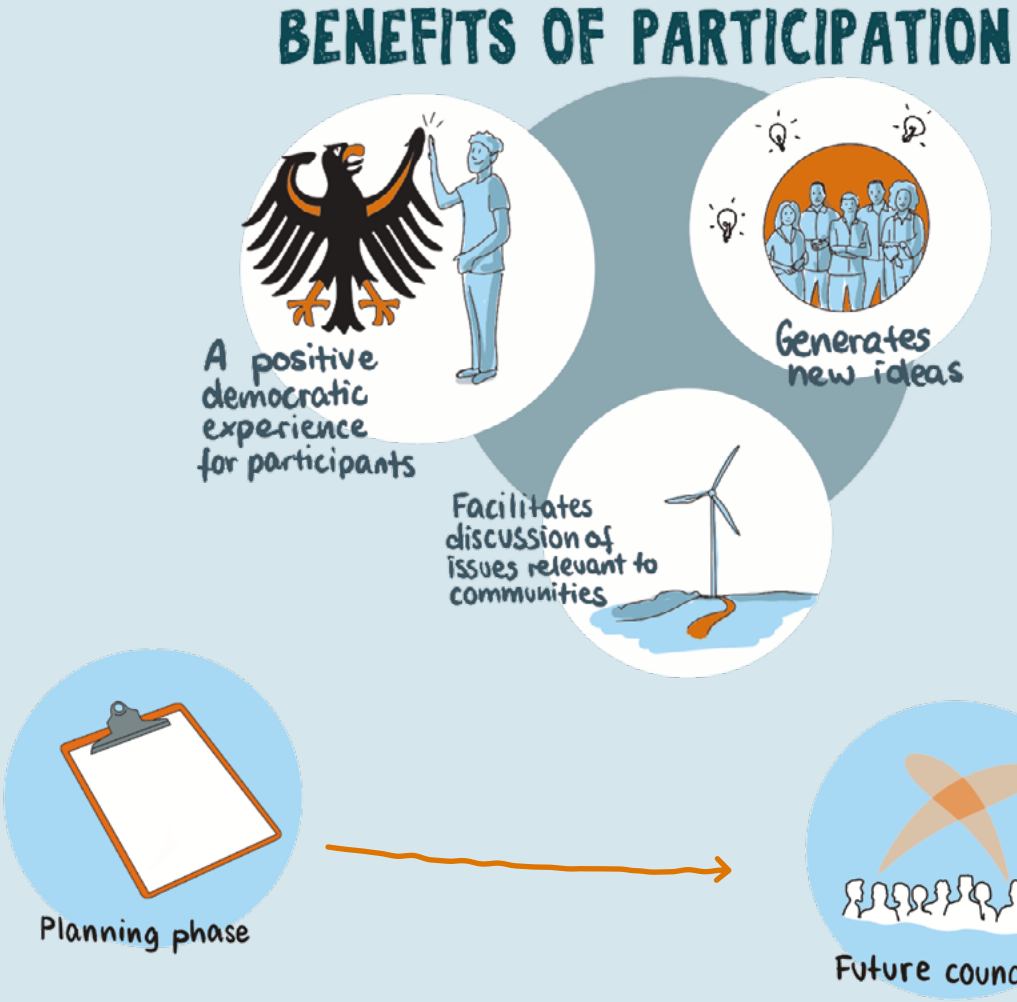


Common mistakes and how to avoid them

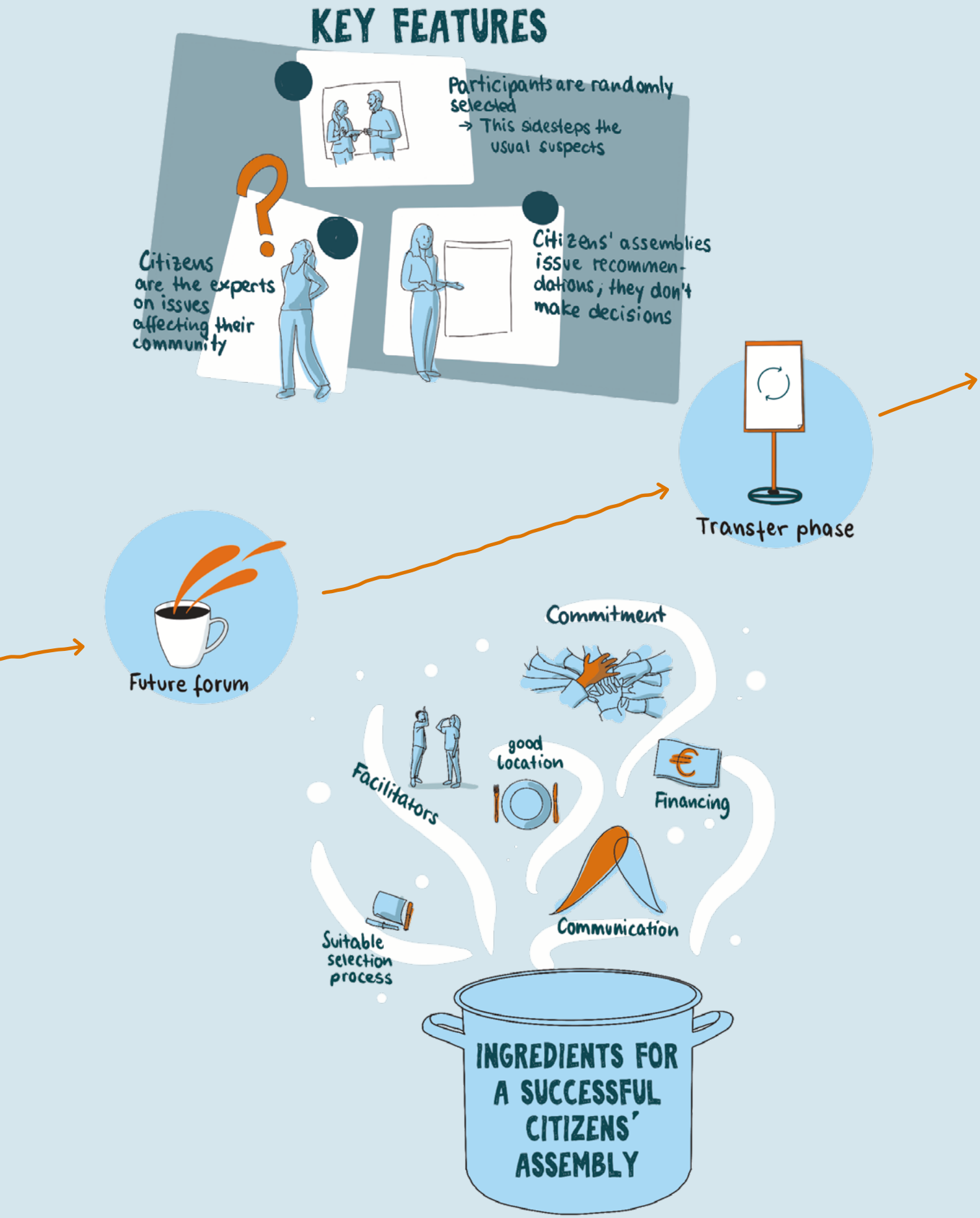
These common mistakes can be easily avoided:

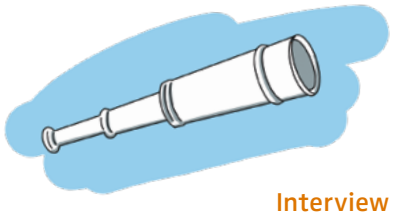
Not good: Process planning and management handled by a single stakeholder – such as only the mayor's office – can slow progress due to **limited resources** and may cause misunderstandings and **discontent** among other stakeholders.	*Prioritise* **dialogue with all stakeholders before and after the process** to enable learning, create connections and provide a safe space for communication. This allows the process design to be developed and adapted on a joint basis.
Avoid committing too rigidly to a specific process design that has been predefined or used elsewhere.	*Plan to be* **flexible when it comes to enhancing or adjusting the process design** in order to link the local process with municipal projects and existing participation processes as well as to take into account feedback and the needs of all local stakeholders and to find creative and custom formats.
Unrealistic expectation management: A promise is made that **each and every recommendation will be implemented 1:1** – both in communication with the randomly selected participants and with other stakeholders and the local public.	*Ensure that there is a* **clear and shared understanding of the desired quality of the results in advance.** This creates added value in terms of content and produces results that politicians and administrators need and can use to their advantage through their implementation. The results of citizens' assemblies are usually always "recommendations", which can of course also be rejected for good reasons.
A mistake: After the citizens' assembly, attention is given only to the **specific formulation** of concrete recommendations – without addressing the overall result and the advisory function of the citizens' assembly.	*Important:* Read between the lines and pay close attention to the message behind the message. Keep in mind that the **impact of citizens' assemblies goes beyond the recommendations**. Also appreciate the impact on the participants, on other stakeholders, and on the culture of participation in the entire community.
A flop: The results are delivered and all of the participants are enthusiastic – but nothing happens.	*Make sure in advance* that **there is sufficient time after the citizens' assembly for political and administrative bodies to give the recommendations** serious discussion and to follow through on implementation. It is helpful to agree on a common course of action before the citizens' assembly.
Disappointing: A citizens' assembly is held, but the rest of the municipality never hears about it.	*Enable* **good communication between the citizens' assembly** and the municipal public. Only a transparent process will ensure that residents trust the legitimacy of the results. As well as providing recommendations, the citizens' assembly can help to foster a local culture of cooperation and catalyse further engagement from citizens leading to broader impacts. The citizens' assembly can only unleash its full potential with broad public participation.

Citizens' assemblies at a glance






KEY FEATURES
Participants are randomly selected
→ This sidesteps the usual suspects
Citizens are the experts on issues affecting their community
Citizens' assemblies issue recommendations; they don't make decisions
Transfer phase
Future forum
Commitment
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INGREDIENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY



A democracy fit for future generations in 2050

Interview **As a model project, LOSLAND provides a possible model for a local path to a democracy fit for future generations. The project is underpinned by a vision for social transformation. Patrizia Nanz and Roman Huber, both of whom played a key role in creating LOSLAND, explain how this might be achieved.**

What is the social vision behind the LOSLAND project and how can participation formats contribute to this vision?

Patrizia *Marie von Mallinckrodt and I spent a year in project workshops with a variety of people: mayors, members of the Bundestag and the European Parliament, administrative staff from various ministries, journalists, stakeholders from civil society and an artist. We worked on the question of how democracy can be lived and practised in the 21st century. It became clear to us that we wanted to start our project together with local authorities because that is where we can be closest to the reality of citizens' lives and where we have the most concrete leverage for social transformation. Our vision was based on decentralisation and self-organisation with the future councils in 10 municipalities. With LOSLAND, we also wanted to show how well-executed participation processes can (and must) be embedded into the democratic structure (municipal/city council, administration) in order to be effective. We wanted to be able to "harvest" these processes in a way that created a mosaic of participating municipalities so that people would ask themselves what Germany could look like if all the municipalities started doing politics this way. Like a political movement. The federal government could learn a lot from local municipalities, especially in the area of transformation — and in this learning role, it could create a framework for self-organisation to develop its potential. In a sense, the state is responsible for the organisation of self-organisation.*

Roman *The multiple crises we face are too complex to be solved by individuals working alone. That's why we need more cooperation and more collective intelligence. Because a group can be smarter than the smartest individual. So the question we investigated together is: When do we humans become "dumber" and when do we become smarter and what does that mean for society? We also want to counteract the increasing division in society. We are turning the paradigm of "It's the others people's fault" on its head. And we're also beginning to question ourselves. Ultimately, division doesn't just arise elsewhere, but also within and through us.*

"Just imagine how Germany would change if all municipalities started doing politics this way."

Based on your experience in strengthening participation at the federal level, what areas hold the most promise and what do we need to do so that we, the municipalities, the states and the international community can succeed in achieving the transformation?

Patrizia *The transformation is so complex and comprehensive that we can only manage it together through interactions encompassing different skills. In my view, this requires the right awareness and identification among citizens and stakeholders from business, civil society and science who participate in finding good ideas for the common good. Above all, we also require this in politics and administration, where self-transformation is currently making the least progress. We need a "learning state" that shapes policy and designs co-creative processes with stakeholders in regions and municipalities. The European Commission understands that implementing the European Green Deal is now less about WHAT needs to be done (we have known this for a long time) and more about HOW we do it. It has therefore been experimenting with participatory policy-making for several years. Perhaps bottom-up processes in municipalities and states can be adopted here in the future. But I'm also hoping for a renewed approach from administration and politics at the federal level (the HOW of transformative governance). The crucial question is: who will take the initiative? The politician or party that discovers they can win elections by demonstrating credible concern for the state's ability to shape outcomes?*

"We must actively foster our social cohesion; it won't happen on its own. Everyone wants to belong and help shape the future."

Roman *We need new cultural competencies to deal with current challenges. Otherwise, our society will come under increasing strain and become less resilient and more fragmented. Those who don't feel heard and are not involved in shaping their living conditions will begin to protest, rebel or turn away. We must actively foster our social cohesion; it won't happen on its own. Everyone wants to belong and help shape the future. This applies at all levels – in private and family life as well as in professional or political life. I believe that millions of people want to get involved politically and help transform our society. This requires two things: an invitation from politicians and administrators to people who want to contribute, and a certain level of practical support in the form of expertise, training, facilitation and venues. Participation departments in every federal state and democracy commissioners in every major city could provide this.*



Patrizia Nanz

is Head of the "Laboratory of Participatory Management" at BASE, the Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management, which she also heads up as Vice President. She has long been concerned with the question of how politics, administration, science, business and civil society can work together to solve complex social problems and shape change. This was the motivation behind the LOSLAND initiative. Until January 2021, Patrizia Nanz was Scientific Director at the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) and Professor for Transformative Sustainability Science at the University of Potsdam.



Roman Huber

is the Managing Director of Mehr Demokratie (More Democracy). He is a co-initiator and organiser of the first two nationwide citizens' assemblies Demokratie (Democracy) and Deutschlands Rolle in der Welt (Germany's Role in the World). Mehr Demokratie is currently conducting further citizens' assemblies on behalf of the Bundestag. The association has been committed for decades to strengthening direct democracy and citizen participation at all levels. In discussions with Patrizia Nanz and Marie von Mallinckrodt, the plan was born to put the LOSLAND concept into practice as a Mehr Demokratie project. Roman Huber is keen to build bridges between the public and the world of politics and to encourage people to participate in shaping democracy.

You are working to make democracy fit for future generations – what are your predictions for the year 2050?

Patrizia *In 27 years, we will have completed the socio-ecological transformation – and with it, our own transformation, especially in government and the economy. In 2050, democracy as a form of government will be able to take into account the interests of future generations in all decisions, through a variety of formats of institutional integration into the political system (e.g. through a commissioner), but above all because it will be based far less on short-sighted legislative periods. It will continuously seek legitimacy for political decisions through randomly selected citizen participation. The collective intelligence of the entire population will be used (with the aid of technology) to design and implement policies. There will be effective interlinking between all government entities (horizontal interlinking) as well as between bottom-up and top-down processes in permanent learning loops (vertical interlinking). This will be at local, regional, national, European and global levels. Citizens, civil society, science and business will be involved in the sustainable development of our society for the common good. This will make democracy as a way of life much more fun for everyone.*

Roman *Germany will embrace participation and almost everyone will have participated in a participation process at least once, either through random selection or other means. Democracy will be a living practice – an "empathetic democracy". I think state structures will be far more fluid and organic, just as we see in the economy today, where the old hierarchical control structures have been partially replaced. I see systems of trust and agile collaboration based on competence. I also see a growing awareness of interior social spaces, including the collective shadows of our past and completely new ways of dealing with them in an integrated way. I also hope that state borders will be softer and more permeable and that we will have developed compassion not only for people in our own country, but for all of humanity and the earth.*

Contributors

Rosa Hoppe is a moderator and process facilitator. She brought her expertise in participatory practice and co-creative collaboration to the LOSLAND project – both as an advisor to local authorities and as a project manager in a team that values cooperation. She believes there is much to learn from diverse perspectives – and sees fostering this exchange as one of the main aims of this publication.

Jonas Korn studied philosophy and futurology. As a member of the project's core team, he supported three municipalities and also managed the project's digital solutions. At LOSLAND, as he likes to say, his job was to take a future-oriented perspective – one that has also shaped his contribution to this publication.

Daniel Oppold, a political scientist and expert on public administration at the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) in Potsdam, studies democratic innovations and co-creative processes, including citizens' councils and other participatory formats. He also has practical experience as a process facilitator and moderator and contributed his knowledge to the LOSLAND project and this publication.

Lore Graf is a freelance author and journalist and joined the LOSLAND team to edit this publication. After many years working on European border politics, she turned her focus inward, examining the dynamics within German villages and towns. She studied sociology, education and political science.

Pauline Uhrmeister discovered her interest and enthusiasm for the potential of sortition-based participation as a tool to revitalize democracy through her direct engagement with citizens' assembly research. She joined LOSLAND during the preparation of her final thesis in political science and contributed her expertise to both the project's participatory practices and the final publication.

Charlotte Bernstorff discovered her enthusiasm for citizens' councils in her work as a freelance journalist. At LOSLAND, Charlotte was responsible for public relations – the perfect complement to her job as a reporter – giving people a voice and helping to shape political opinion.

Marett Katalin Klahn has worked in the field of democracy education and anti-discrimination for many years. Her aim is to make education and participation processes as inclusive as possible – including at LOSLAND and in local government. Marett stood in for Jonas in the LOSLAND team during his parental leave. She works as a specialist in civic engagement and political participation for the City of Leipzig

Anna Ravizza studied environmental sciences and political science. Her interest in co-creative processes and their potential to augment transformations led her to join LOSLAND's accompanying research. As part of her work on climate and democracy for Mehr Demokratie e.V., Anna interviewed Gerd-Christian Wagner for this publication and analysed the data from the accompanying research.

Florian Wieczorek is a political scientist specializing in the development and advisory support of sortition-based participation at Mehr Demokratie e.V. During the LOSLAND project, he researched the relationship between deliberative participation and identification effects (''ownership''). Florian wrote the section ''Citizens' assemblies for a sustainable future?''.

Bernd Altenried is a graphic designer who gives content a harmonious form. Working from his studios in Lindau and Berlin, he makes themes, ideas, and visions visible and tangible (www.almo.de). Additionally, as a therapist, he offers psychological counselling and integrative Gestalt therapy (www.achtsame-beratung.de).

Svenja Mix is a sociologist. As a freelance moderator specializing in engagement and participation, she worked as a LOSLAND moderator. A visual thinker, she artistically contributed her experiences to this publication and created the illustrations. (www.mix-malt.de)

LOSLAND

Shaping the Future of Communities through Public Participation

A Nationwide Model Project

Visit our website:
www.losland.org

Download our brochure here:
https://www.mehr-demokratie.de/projekte/losland

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LOSLAND and gender: We have endeavoured to use inclusive language throughout this publication. In the German original publication, the binary form „Bürgerinnen und Bürger" was used in accordance with the language guidelines issued by the project organiser, Mehr Demokratie e.V. These guidelines, adopted by a members' resolution, stipulate that gender-sensitive forms such as the colon or asterisk should not be used. The editorial team acknowledges that this binary spelling does not linguistically reflect the diversity of gender identities and may exclude individuals who identify outside the male-female binary. We recognise the importance of inclusive language and appreciate the ongoing discussion around how best to achieve it.

