

Local Democracy Revisited

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Abstract

The reform of institutional arrangements at the local level, especially the personalisation of executive power and the implementation of new options to participate, was expected to reinforce local democracy. However, there were doubts from the start as to whether this goal could be achieved, because institutional reforms were combined with the implementation of New Public Management. After more than a decade, an evaluation of the adopted measures in major western democracies seems appropriate. The comparative analysis draws on empirical studies conducted over three decades. Because of available data that is extremely difficult to compose for all western democracies, decision making procedures have been neglected in comparative empirical research. The evaluation presented here includes a puzzle of findings, which underpin future prospects of continuing reforms. The result is that a lack of accountability and control prevents democratization. Furthermore, measures taken to improve direct citizen participation have not achieved their goal.

Index terms—

1 Local Democracy Revisited

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2 I.

Local Democracy Revisited 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

44 empirical studies have revealed the positive effects of participation, e.g. increased social confidence (Putnam
45 2000). But have such developments actually contributed to more democracy?

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48 E-mail : karl.h.nassmacher@uni-oldenburg.de based on theoretical considerations and empirical findings should
49 be possible.

50 3 II.

51 4 Innovations at the Local Level

52 All western democracies have responded to citizen requests for more participation. New forms of participation
53 might have been intended to fill the gap between existing opportunities and people's increased wish to participate.
54 Since the 1970s the options for participation in democracies have been increased in many sectors, e.g. land
55 use and infrastructure planning procedures, school boards, direct democracy. Regarding the most important
56 facility of participation, namely elections, many countries extended suffrage to younger people, e.g. sixteen-
57 year-olds. On the one hand new arrangements for the participation of individuals in the run up of decisions
58 were added. On the other hand the right to vote directly for the mayor -responsible for the coordination and
59 delivery of public servicescurtailed the former position of the council, which till then had all legal power. This
60 was underpinned by the major innovation in the 1990s: the implementation of New Public Management (NPM)
61 (Bogumil 2001; Pollmann 1998: 400; King & Stoker 1996; Pratchett & Wilson 1996;Pratchett 1999;John
62 2001). New Zealand and the Netherlands were the front runners, followed by the US (Poister and Streib
63 1994;2005) and the Northern European countries. New Public Management was meant to establish an efficient
64 public administration, associated with decentralization, deregulation and delegation. Furthermore reforms of the
65 political decision-making procedures should be implemented. Politicians should only focus on budgeting, goal
66 setting, planning and general issues (Vabo 2000). In Germany the innovation was endorsed by the scientific
67 community as well as the leading local government associations. Municipalities were forced to implement the
68 major components of the initiative.

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

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

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

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

92 5 III.

93 6 Major Impacts

94 Initially New Public Management gave rise to a variety of community-based groups. But eventually per-
95 manent institutions arose from these initiatives, e.g. child care homes that complement public nursery
96 schools/kindergartens, or women's refuges. They fill in a gap as state authorities provide limited public resources
97 for the new bodies and thus facilitate activities in these areas. In addition, governmental actors have tried to
98 improve economic development by building alliances with the private sector through public-private partnerships.
99 Investors are invited to be a sponsor for or to build new infrastructure, e.g. for shopping and leisure. However,
100 one has to bear in mind that none of these actors and groups have any responsibility towards the general public.
101 At the same time, the new arrangements have weakened the power of elected local authorities. Thus the clear

102 channels of accountability that characterize western democracies have become blurred. Even elected officials "try
103 to maintain that whatever is wrong is not their problem" ??Margolis & Resnick 1996: 196).

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

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

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

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133 autonomous interaction of a plurality of independent organizations" ??Pratchett 1999: 740). The incorporation
134 of numerous agencies and organizations in decisionmaking in service delivery contributes to fragmentation within
135 the overall system ??Stoker 1996: 2).

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

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

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

157 8 IV.

158 9 Prospects for the Future

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

10 a) Personnel

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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 be 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.

12 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. Political 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

221 political parties. This vision of development is not very clear-cut or concrete. Critics point out that politicians
222 acting always under uncertainty have to react with a short-term view and make use of present-day opportunities
223 when problems have to be solved.

224 A lot of scholars in the 1970s expected "that future parties will be less dependent on the functioning of their
225 local subunits because new communication technologies ... will give them ample opportunities for campaigning"
226 ??Geser 1999: 34). Local gatherings seemed to be old-fashioned. However, recently scholars have paid more
227 attention to the local chapters of political parties, and there is empirical information about their value (Geser
228 1999: 35-37; John &Saiz 1999: 47). This concerns not only campaigning but also raising their voices in deciding
229 particular issues according to their values. The size of communities as well as the social-economic structure (class
230 conflict) are strongly related to local party organizational strength (John &Saiz 1999: 44, 55, 69).

231 The political parties themselves have contributed to the under-valuing of their local chapters. However, the
232 internal structures of political parties differ, and changes occur through a multitude of impulses. The US local
233 parties, for example, vary widely in organizational strength. In the large towns they seem very influential. Usually
234 the national party does not intervene in local affairs ??Saiz 1999: 174, 177), which is also true for the Canadian
235 parties. Until the 1990s the local Labour Party in Britain was part of the national hierarchy, following national
236 guidelines and being subject to strong disciplinary measures ??Game & Leach 1996: 130, 136). Contrary to
237 that, local Conservatives and Liberals were more decentralized (Game & Leach 1996: 135) and there was no
238 great influence of the party headquarters. They experienced more informal structures. This changed when
239 the Conservatives became more centralized. In the 1990s Labor started to revitalize its local base. Individual
240 party members were seen as the "lifeblood of the parties". Under Blair new individual members were welcomed
241 to demonstrate the modern character of his party. Party leaders paid more attention to the activities in the
242 constituencies, and the level of support for the parties in general elections increased (Seyd&Whiteley 2002: 32/
243 33).

244 13 c) Changes in Party Competition

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

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

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

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

279 Political parties themselves have tried to solve the problem: their get-out-the-vote-drives are the strongest
280 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 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 problemsolving 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 timeconsuming 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

344 has been used in the southern states of Germany for decades. It has not weakened the dominant right-wing parties
345 CDU and CSU, as their candidates (e.g. self-employed people with academic background such as pharmacists,
346 lawyers, physicians and architects, as well as small employers) are well known among the public. Left-wing
347 parties have found it difficult to find candidates with a comparable reputation. Therefore it seems to be safe to
348 predict -supported by a small number of empirical findings -that preferential voting favors conservative parties. In
349 contrast, the abolition of the five-percent hurdle seems to encourage splitting of local parties and the candidature
350 of independents.

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

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

370 V.

371 15 Conclusion

372 Bearing in mind that western democracies should balance freedom and equality, there must be institutional
373 arrangements that grant equal access to all citizens who want to be involved in local affairs. This was introduced
374 through the formula 'one man, one vote'. The range of options for participation has been expanded for some
375 decades, but many measures are of minor importance for influencing decisions. Regarding the major and
376 councilors, electoral systems allow for more individual choice of the voters. However, electing the mayor directly
377 is not valued highly by voters, as the low turnout shows, and preferential voting for councilors has complicated
378 the voting process. This would get even worse if non-partisan ballots were introduced. A larger turnout of
379 well-educated voters and consequently increased votes for councilors of the upper middle class has strengthened
380 the conservative and liberal camps. Direct democracy has the same impact. The mayors' visibility in the media
381 hides the fact that public control of Decision-making is impossible, as in a disaggregated system nobody seems
382 to be responsible. The universal practice for councilors of the same party to organize themselves in a political
383 group with specific views on political issues is withering away, as multi-party systems become widespread. To
384 summarize the impacts of the new institutional arrangements: freedom has been increased at the expense of
385 equality and accountability. 1See, for instance, Norris, Pippa quoted in: Power to the People, A pervasive web
386 will increase demands for direct democracy, in: The Economist, January 25th 2003:13. 2 Most councilors enter
387 the local council on a party ticket, while initiatives and non-profit organizations provide the same opportunity
388 only in smaller towns. 3 The consequence was that the NDP stronghold British Columbia had the smallest
389 number of towns with non-partisan councils. ^{1 2 3}

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Figure 1: 4

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