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Local Democracy Revisited

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Local Democracy Revisited

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I. Local Democracy Revisited

In debates on the legitimacy of modern democracies, low voter turnout is frequently mentioned as the most important indicator for the growing distance between voters and political institutions. In the 1970s, however, with levels of formal education rising, political scientists observed a revolution in participation patterns. This is not necessarily a contradiction: people's increased political activity since the 1970s might have taken unconventional forms. The large increase of newly emerging associations is seen as an indicator for the rising number of citizens wishing to participate actively. Some scholars even talk about an explosion in this sector (Anheier et al. 1997: 13; Anheier 1997: 64). New small parties entered the political scene and often changed local party systems.

These developments may be interpreted as steps towards an active civil society, which social and political scientists have called for. Normative concepts, such as the theories of strong (Barber 1984) or reflexive (Schmalz-Bruns 1995) democracy, see a strong civil society as an indispensable basis for democracy. Likewise, numerous empirical studies have revealed the positive effects of participation, e.g. increased social confidence (Putnam 2000). But have such developments actually contributed to more democracy? After about thirty years' experience with these developments in many western countries, a hypothesis based based on theoretical considerations and empirical findings should be possible.

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II. Innovations at the Local Level

All western democracies have responded to citizen requests for more participation. New forms of participation might have been intended to fill the gap between existing opportunities and people's increased wish to participate. Since the 1970s the options for participation in democracies have been increased in many sectors, e.g. land use and infrastructure planning procedures, school boards, direct democracy. Regarding the most important facility of participation, namely elections, many countries extended suffrage to younger people, e.g. sixteen-year-olds. On the one hand new arrangements for the participation of individuals in the run up of decisions were added. On the other hand the right to vote directly for the mayor - responsible for the coordination and delivery of public services - curtailed the former position of the council, which till then had all legal power. This was underpinned by the major innovation in the 1990s: the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) (Bogumil 2001; Wollmann 1998: 400; King & Stoker 1996; Pratchett & Wilson 1996; Pratchett 1999; John 2001). New Zealand and the Netherlands were the front runners, followed by the US (Poister and Streib 1994; 2005) and the Northern European countries. New Public Management was meant to establish an efficient public administration, associated with decentralization, deregulation and delegation. Furthermore reforms of the political decision-making procedures should be implemented. Politicians should only focus on budgeting, goal setting, planning and general issues (Vabo 2000). In Germany the innovation was endorsed by the scientific community as well as the leading local government associations. Municipalities were forced to implement the major components of the initiative.

Although the primary goal of this innovative approach had been more efficiency in political and administrative procedures, it also included new forms of civil participation (Schedler&Proeller 2000: 205pp, especially 210-211). New Public Management has created new modes of governance and broader networks, requiring private firms, those operating in the third sector – called Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) – and individual citizens to pursue problem-solving strategies that bring

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about more citizen-friendly decisions, to strengthen citizenship and to bring politics closer to the people.

Until the 1990s public participation at the local level had usually been limited to the input of the policy cycle, which relates to the preparation of the political decision-making process. The reforms of the 1990s offered a wider range of options for participation, which were not only related to the input of policy-making but also designed to strengthen public participation in the implementation of decisions (Pratchett 1999: 733; Lowndes et al. 2001: 447). Generally, engaging the public is now spreading through the public administration, as more individuals are invited to do voluntary work.

There is a consensus that voluntary work can help enhance democracy, because citizens take part in face-to-face meetings and learn to organize activities. This creates social confidence and provides the opportunity to practice moderation, find a compromise and create mutual understanding. However, critics of New Public Management argue that volunteering may not improve democracy. The volunteers are rather seen as "stopgaps" in times of a shortage of public funds (Nassmacher 2006: 47/48).

As outsourcing is an important goal of the reforms, it is anticipated that administrators will increase efforts to achieve greater public participation by acting more enabling, cooperative and supportive, particularly in sectors where - partly for lack of financial means - administrators are not able to satisfy public demand. For example, in social policies such as child care, youth policies and care for the elderly volunteer activities are appreciated. Private interest groups, citizen initiatives and all kinds of non-profit organizations fulfill demands on a short-term basis.

III. Major Impacts

Initially New Public Management gave rise to a variety of community-based groups. But eventually permanent institutions arose from these initiatives, e.g. child care homes that complement public nursery schools/kindergartens, or women's refuges. They fill in a gap as state authorities provide limited public resources for the new bodies and thus facilitate activities in these areas. In addition, governmental actors have tried to improve economic development by building alliances with the private sector through public-private partnerships. Investors are invited to be a sponsor for or to build new infrastructure, e.g. for shopping and leisure. However, one has to bear in mind that none of these actors and groups have any responsibility towards the general public. At the same time, the new arrangements have weakened the power of elected local authorities. Thus the clear channels of accountability that characterize western democracies have become blurred. Even elected officials "try to maintain that whatever is wrong is not their problem" (Margolis & Resnick 1996: 196).

Years ago the prognosis for future decision-making at the local level used to be a continuing trend towards parliamentarisation (Frey &Nassmacher 1975), which had started in Germany in the 1960s. A parliamentarian political system has the advantage of a division of power between the parliamentary majority and the executive on the one hand and the parliamentary opposition on the other. The majority is accountable for decisions and non-decisions during the legislative period, and its actions are observable by the public and the voters. In order to make its actions understandable, the majority has to advertise its views. The role of the opposition is to point out what went wrong and present alternatives.

By adopting New Public Management, the relationship between council and the administration should be streamlined according to the principal-agent model: after an election, the council formulates goals for the entire legislative period, and the administration has to implement policies. Critics have indicated again and again that this model is much too simplistic for real politics, as new, sudden challenges, e.g. the bankruptcy of a major firm, need flexible reactions based on longstanding values of each party. In addition the principal-agent model represents a shift towards the presidential system (with the separation of power between the president and parliament), where the mayor is the effective head of government and all power is concentrated in that one person. But can he or she be the centre of accountability, as some scholars (Severs et al. 2008: 136) assume? The mayor is acting in highly complex networks with centripetal and centrifugal forces, and he usually needs a majority of the councilors for decision-making. Without the discipline of a one-party majority or a stable coalition in the council, mayors are permanently struggling to secure support for their actions. At the same time, nobody knows who is responsible for decisions. Often mayors themselves, even in larger cities, deny that they are beholden to party policy and try to assure citizens that they are always working for the public's best.

The mayor's responsibility only covers important decisions for the entire community; but there are also a lot of decisions to be made on special policies, which are outsourced and implemented by private partners or non-profit organizations. Initiatives in all policy fields are incorporated more or less in preparing and implementation decisions. In addition, volunteers play a part in some trivial decisions. These relate to the production of the policy output and include - at all events - small adjustments with regard to small groups and a fistful of people, respectively. This promotes a disaggregation of decision-making. Network analysts point out that "policy emerges not from centrally concerted or programmed action but from the

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autonomous interaction of a plurality of independent organizations" (Pratchett 1999: 740). The incorporation of numerous agencies and organizations in decision-making in service delivery contributes to fragmentation within the overall system (Stoker 1996: 2).

This raises not only the question of public accountability of all these new bodies but also the question of local democratic control. Those who exercise public power or spend public money should be answerable to those on whose behalf they act. Even if under New Public Management the consumers are the focus of all activities of the administration, this should not replace the need for collective accountability for policy and use of resources. Legitimacy of decisions is withering away, and at the same time channels for corrupt practices open. This will likely contribute to growing resentment against democracy, and elections will become less and less interesting to the voter.

We are aware that new decentralized structures will bring about new rules and - in wider networks - new styles of decision-making. But first of all complexity dominates in an extremely badly arranged web of relationships. The new rules of the game will emerge from negotiations and a new consensus between actors in each policy field. But achieving coordination after decentralization and fragmentation takes time. Moreover there should be doubts that efficiency of decision-making and implementation will come to the fore. Meanwhile external observers can hardly assess the roles of the actors and their relations to one another. This does not fit with the other goal of the reform: to bring about more local mobilization and influence of the citizenry.

The results are - comparable to empirical studies on community power and corporatism (Hunter 1953; Dahl 1961; Bogumil&Holtkamp 2002; Nassmacher&Nassmacher 2007) carried out for centuries in all western democracies - that established non-profit organizations have an advantage over newly created initiatives and issue groups. Even agent-centered institutionalism points to the same powerful agents in local authorities, and projections predict a concentration of power and a strengthening of the major leaders (Prior et al. 1995: 119; John 2001). The mayors as the most visible agents of the local political system try to set the agenda in policies and politics, but this might be rather symbolic and does not mean that they are able to take control of each policy process.

IV. Prospects for the Future

Those who try to influence decision-making as well as the institutional arrangements have to be examined more closely, as do future changes that are likely to happen.

a) Personnel

At the local level, the directly elected mayor can be sure of overwhelming attention, and he or she is highly visible in the local media. This has not brought about a higher voter turnout in direct elections than in local council elections. In fact, just the opposite occurred in Germany.

It seems that citizens do not value direct elections as a measure of more democracy. Also, the powerful role of the mayor disadvantages the council. This may contribute to the assumption that standing as a councilor is not very attractive to a lot of people who are ready to engage politically. One group is well-educated women. An increasing number of women hold a job, even if they are married and have children. Deficits in the provision of public welfare services may contribute to the fact that women engage publicly, for example in the child care sector or in care for the elderly, to solve their own immediate problems. Consequently voluntary activities do not start in political parties but in other forms (Stöbe-Blossey 2001: 174; Phillips 1996: 115), where quick outcomes are expected. With growing difficulties in the transition from academic studies to paid occupation, many young and well-educated women view volunteer work as way to gain entrance to a paid job (Rabe-Kleberg 1992: 87, 90).

Other incentives for volunteering are to have fun, to form networks, to improve communication skills and to obtain managerial skills. To some degree this may the value of engagement in political parties. But only very few volunteers can achieve well-paid political party positions or have successful political careers. As a precondition continuing engagement is unavoidable. This makes activities in parties always very time consuming and especially younger people are more restricted according to the demanded flexibility on the labor market.

After years of debates on citizens' disenchantment with politics and politicians, participation in political parties is not very highly valued. In contrast, there is no lack of appreciation for voluntary work in social or cultural organizations or initiatives. Many well-educated people are pushed "into functionally-based arenas and patterns and this in turn undermines the support at both central and local levels for government for broad, community-based, local democratic policy-making." (Stoker 1991: 14) The result is that officeholders come from a severely limited spectrum of society. People at the end of their vocational career or those with a safe profession dominate in the councils, e.g. in Germany they come from the public sector or are small business owners. But as councilors they have to perform steering and controlling functions observed by a critical public. If people are not convinced of the councilors' competence, this may contribute to de-legitimizing democracies.

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The politicians' abilities to perform their tasks in the council derive from their profession or work. Only few councilors concede that making complex decisions requires additional training. This gives rise to calls for public authorities to transfer their resources and power to non-partisan entities designed to take on special issues. However, since voluntary work in political parties has become the major stepping stone for a political career and the gateway to more powerful positions in politics, the recruitment of qualified candidates is not only a problem for local democracy, but for each level of western democracies. Furthermore it contributes to the weakening of political parties.

b) Political Parties

Although options for direct democracy have been added, western democracies are still predominantly representative. Western democracies are also party democracies. The proper functioning of political parties is without alternative. Volunteering in political parties means that people with higher education and more managerial skills have to listen and talk to people of lower strata to increase their reputation in the group. The "socioeconomic disparities can be partially counteracted by this [sic] popularly rooted political parties." (Skocpol 2004: 10). Maybe traditional voluntary associations, through seeking large numbers of members and bringing together different strata of society, "conveyed knowledge and motivation that could be transferred to other endeavors" (Skocpol 2004: 11). Even if these associations largely stay out of politics, they may be able to bridge the gap to political parties and thus promote access to them. Mass democracies rely on symbols and organizations such as political parties to give the public guidance and orientation. Parties take positions on key issues in a society, and they channel as well as express interests. "Politics involves collective decision-making" (Stoker 1996: 192), not fighting for special interests. Those who neglect the importance of political parties disregard the results of empirical studies (Kunz 2000): it is evident that different values influence decisions of parties at the local level - not only in Germany.

However, the trend seems to be that political parties at the local level are questioned more and more. The traditional position – which is still defended in many rural areas – that local government is not a matter for party political activity comes to the fore again. Politics - the development and expression of voice and weighing of community objectives - is downplayed. The smaller the town, the more important are informal networks and consensual decision-making processes among the dominant actors.

But now the role of political parties seems to be challenged in larger municipalities as well, as conflicts about value-oriented visions in all policy fields are denied in the public debate. In this view policies in the cities have to follow a long-term model for the future development of the municipalities. It is argued that each city has an overriding general public interest that is superior to the interests of different groups or the values supported by political parties. This vision of development is not very clear-cut or concrete. Critics point out that politicians acting always under uncertainty have to react with a short-term view and make use of present-day opportunities when problems have to be solved.

A lot of scholars in the 1970s expected "that future parties will be less dependent on the functioning of their local subunits because new communication technologies ... will give them ample opportunities for campaigning" (Geser 1999: 34). Local gatherings seemed to be old-fashioned. However, recently scholars have paid more attention to the local chapters of political parties, and there is empirical information about their value (Geser 1999: 35-37; John &Saiz 1999: 47). This concerns not only campaigning but also raising their voices in deciding particular issues according to their values. The size of communities as well as the social-economic structure (class conflict) are strongly related to local party organizational strength (John &Saiz 1999: 44, 55, 69).

The political parties themselves have contributed to the under-valuing of their local chapters. However, the internal structures of political parties differ, and changes occur through a multitude of impulses. The US local parties, for example, vary widely in organizational strength. In the large towns they seem very influential. Usually the national party does not intervene in local affairs (Saiz 1999: 174, 177), which is also true for the Canadian parties. Until the 1990s the local Labour Party in Britain was part of the national hierarchy, following national guidelines and being subject to strong disciplinary measures (Game & Leach 1996: 130, 136). Contrary to that, local Conservatives and Liberals were more decentralized (Game & Leach 1996: 135) and there was no great influence of the party headquarters. They experienced more informal structures. This changed when the Conservatives became more centralized. In the 1990s Labor started to revitalize its local base. Individual party members were seen as the "lifeblood of the parties". Under Blair new individual members were welcomed to demonstrate the modern character of his party. Party leaders paid more attention to the activities in the constituencies, and the level of support for the parties in general elections increased (Seyd&Whiteley 2002: 32/ 33).

c) Changes in Party Competition

Fair competition in campaigns is a litmus test for local democracy. Communities are part of the political culture of their countries and regions. In particular, electoral systems and rules for the recruitment of candidates affect the party system.

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Especially under federalism, it is common that institutional arrangements vary between cities and towns, or between states (e.g. the states of Germany and US towns). Changes have taken place concerning the opportunities of parties to offer a personal tableau for their council factions, as in some places preferential voting for candidates has been introduced. A greater challenge for parties seems to be direct democracy or considerations of non-partisan communities.

As political parties are under pressure everywhere, the idea of non-partisanship is coming to the fore again. This is not a new idea. It was the most commonly adopted reform in North America in the early 20th century. About two-thirds of municipalities in the US are run without the political parties' names on the ballot. Canada followed soon. In the early 1970s in Alberta, most people still opted against parties at the local level, in larger as well as smaller municipalities (Masson 1985: 291). Firstly this was a measure against the turn-of-the-century party machines and thus against party power with corrupt practices and overwhelming patronage. In combination with elections at-large it was meant to reduce the impact of socio-economic cleavages and minority voting blocs in local politics. Secondly the reformers believed it would restrict local campaigns to local issues. Thirdly the municipalities should deliver services in an "efficient and businesslike" manner (Margolis &Resnick 1996:184). Last but not least, it should raise the caliber of the candidates.

Many scholars doubt that this measure has made local democracy stronger. Instead, its major impact in the US seems to be that the political process "tends to be dominated by well-organized, often well-endowed, interest groups with their own particular agenda" (Margolis &Resnick 1996: 183). Furthermore nonpartisanship has been accompanied by reduced voter turnout. As even in middle-sized towns only a small number of people know the candidates in person, most potential voters lack orientation (Kevenhörster 1979: 292). This brings about limited opportunities of minority groups and disproportionately represented minorities (Welch 1990). The problem is exacerbated in larger municipalities with at-large elections. Especially in large cities, council candidates have to put a lot of money into their campaigns. This means if no organization is willing to sponsor the campaign, only candidates from the middle or even upper middle class are wealthy enough to run. Consequently Republican candidates have an advantage in non-partisan elections, while the turnout for Democrats (generally citizens with lower income) is reduced. Therefore the Republicans in the US as well as the Conservatives in Canada prefer non-partisanship, while the Democrats in the US and the NDP3 in Canada fight against it. As voter turnout is widely regarded as a measure for grass-roots democracy, one may judge non-partisanship as a step in the wrong direction.

Political parties themselves have tried to solve the problem: their get-out-the-vote-drives are the strongest measure. Their organizational activity seems far higher today than it was in the past, and the effectiveness of parties is most likely increasing rather significantly. In some cities local civic organizations have sprung up that are loosely related to state and federal parties, which provided funds for the local campaigns. Soon the public became aware of this (Masson 1985: 298; Purcal 1993), so that non-partisanship often remains only a formality. The hurdle works at all events in edge-cities and suburbs with middle class inhabitants. As has been shown in non-partisan municipalities, it is impossible to take partisan considerations out of local politics. "Thus, local political decision making has a partisan component, even though it is covert rather than overt" (Masson 1985: 292).

However, political participation remains at a low level. Only a few scholars do research on local party activities, and the emerging picture is inconsistent. Some find that parties are mere electoral organizations: "Parties are simply trying to survive and make a good showing in the next election" (Margolis &Resnick 1996: 190). "...neither their leaders nor their public officeholders envision them fulfilling the active policy role called for by the strong model of party responsibility." "Local politicians are constantly searching for nonpolitical solutions that relieve them for [sic] responsibility for making tough decisions" (Margolis &Resnick 1996: 192). This does not increase the reputation of the council and contributes to a general loss of faith in the ability of government to solve political problems (Margolis &Resnick 1996: 190, 192).

Some scholars regard representation as a political feature of the past. As more and more people become better educated, they force the implementation of direct decision-making by the citizens. Advocates of direct democracy argue that democracy is government "by the people". In its purest form this means that people come together and make political decisions. Some experiences are at hand concerning town meetings, as traditionally held in very small villages in Switzerland. They have also been conducted in New England since the 1960s. However, attendance has always been very poor, except in very small towns or villages, and it has varied over the years and from issue to issue. In New England attendance was higher in the 1960s than in the 1990s (Zimmerman 1999: 46, 47). Decisions were strongly influenced by town officers and committees, and their recommendations were very often followed (Zimmerman 1999: 49). But there were good debates, and the participants felt better informed. Considering the large number of decisions that have to be made each day, as well as organizational problems and expenses for managing direct attendance at least for major issues, town meetings are useful only in small municipalities

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and in some policy fields, and as a supplement to a representative body.

Meanwhile, direct democracy by citizen-initiated ballot or referendum, or initiated by the public authorities, especially the council, is widely employed in western democracies, especially in Switzerland and the US. Germany has recently followed suit (Scarrow 1999a: 276-278) at the local and state levels. Ballots and referenda have increased during the last decades in these countries and world-wide. In a direct democracy, citizens both participate in discussions about different policies and then make the final choice. However, "it is unmediated participation in both policy formation and policy decision" (Dalton et al. 2003: 10). As the outcome of citizen-led initiatives can have important impacts on the operations of public organizations, local governments in the US choose strategic responses before particular issues has been placed on the ballot (Ely/Jacob 2013: 39).

As we know from numerous studies, those who participate in direct democracy are generally well educated and well off. Expectations that new issues would be raised and new arrangements for problem-solving would be tested were disappointed. Across countries the topics have been fairly similar (infrastructure development, environmental measures, land use), and most of the issues have been raised before in the political debate. Rent-seeking is a strong incentive for participants. Proposals that would result in higher taxes are usually turned down (Wagschal 1997). Slim budgets often lead to dismissal of personnel and/or termination of social programs. In addition, xenophobia has become evident.

Scholars who advocate direct democracy never consider the financial implications. Also, direct democracy is very time-consuming for both the administration and the citizens. Further problems are the impact of pressure groups and the push for minority interests. Many authors have pointed out negative effects for parties, which have to deal with all propositions put forward under direct democracy (Ladner/Brändle 1999: 284-286). Involvement of the political parties is unavoidable and an additional time-consuming burden for party activists (Nassmacher 2001). However, it forces parties to be active and visible between election campaigns, and this brings about a professionalization of the party staff (Ladner/Brändle 1999: 293). Therefore direct democracy does not automatically weaken the parties. Under some circumstances it may help combat citizens' dissatisfaction and "boost support for the process upon which the parties depend" (Scarrow 1999b: 358/359).

Direct democracy also increases the importance of smaller parties (Ladner/Brändle 1999: 295) and thus affects the party system. However, the major measure for shaping party systems is the electoral system. In the first-past-the-post-system (single member simple plurality systems) the voter has the best chance to hold candidates and their parties accountable through the ballot box. There seems to be only one counteracting factor: regional strongholds of parties built on specific socio-economic structures, e.g. ethnic minorities or historical communities. This can cause longstanding dominance of one party. Corrupt practices may be the most important problem that comes about in such cases.

Proportional representation systems are widely regarded as the most important explanation for centrifugal parliaments, as in Switzerland (Ladner 1991: 126) and Germany. For decades in Switzerland the local chapters of the national parties have been dominant (Ladner 1991: 259). The same has been true in Germany, where local, independent parties have played no important role in larger towns. A first step in changing these party systems may have been enabling the citizens to cast preference votes for local council candidates. This measure has been used in the southern states of Germany for decades. It has not weakened the dominant right-wing parties CDU and CSU, as their candidates (e.g. self-employed people with academic background such as pharmacists, lawyers, physicians and architects, as well as small employers) are well known among the public. Left-wing parties have found it difficult to find candidates with a comparable reputation. Therefore it seems to be safe to predict - supported by a small number of empirical findings - that preferential voting favors conservative parties. In contrast, the abolition of the five-percent hurdle seems to encourage splitting of local parties and the candidature of independents.

This may influence the diversity of perspectives included in the policymaking process and lead to early debate and action on new issues (Orellana 2010): 613). More than a few analysts see these recent developments as advantageous for western democracies. This has to be questioned. Has democracy really been enhanced? One has to keep in mind that the supposedly new actors in the councils are often not really new on the scene (Naßmacher2006: 142, 144). Many had problems in their old parties and were not able to accept political compromise. To a smaller degree they may be able to inject fresh perspectives and new expertise into public policy debates. In any case, personal tensions are now played out in the council as a whole and become a burden, as the public is prevented from giving their full attention to the problems that have to be solved. It is safe to say that if there is no aggregation of different views, the decision-making process will take more time. This may contribute to a decline of public satisfaction with local government and democracy.[3]

To a lesser degree the laws for party financing are important for the internal structure of party organizations and their activities at the local level. This

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may be true for German and Swedish parties. As state funds for German parties depend on the parties' own income and are provided as matching funds, parties have to look after their members and solicit new members and their dues as well as additional donations from citizens. In Sweden, state aid depends on votes, even in local elections, and this encourages activities of the local party chapters. My own findings confirm that activities and influence of parties in local politics depend very much on the party activists and councilors themselves, their motivation, social and political skills and policy expertise. It comes as no surprise that caucus members are dominant in local party organizations. They have more resources than regular party activists, who are usually not able or not willing to use their own wealth.

V. Conclusion

Bearing in mind that western democracies should balance freedom and equality, there must be institutional arrangements that grant equal access to all citizens who want to be involved in local affairs. This was introduced through the formula 'one man, one vote'. The range of options for participation has been expanded for some decades, but many measures are of minor importance for influencing decisions. Regarding the major and councilors, electoral systems allow for more individual choice of the voters. However, electing the mayor directly is not valued highly by voters, as the low turnout shows, and preferential voting for councilors has complicated the voting process. This would get even worse if non-partisan ballots were introduced. A larger turnout of well-educated voters and consequently increased votes for councilors of the upper middle class has strengthened the conservative and liberal camps. Direct democracy has the same impact. The mayors' visibility in the media hides the fact that public control of Decision-making is impossible, as in a disaggregated system nobody seems to be responsible. The universal practice for councilors of the same party to organize themselves in a political group with specific views on political issues is withering away, as multi-party systems become widespread. To summarize the impacts of the new institutional arrangements: freedom has been increased at the expense of equality and accountability.

1See, for instance, Norris, Pippa quoted in: Power to the People, A pervasive web will increase demands for direct democracy, in: The Economist, January 25th 2003:13.

2 Most councilors enter the local council on a party ticket, while initiatives and non-profit organizations provide the same opportunity only in smaller towns.

3 The consequence was that the NDP stronghold British Columbia had the smallest number of towns with non-partisan councils.

4 They have advantages not only in knowing what goes on in the town, but also because the caucuses employ publicly funded assistants.

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