

NEWS ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN AUSTRIA

The image on the right is from the original article in German,

as published in Biorama, an Austrian online magazine for sustainable living.

The original link is www.biorama.at/burger-rate/

The English translation below is courtesy of DiaPraxis.com

SELBST WIRKSAM WERDEN

4 Apr, 2013 Wolfgang Smejkal Ausgabe 23, Magazin, Schaufenster



Partizipation steigert die Zufriedenheit im Gemeinwesen. In Vorarlberg gibt es damit seit 2005 praktische Erfahrungen und eine Studie, die die positive Wirkung der sogenannten »Bürger-Räte« untermauert.

2013 ist offiziell zum »Europäischen Jahr der Bürgerinnen und Bürger« erklärt worden. 20 Jahre nach der Einführung der Unionsbürgerschaft wird der Fokus dieses Jahres auf den Errungenschaften für die Bürger und ihren Erwartungen für die Zukunft liegen. Im Laufe des Europäischen Jahres sollen Veranstaltungen durchgeführt werden, auf denen den Bürgern erklärt wird, wie sie ihre EU-Rechte unmittelbar nutzen können und welche Maßnahmen und Programme existieren. Ferner soll mit den Bürgern EU-weit diskutiert werden, wie die Europäische Union in der Zukunft aussehen sollte und welche Reformen ihrer Ansicht nach erforderlich sind, um Verbesserungen in ihrem Alltag zu erwirken.

Developing Self-Efficacy

By Wolfgang Smejkal April 4, 2013

Participation increases the level of satisfaction in a community. Since 2005, Vorarlberg has practical experiences as well as a research study that confirms the positive impact of their "Citizens Councils".

2013 has been officially declared the "European Year of Citizen." Twenty years after the introduction of EU citizenship, the focus of this year is the achievements of the people themselves and their own aspirations for their future. As part of this European Year, events are being held to explain to citizens how they can use their EU rights directly and what measures and programs exist. There are also conversations with citizens throughout the European Union on their views about what the European Union should look like in the future, as well as what reforms are needed to obtain improvements in their daily lives.

Civic engagement and self-help are important building blocks of a culture of direct democracy. The combination of individual initiative and social responsibility opens up creative and collaborative solutions in all areas of social life. Citizens who are involved in participatory processes benefit, as their needs and interests can be addressed more effectively. The opportunity to participate in

planning conversations also promotes a sense of responsibility for municipal affairs and for the need to balance different interests.

Self-Efficacy

In 2006, Vorarlberg's Office for Future-Related Issues sponsored a Citizen's Council on a long-standing urban problem. The twelve randomly-selected city dwellers developed a new creative solution of such high quality that the planners and politicians attending the presentation were astonished. Since then, in Vorarlberg and beyond, many such Citizens' Councils have been carried out in various places and on many different topics. A "Citizen's Council" provides a simple, cost-effective and rapid way to strengthen the self-organization and self-responsibility of citizens. This participation method has been used since 2005 in Austria at local, regional and national levels. The spectrum of topics has ranged from planning and visioning processes for community revitalization construction projects, to applications with adolescents and mothers. In a 2012 evaluation of five Austrian citizen councils, it was classified as a promising public participation methodology to bridge the gap between citizens and decision-makers.

Learning Process

The Citizens' Council ("Wisdom Council") is a US-based participation method developed by organizational consultant and social innovator [Jim Rough](#). Twelve people from a county, a city or a region are selected at random to spend 1-2 days exploring an issue in a very open-ended manner. To this end, the facilitation method "[Dynamic Facilitation](#)" is used, which allows an associative and creative approach to discovering new possibilities for action. A specially-trained facilitator helps participants uncover what it is they want and how they can creatively develop collaborative solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems. At the

Bürgerbeteiligung



"Bildung muss uns mehr wert sein!"

Am 24. und 25. Mai 2013 fand der landesweite Dialog "Zukunftstaugliche Bildung aus?" statt. Die Teilnehmer präsentierten und diskutierten. In Vertiefungsworkshops erarbeiteten die Teilnehmer mit konkreten Bildungsinstitutionen Sie die vorläufige Dokumentation zum Bü



Bürgerrat und Landtagsenquete: Wie gelingt Nachbarschaft?"

Am 9. und 10. November 2012 fand der Bürgererrat "Wie gelingt Nachbarschaft?" statt. 11 Personen erarbeiteten Lösungsvorschläge und präsentierten sie der Landtagsenquete.



Landesweiter BürgerInnen-Rat: Was ist die Zukunft?"

Die Vorarlberger Landesregierung hat zur Landtagswahl 2013 eine BürgerInnen-Rat einberufen. 16 Personen wurden zufallsprinzipal ausgewählt, um an wichtigen Fragen für die Zukunft zu diskutieren.



Erster BürgerInnen-Rat Pielachtal

Ziel des BürgerInnen-Rates der Gemeinde Pielachtal: Die grundlegende Frage: „Wie soll die Entwicklung der Gemeinde aussehen?“ zu konkretisieren. Welche Themen sind Ihnen wichtig? Wo sehen Sie Verbesserungsbedarf?



BürgerInnen-Rat der WITUS-Gemeinden

Fünf Wäldergemeinden setzen auf Kooperation. Der erste BürgerInnen-Rat im Bregenzerwald und Wälder konnten dadurch ihre Ideen für die Zukunft an einem Tag diskutieren.



BürgerInnen-Rat macht Schule

Am 23. März 2012 fand erstmals ein Schülerrat in der Gemeinde Pielachtal statt. Die Schüler diskutierten über wesentliche Fragen der Gemeindeentwicklung und präsentierten sie der Landtagsenquete.

The above image is from a Vorarlberg web page that lists all of the 20+ "Citizen's Councils" they've hosted to date, each one with further links to full documentation (aber in Deutsch!) The page is at <http://tinyurl.com/VorarlbergWC>

same time, the process generates a dialogue marked by a high degree of listening. With this empowering approach, better, faster and more consensual results can be achieved than through other facilitation methods.

Transparency

The results of the Citizens' Council are written up in a statement that is presented to the public. In addition to the participants and moderators, others present at this public meeting include the organizers, representatives of all political parties, and interested citizens. There, the statement of the Citizens' Council is presented, explored with the audience, and expanded upon. [*Translator's note: these public meetings are usually hosted utilizing other AoH methodologies such as World Café.*] Next, the Citizens' Council is dissolved, and a Resonance Group is created. This is a working group made up of district policymakers, municipal administrators, and citizens. It meets every one to two months to discuss the implementation of the outcomes of the Citizens' Council, which are in the form of purely non-binding policy recommendations. At the end of a Citizens' Council process, another Citizens' Council is created with other participants. Thus it is possible for citizens to participate in a temporary way and still to be heard.

Representativeness

Previous examples in Vorarlberg include a periodically established Citizens' Council in Bregenz (the Lakeside Area) as well as various national citizens' council (for example, one in November of 2012, in combination with a parliamentary inquiry on economic growth and the quality of life.) It is also possible to invite very specific audiences to explore specific questions (for example, Bregenzwald and Montafon). There have also been special youth councils (How are young people faring?) and mothers' councils (What are the needs of mothers with large families?) "Once participants have taken part in a Citizens' Council, then the enthusiasm that follows is usually very high. Often participants request the opportunity to invest more time into the project and want to stay tuned. We have seen that participants gain the experience of having made a difference. This is our greatest motivation to invest even further in Citizens' Councils and to use them not only as a means for inviting civic participation, but more generally as a tool for promoting active engagement," explains Michael Lederer, coordinator of the Citizens' Councils for the Office of Future-Related Issues of the Vorarlberg government. At a national level, the Ministry of the Environment is also promoting the development and implementation of citizen engagement and public participation projects.

There are many tools and methods for inviting the participation of the population in decision-making. It remains an open question, whether our society has enough will and skill to actually make good use of these tools. The Citizens' Council method has demonstrated its strengths as a process, by trusting the 'wisdom of crowds' and acknowledging that randomly selected people, working together on major challenges, can usually arrive at a holistic, sophisticated, and innovative common denominators.

Thank you for your interest in learning about and spreading innovative methods for public engagement and active democracy!

This translation has been brought to you by www.diaprxaxis.com.

As active members of the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation here in the U.S., and as friends & colleagues of several of the people and organizations referenced in this article, we are happy to promote their good work.