CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

Evaluation of Public Participation Processes in Environmental Decision-making

Evaluation of Referenda and Public Hearings on Waste Management from a Participant Perspective

Ph.D. Dissertation

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Budapest, 2013

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1. Introduction

In a 2003 research project, we analyzed the environmental conflict surrounding the Northeast Pest Country Regional Landfill (Baranyi et al., 2004), which brought my attention to public participation. In this ISPA-funded (Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession) program, public acceptance was verified by local referenda, which granted veto power to the populations of the settlements in question over the setting up of the landfill. In the course of the Northeast Pest Country Regional Waste Management Program, eight towns voted against the landfill during 2002-2003.[1] During our research, we looked at and analyzed the case thoroughly. That time, we approached the topic from the emergence of environmental conflicts. A question had arisen in my mind that was left unanswered back then, but which I seek to answer through this thesis. Was the participation of the public indeed conducted in the proper way? That is, is the referendum, as a participatory mechanism, suited for the involvement of the local population in current environmental / waste management decisions?

An incentive for giving further thought to this question was that Szántó (2008c) established that the referendum had been very frequently used in Hungarian waste management projects during the last decade. Consequently, some of my research questions aim at analyzing the use of referenda in waste management cases.

Besides the referendum, the other tool to be scrutinized is the public hearing. The reason for also including the public hearing in the analysis is that it is the one most frequently employed participatory mechanism both in Hungary and in Western democracies. As far as public hearings are concerned, several authors have already called attention to the lack of comprehensive analyses (Webler–Renn, 1995 and Stern–Fineberg, 1996). Based on theoretical evaluations, the literature associates numerous contradictions with both tools.

Based on experience, the literature does give us an impression about the effectiveness of the tools. Concerning public hearings, objections voiced by the population may push decision-makers towards an adverse decision (Rosener, 1981, Chess–Purcell, 1999), and experience from Hungary also shows that in 40% of all

1 For details see Kiss G, 2005

siting cases, opposition from the population actually prevented the project from being realized (Szántó 2008c). However, the small number of cases that the experience reported in the literature is based on would certainly justify a closer look at the question.

The evaluation of participatory processes in the international literature comprises criteria that assess the effectiveness of the process based on participants' opinions (Tuler−Webler, 1999, Webler et al., 2001). These researches are based on the idea that a participatory process can only be successful if its participants deem it to be such. Others wish to underline (Rowe et al., 2004) that the opinion of the financer must not be left out of consideration, either, when assessing the efficiency of a participatory tool.

In Hungary, no research has been done so far into how satisfied the stakeholders, and the local population in particular, were with the public engagement process, and how they evaluated it in retrospect. The participant evaluation of these two tools (referenda and public hearings) is missing from the international literature, as well.

Based on the above, what my doctoral research aims at is the evaluation of referenda and public hearings in Hungary's decision-making practice concerning waste management matters.

Specifically, I seek to establish

1. how efficient, in participants' views, public hearings and referenda are as vehicles of public involvement,
2. whether the outcomes of these processes actually influence the decisions;
3. how satisfied the participants are with the results of the decisions and with the quality of the process itself.

There is absolutely no doubt that local citizens have the right to participate in the decision-making process. But how? Works exploring the „how" question constitute a significant part of the literature of public participation. An extensive debate is going on about how the appropriate participatory mechanism ought to be selected for a particular environmental decision. The key to understanding the various approaches and the underlying reasons is to examine how the individual approaches define the participatory process itself and what they believe to be the substance thereof. Differing theoretical backgrounds lead to differing practical conclusions. Therefore, I

will first present the theoretical foundations of public participation in environmental decision-making, and the arguments that can be derived from these theoretical considerations for and against public involvement. I studied the theories to the depth that was necessary for me to be able to identify and understand these arguments.

Authors relying on different theoretical backgrounds define public participation in differing ways, too. They use different criteria to tell apart participatory processes from non-participation, they differ on what constitutes substantial participation and define a „good" participatory process in differing terms. Therefore I will first clarify the various definitions of participation, and then present, along with a review of the literature on the evaluation of participatory mechanisms, the criteria the various authors use to evaluate participatory processes. These writings also engage in the actual evaluation of individual participatory mechanisms and, based on the evaluations, they also suggest various ways for their categorization. After an overview of these works, I will proceed to characterize, drawing from the literature, the referendum and the public hearing as participatory tools.

The overview on international research findings is followed by a discussion of the status of public participation in Hungary. Drawing from the Hungarian literature, I describe the Hungarian practice proceeding along the rungs of the ladder of participation.

The section on the empirical research starts out with an explanation of its background and my choice of topic, based on my own research experience and the existing literature. Next, I position my doctoral research in the relevant field of academic debate. Based on all the above, I then formulate my research questions about the public hearings and the referendum relating to a particular waste management case.

The empirical research was conducted in a little village, Pári, where a referendum was held on 25 March 2012 on the setting up of two „waste collection sites". This decision-making process provided the basis for a case study, which I then examined applying various qualitative research techniques. The fieldwork served to explore the affected parties' opinions about both the referendum and the public hearings held beforehand. First, I present my research methodology, followed by an account of the circumstances under which the case was selected. In my discussion of the research findings, I proceed along the elements of the theory I arrived at, touching upon the topics of waste management and democracy, and giving a detailed account of

participants' evaluation of the referendum and the public hearings in question. These are then used to formulate my conclusions about public participation.

2. Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making

The area of my previous research activities was, as I have already mentioned in the introduction, waste management in Hungary. The last two decades have witnessed significant developments in our waste management infrastructure. As a result, the landfills that did not meet the regulatory requirements and carried risks for both the environment as well as human health were closed. Given that in the past the infrastructure had been dominated by landfills, they were the primary targets of the developments, as well. The aim of establishing a regional system of landfills was to minimize the pollution of the natural environment and the efficient protection of human health. The objective set for the infrastructure development program was to set up regional systems that can achieve economies of scale (for the connection between developments and economies of scale, see Kerekes, 2002a,b and 2003). Meaning that facilities that burdened the environment would be shut down, and new, state-of-the-art ones would be built, which would by all means carry lower environmental risks.

The implications of the EU accession for waste management are stated by Gille (2004). She draws attention to the main contradictions between the legislation and the practice of funding new facilities. Preventative waste policy is against the practice of siting huge regional waste dumps in Hungary. These contradictions have led to a high rate of landfilling in Hungary. The waste management system changes raise the question of the cultural impact of the preferred technology. Ten years after the accession it is questionable how the citizens relate to waste management decisions and participation. The cultural impact of the waste regime can affect the knowledge of wastes in the society.

The present thesis deals with the use of public participation tools in the siting of waste management facilities. Even more specifically, with the two tools most frequently applied in the Hungarian practice: public hearings and referenda. For the purposes of this thesis, it is considered a given that the developments indeed brought environmentally favorable results. Nor will I look into whether the waste management investment projects in question bolstered the economy or how the benefits of waste management measured up against its costs (for details on the topic,

see Csutora, 2003). That is, I will not examine whether the environmental infrastructure development realized actually serves the protection of the environment or what its economic effects are. Out of the social effects of these investments, it is the application of public participation tools that I wish to investigate. To me, the question is whether, working from a sustainable development perspective, the public's interest was taken into account in establishing these facilities, and how this is reflected in the participatory mechanisms and decision-making processes applied. Thus considering the three pillars of sustainable development (which tripartition has, nonetheless, been criticized by many, see e.g. Kiss, K. 2005), out of the social aspects, it is public participation that my present work relies on to examine the social pillar. My starting point for the evaluation of the use of participatory tools in environmental decision-making is the concept of sustainable development.[2]

A significant portion of the literature of public participation deals with investment decisions in so-called developing countries. Public participation processes concerning such developments are not covered in this thesis. The dissertation only considers public participation processes – pertaining to decisions that affect the natural environment – in the democracies of the so-called developed world.

Depending on the context, different terms are used to refer to the public actors participating in these processes: e.g. citizens, laypeople or affected parties, stakeholders. As regards the thesis, the only distinction between these various expressions is that between individuals (citizens, affected parties) and groups representing some common interest (interest groups); while society and local community include both types.

2.1 Why Should the Public Participate in Environmental Decision-Making? Theoretical Arguments for Public Participation

The literature of public participation is characterized by a duality: the duality of empirical studies and theory building works (Webler, 1999 and Reed, 2008). It is the description and analysis of real-life cases, mostly in the form of case studies, that

[2] The definition of the concept of sustainable development and the issues thereof fall outside the scope of this thesis. For details on the topic, see Kiss K. (2005).

makes up the majority of the academic discourse, which has been going on since the early 1970s. The apparent purpose of these case studies is to gather the empirical experience required for generalization and for the building of a theoretical model, as well. The academic analyses also strive to provide guidance to the practitioners of the field (mediators, planners, officials). This might result in an important interaction, a dialogue between the theory building efforts and the practice of public participation (Webler, 1999). Academic papers often express the wish to assist in improving the quality of practical implementation. Papers that rely on empirical surveys typically take the form of a case study, covering the topics of planning, risk communication, siting and environmental conflicts, and the range of environmental issues discussed is very broad, as well, including hydrology, waste management, the preservation of biodiversity, forestry etc. The highly varied background of the cases often raises questions about theoretical generalizability and methodological validity, which are often left unanswered by the authors. The specific practical guidance we referred to above, targeting those organizing public participation processes, is provided by a row of handbooks, which serve as manuals for the planning and implementation of participatory processes (see, among others, Wilcox, 1994, English et al., 1993).

However, the scientific evaluation of practical experience has not produced a consistent theoretical background, and according to Webler's (1999) criticism, the authors often do not even strive to utilize already existing theoretical starting points. It is the creation of this theoretical background that the smaller portion of papers is engaged in. The theoretical roots of the participation literature are highly varied. Authors typically have an inter-disciplinary background, which has both its advantages and drawbacks. On the one hand, the topic may bring together a number of different perspectives and approches, which makes the theory more colorful, but on the other hand, different approaches often tend to talk at cross purposes (Webler, 1999). The roots reach into political science, psychology and sociology or, more specifically, into democratic theory, communication theory, risk evaluation, decision theory and environmental science.

However, works where theory building is coupled with practical experience are very rare. Exceptions are, for instance, Renn et al., (1995b), the works of Webler et al. including Webler (1995), Tuler–Webler (1999) and (Webler–Tuler, 2000), or Rowe–Frewer (1999), (2000) and (2004), and Kemp (1985). In addition to building the

theoretical background, these authors also conducted methodologically thorough empirical researches. That is, they also test their theories by means of some empirical survey (findings from these studies are discussed in Chapter 3).

Even though I examined the area of public participation that pertains to environmental decisions, I found that the environmental perspective itself or the resolution of environmental issues rarely ever was in the foreground in these papers. Of course there are exceptions (e.g. Raffensperger, 1998 and Brulle, 2002), but the majority of the authors discuss public participation in itself, environmental issues „only" serve as a backdrop to public participation. I myself found this approach to be too anthropocentric, sometimes even narrow-minded. If, however, we rely on the concept of sustainable development as our frame of interpretation, then social issues appear as just one of the aspects – a crucial one, though – of environmental matters, which alone cannot provide the solution to environmental problems. If we were to reverse the perspective: to me, the natural environment is not just one of the aspects, but it is public decisions that have to serve the protection of environmental values. It remains a key question, however, whether decisions jointly made by the population, environmentalist groups, the government, market actors and scientists are „better" for the natural environment, whether deliberative decision-making can be efficient in protecting environmental values? My below presentation of the theory of public participation will cover these questions, as well.

In the literature of participation, authors often cite Fiorino's article from 1990, in which he explains the theoretical criteria that can be derived from democratic theory with respect to public participation. In the same article, Fiorino also provides an thorough answer as to why the population should participate in environmental decision-making. He gives three arguments (substantive, normative and instrumental) for participation (Fiorino, 1990, 227-228):

1. Substantive argument: Laypeople's judgement fundamentally differs from that of experts. They have a different perception of the cases, the solutions and the risks. They are sensitive to social and political values. Thereby, their participation allows for the management of uncertainties and the correction of mistakes.
2. Normative argument: Technocratic evaluations cannot take democratic values into account. The diversity of values is ignored. Laypeople are the best judges of their own interests.

3. Instrumental argument: Efficient public participation improves the legitimacy of the decision and leads to better results. The wider the circle of those involved, the more interests can be integrated and the smaller the chance for a mistake. The conceit that institutions suffer from might get even worse if people are left out.

In addition to Fiorino's three arguments rooted in democratic theory, other scientific theories also confirm the need for public participation in environmental decision-making. These approaches are summarized in the following figure.

Figure 1: Approaches in the Theory of Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making

Source: author's own compilation

The demand for public participation basically originates in democratic theory. The *democratic arguments* are parts of the various models of democracy, as well. The *Habermasian arguments* for public participation come from Jürgen Habermas's writings on democracy, theory of communication and discourse ethics. The „green arguments" in favor of public participation in environmental matters are rooted in the theories of environmental democracy and sustainability. The *rsik arguments* were

derived from risk research and in particular from the evaluation of environmental risks. Arguments associated with the relationship between *science and society* appear in the reasoning of post-normal science and social learning. And it is psychology and behavioral economics that complement all the above with the *behavioral arguments*. Next, I will expand on the theories behind the arguments shown on the figure 1.

2.1.1 „Democratic" Arguments

The theory of public participation is rooted in democratic theories. In modern societies, democracy (i.e. people's power) is mainly realized by representation due to the size and complexity of nation states.

In a representative democracy, professional political elites make the decisions, which are supposed to find positive-sum solutions (Sartori, 1999). In representative democracies, people have only indirect connections with the exercise of power, which has been professionalized by the political elite representing them. However, this distance may undermine democracy itself, since representation might result in the simplerotation of groups of elites, applying political marketing campaigns devoid of any democratic deliberation on public issues and democratic power might thus become a mere competition among the elites for being in power (Miller, 1995). Consequently, people get excluded from the exercise of power, political issues appear to be distant and uncomprehensible to them (democratic deficit),. People over time tend to loose trust in the political elite and they turn their attention away from as well as decrease their engagement with politics as public issues. which leads to political apathy and passivity (Király, 2012b). This phenomenon can be treated in various ways, the most important of which are the other models of democracy, the new institutions of citizen power, as well as the theories of rational discourse. All of them aim at involving people in the exercise of democratic power again, and at "repoliticizing" society (Bogdanor, 2001, Miller, 1995).

In the theory of democracy, three other models of democracy are distinguished: direct, participatory and deliberative democracy (Antal, 2009). *Direct democracy,* where people exercise power directly without representation, does exist both in the theory and the actual history of democracies. In such a system, decision-making tends to be carried out by means of referenda. However, direct democracy is

criticized for being significantly limited; many opine that it is expressly unviable for populations of more than a few hundred people (Sartori, 1999).

The other two concepts of democracy are *participatory democracy and deliberative democracy*, where decisions are made by deliberation. It aims at resolving the isolation between the citizens and the institutions. Given that neither of these three alternative forms (direct, deliberative and participatory) of democracy can prevail alone in today's mass societies dut to the size and the pluralism of nation states, the necessity of representative democracy is unquestionable. However, public participation tools may well be useful complements, serving to re-establish citizens' power, reducing the isolation of the elite and ensuring political participation, the very basis of democracy – and, hence, to enhance democracy (Pataki, 2007).

The main function of participation is education: , teaching and enhancing democratic skills, while, on the other, at the collective level by building tolerance and empathy in the political community and trust in democratic procedures (Lánczi, 2000).

Rousseau and Mill, important scholars in the theory of democracy, emphasize the educating function of participation (Pateman, 1970). According to Rousseau, the most important function of participation is education, because citizens can learn to separate their own interests from those of the public and become aware that even though the two are interdependent, they do not necessarilyconflict with each other. Rousseau saw participatory procedures as self-sustaining, since the skills obtained by citizens enable them to participate in further decision-making. According to Mill citizens can learn to take other people's interests and opinions into consideration and start thinking about the public's interest besides that of their own. Participation in local decision–making, furthermore, teaches people how to govern themselves, that is to say, they learn democracy (Pateman, 1970).

Thus if we accept democracy to be a fundamental value, that leads us to the following democratic arguments in favor of public participation (based on Webler–Renn, 1995):

- Public participation strengthens democracy, because it delegates power to the people.
- Through public participation, the various members of society may be granted equal rights to influence decisions.
- The participatory process may enhance society's knowledge and improve its awareness.

- Deliberation facilitates the formulation of the collective will.
- Democracy is best learnt by taking part in it.
- Participation also contributes to citizens' personal and social development.
- Participation will enable people to represent and protect their own interests.
- People themselves are the best judge of their own interests.
- In order to make legitimate decisions, public discourse must be ensured.
- In a democracy, voicing one's opinion is a fundamental right.

2.1.2 „Habermasian" Arguments

Jürgen Habermas is considered to be a major scholar of the Frankfurt School, dealing with the criticism of modern society, and his works are believed to be central to public participation theory and, hence, frequently referenced in the literature (e.g. Kemp, 1985, Webler, 1995). One of Habermas's main concerns is how direct participation can be realized in today's complex and pluralist societies (Habermas, 1996). He argued that everyday decision-making in the political system is driven by its own unique internal logic, and that the decision-making process follows some sort of bureaucratic system. This decision-making process is untransparent to the public, which puts them in an outsider positions, alienates them from the system and may even make them give up their loyalty. And the resulting decisions can by no means be legitimate, as that, in Habermas' view, could only be achieved through face-to-face communication. According to him, the problem can be resolved by channelling people's opinions into this system (sluice-gate model). The means to this end are deliberative platforms that can thematize and amplify the ideas, concerns and expectations of the communities. These deliberative platforms may also ensure the legitimacy of the decisions that the political system makes: "… the discourse theory of democracy implies that the binding decisions, to be legitimate, they must be steered by communication flows that start at the periphery and pass through the sluices of democratic and constitutional procedures situated at the entrance to the parliamentary complex or to the courts" (Habermas, 1996, p. 356).

In the course of these public deliberations, problems can be identified and solutions may be proposed, as well. The outcomes of these discourses are then channelled into the political center, ensuring, on the one hand, citizens' participation in policy

making and, on the other hand, the legitimacy of political decisions (Király-Várnagy, 2012, p. 152-154).

The Habermasian theory of communication and discourse ethics, as related to democratic theory, is a cornerstone of the theory of public participation (e.g. Kemp, 1985, Webler, 1995). According to Habermas, a fundamental issue of modern societies is, in addition to their depoliticization, the scientification of politics, which also acts to mystify practical terminology. The professionalization of planning procedures gives rise to new technical terms and definitions, and bureaucratic and legal instruments that may lead to partial and/or token public participation in planning processes, which then again leads to a legitimation crisis. Habermas argues that true legitimacy can only be achieved by repoliticizing the society, by reaching a consensus through discourse (Kemp, 1985).

According to Habermas's theory of communicative action, a decision can only be legitimate if it is accepted by everyone. Consensus reached through domination-free communication is based on public interest, thus the different interests can be reconciled, arguments being the principal means of persuasion. Creating the ideal speech situation ensures that decisions are not determined by mere power. Discussions can, as well, make people aware of what they actually want to achieve (Felkai, 2001).

One key term of the theory is the ideal speech situation, the criteria of which ensure that the consensus to be reached serves general interests rather than personal ones. The criteria are as follows (Kemp, 1985, p. 187-188):

1. All potential participants must have the same chance to initiate and sustain the discourse. They must be allowed to raise questions and provide answers throughout the discourse.
2. All potential participants must have the same chance to express their attitudes, feelings and intentions, which ensures that participants are free of internal constraints and requires them to be honest and sincere both to themselves and to the others.
3. All potential speakers must have equal chance to command and oppose, permit or forbid arguments. They must have equal opportunity to make and accept promises; provide and call for justifications.

4. All potential participants must have equal opportunity to provide interpretations and explanations, to criticize and make proposals. Accordingly, no one view is exempt from consideration and criticism.

According to Habermas the ideal speech situation is unattainable in reality due to the external political and internal psychological constraints the participants have to face. The concept of the ideal speech situation should be used as normative standard for evaluating the strenghts and limitations of actual speech situations (Kemp, 1985).

2.1.3 „Green" Arguments

One of the most important green arguments is the notion of sustainability, which also emphasizes the participation of the public in environmental decision-making. Besides ecological and economic factors, the definition of sustainability also incorporates social aspects, whether they be called environmental, economic and social pillars or objectives/conditions. Considering the siting of a waste management facility, for example, a decision can only be sustainable if it not only improves the quality of the environment, but is also accepted by the citizens living in the surrounding area If we, even though we know that the existence of the facility is a must from society's point of view, do not prevent those bearing most of the harmful consequences of the facility from deciding on its necessity.

The idea of sustainability aims at creating a social structure that involves people in the discussion of and the decision-making on matters that they are affected by (Hopwood et al., 2005, Gladwin et al., 1995, Barbier, 1987), which clearly implies that participation is considered a fundamental value. And also a tool promoting progress towards sustainability, on the one hand in representing matters of science and technology in public discourse (Chilvers, 2010) and, on the other hand, in the development and implementation of plans and action strategies towards sustainability (Macnaghten−Jacobs, 1997).

The Brundtland definition of sustainable development already emphasized human development, participation in decision-making and equity in the distribution of benefits[3]. Social justice is a substantial element of the concept, in addition to its environmental and economic components (Hopwood et al., 2005). In

[3] „Such equity would be aided by political systems that secure effective citizen participation in decision making and by greater democracy in international decision making." United Nations, 1987, p. 16

environmentalism one of the most important, as well as contested, concepts is sustainability. One of the criteria of sustainable development listed in 'Our Common Future' (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. United Nations, 1987) is that the economic, social and ecological aspects all need to be integrated in decision–making, and answerability for the consequences of the decisions must be ensured, as well (United Nations, 1987). The enforcement of the common interest needs to be ensured by legislation and, on the other hand, it also necessitates the knowledge and the support of the community, which is exactly why the public has to participate in environmental decision-making[4] (United Nations, 1987, p. 56). The report also underlined that public participation is also needed in order to reveal the different poins of view. Which then again must be based on the provision of information and expertise[5] (United Nations, 1987, p. 57).. Accordingly, in resource utilization matters, it is the local community that protects the resource in question the opinion of which ought to be sought out.

The 1991 strategy document 'Caring for the Earth' also put special emphasis on social topics, in addition to environmental issues; it proposed, among others, that public participation in decision-making be enhanced (IUCN, 1991). In later definitions of sustainable development, public participation appears as one of the fundamental objectives of a social system (Barbier, 1987) and an element of human freedom (Viederman, 1994 cited in Gladwin et al., 1995).

A culmination of these ideas' development was the conclusion of the Aarhus Convention[6] on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in 1998 (Palerm, 1999). The preamble of the Convention also made reference to the notion of sustainable development. The Convention made the participation of the public (and its access to information) in environmental matters mandatory, and thereby created the legal framework for public participation, the actual substance of which may, however, take very different forms in practice. Thus from a sustainable development point of view, public participation is considered a tool to accord society and the natural environment.

[4] „The law alone cannot enforce the common interest. It principally needs. community knowledge and support, which entails greater public participation in the decisions that affect the environment." United Nations, 1987, p. 56

[5] „Public inquiries and hearings on the development and environment impacts can help greatly in drawing attention to different points of view. Free access to relevant information and the availability of alternative sources of technical expertise can provide an informed basis for public discussion." United Nations, 1987, p. 57

[6] The Convention was ratified by the Hungarian government by Act LXXXI of 2001.

Beyond the concept of sustainability, there are different green approaches that justify the necessity of public participation in environmental decision making and different models of democracy.

According to the Habermasian arguments, discourse leads to a consensus that serves the public interest. However, in environmental decisions, the question arises whether such a consensus will serve the protection of the natural environment, and whether such a discourse-driven decision is able to protect natural values. Eckersley (1999) argues that critical theory is unsuited for the protection of natural values, because it is based on human considerations and thus cannot guarantee, for example, the protection of species of no apparent use to the human race. Even though some critical theorists argue that critical theory regards the preservation of natural values as an ethical norm, Brulle (2002) still concludes that discourse ethics cannot assure that our decisions will support the protection of natural values. Because in order to do so, those taking part in the discourse would have to realize that humanity and nature are interdependent and that nature is affected by human action. It would make clear the human responsibility for natural environment based on ecological sciences and would take it into account in deliberations. Additionally there exists an aesthetic argument too. Green criticism of Habermas's theory suggests that non-human beings and future generations cannot be represented in the discourse (Eckersley, 1999). Habermas's theory is about human-to-human interaction, and it is only manipulation and control that the interaction between man and nature involves (Dryzek, 2009). According to Eckersley, however, one may put their faith in the precautionary principle, which might be able to ensure that the impact the decisions haveon non-human beings are considered (Eckersley, 1999). Moreover, the establishing of Habermasian deliberative platforms and fora for public discourse opens up the possibility for the advocates of ecological ideas and green policies to voice their opinions and be granted a fair hearing (Brulle, 2002, p. 16).

Although Habermas's theory of discourse ethics was, as we have already mentioned, criticized by environmental theorists, communication does have an important role in the theory of *environmental democracy*, as well (Dryzek, 2009). Environmental democracy is also built on communicative rationality, but extends the notion of communication beyond human relations to include signals of the natural environment, thereby involving in the communicative process the non-human beings that are incapable of verbal communication (Dryzek, 2009). Not only

communication, but deliberative democracy and participatory decision making, as well, are considered important tools furthering sustainability (Arias-Maldonado, 2007).

Advocates of environmental democracy concur that the model of democracy that best serves the interests of environmental values is deliberative democracy. From their point of view, the aim is not the broadening of democracy but realization of environmental democracy. Environmental democratic theory adapts the institutions of representative and deliberative democracy to solve environmental problems and to preserve human and natural values (Antal, 2009).

Arias-Maldonado (2007) discuss five green arguments in the defense of deliberative democracy:

1. environmental values emerge more easily in deliberative contexts;
2. the inclusive character of deliberative democracy makes the incorporation of traditionally excluded actors and voices into the democratic processes possible;
3. deliberative democracy is the best arrangement for developing environmental citizenship[7];
4. deliberative democracy is the best way to combine experts' judgements and citizen participation in decision-making processes;
5. deliberation results in the improved legitimacy and efficiency of sustainability-related decisions.

As Arias-Maldonado (2007) noted, one must not expect more of public participation than what it is able to deliver, namely it should not be expected to enhance society's sensitivity to environmental matters, but only to yield more environmentally advantageous decisions. As they put it „…environmentalism can only provide its commitment to democracy, not democracy's commitment to green values." (Arias-Maldonado, 2007, p. 246).

2.1.4 „Risk" Arguments

[7] The state, character or behavior of a person viewed as a member of the ecosystem with attendant rights and responsibilities, especially the responsibility to maintain ecological integrity and the right to exist in a healthy environment.
Source:
http://glossary.en.eea.europa.eu/terminology/concept_html?term=environmental%20citizenship
downloaded: 13 March 2012.

Another significant part of the literature of public participation comes from *risk research*. As pointed out by Beck (1992, p. 19), the operation of modern societies is accompanied by the generation of risks, and thus the development of conflicts is related to the definition and distribution of risks, as well. „(…) as the risk society develops, so does the antagonism between those afflicted by risks and those who profit from them. The social and economic importance of knowledge grows similarly (…)" (Beck, 1992, p. 46) From a risk research perspective, accordingly, public participation has a paramount importance in the assessment and management of risks, since the deliberative processes between the stakeholders offer an opportunity for the different risk perceptions to be discussed. Different assessments may introduce new perspectives into the discussion that convey new information, knowledge and values to the other parties. Public participation has an important role in conflicts concerning environmental risks, as the proper form of participation may contribute to the mitigation or prevention of conflicts.

In risk research, it has already become an accepted view that the impartial assessment of risks is not possible (technical approach), since people's assumptions about reality are different and experts, too, are subjective (Faragó−Vári, 2002). Beyond the technical (1) one, other approaches also exist in risk assessment. The economic approach (2) considers and weighs undesirable consequences against benefits. The psychological approach (3) sees people assessing risks as subjectively anticipated risks that are not (or only to a lesser extent) based on statistical data and experience, but rather on how widely-known and dreadful certain risks are (Slovic, 1987, Faragó−Vári, 2002). Moreover, people do not only rely on their own perceptions in their risk assessment, but they are also influenced by their social status, group affiliation and cultural background. which is the aspect that the sociological-anthropological approach (4) examines, relating risks to common values, interests, knowledge, beliefs and ideologies.

Similarly, Lupton (1999) classifies risk approaches according to social sciences' epistemological positions, and arranges them on a virtual scale ranging from the realist approach to the strong constructivist approach. The realist position focuses on the objective assessment of risks, and thus asserts that a hazard or threat that actually exists can also be measured in some way that is independent of social and cultural processes (technico-scientific perspective), and that real risk can be separated from risk perception. Weak constructivism suggests that even though objective risk does

indeed exist, it cannot be separated from social and cultural processes, and thus their mediation effects are inevitable. According to Lupton, Beck's risk-society theory and the cultural/symbolic perspective belong to this approach, as well. Strong constructivism claims that nothing is a risk in itself. Whatever we understand to be a risk is a product of our historically, socially and politically contingent way of thinking; Foucault's governmentality perspective could be quoted as an example here. Thus according to Lupton's categorization, the aspect under which risk theories basically differ is their constructivist stance. It is a common recognition of all the theories, nevertheless, that risk has become a critical cultural and political concept in modern societies, a key aspect of which is human subjectivity. Similarly, they all acknowledge that risks can be managed by human intervention, which needs to be characterized by responsibility and choice (Lupton, 1999).

Ortwin Renn, one of the most-cited authors in the public participation literature assesses participation issues from the perspective of risk analysis. According to Renn (1992), the everyday person's risk evaluation is influenced by the following factors (p. 477):

- the expected number of fatalities,
- the catastrophic potential
- the context: e.g. possibility of personal control, equal share of risks and benefits, identifiability of responsible institution, evaluation of the threat and the consequences
- the beliefs associated with the cause of the risk

The public's understanding of risk is, thus, multidimensional, and hence cannot be reduced into mere probabilities and consequences.

Opinions differ not only between experts and lay people, but there may also be significant differences in the evaluation of environmental risks among experts and between the various social groups. Therefore, differing risk perceptions in environmental matters may lead to debates or sometimes even conflicts. Conflicts can be interpreted as a contest between the parties to achieve their goals and enforce their interests. These conflicts over environmental risks can be characterized by differential knowledge, vested interest, value conflict, and mistrust of expert knowledge (Dietz−Stern, 1998). The reasons may be varied (Faragó–Vári, 2002):

- information conflicts: differing levels of information, disparate interpretation of information,

- relationship conflicts: pre-existing relationships between the parties, lack of trust for instance,
- structural conflicts: due to power dynamics and external rules,
- interest conflicts: perceived or real collision of interests
- value conflicts: perceived or real difference in values.

Any one conflict can be characterized by more than one of the above causes. The conflict resolution technique should suit the characteristics of the conflict. For instance, in the case of information conflicts, it is sufficient to ensure that information flow is appropriate and bidirectional, while conflicts of interest call for a discourse, from the very beginning of the decision-making process, that allows for the acceptance and contemplation of the parties' differing (and hardly flexible) values .

This characterization of conflicts by Klára Faragó and Anna Vári (originally Faragó-Vári-Vecsenyi, 1990) is similar to the division of Renn (1992), which differentiates between three levels of the debates on environmental risks (Renn, 1992 p. 493, based on works by Funtowitz-Ravetz and Rayner). The first level is that of knowledge and expertise, where the debate is of a technical character and takes place between experts. On the second, institutional level, the debate concerns the costs of and benefits from the risks, with personal experience and institutional judgments also having a role in the process. This is the level of experience and competence. The third level is governed by values and worldviews. As long as the debate about values and the future directions of development continues on this third level, as long as there is no consensus or resolution of conflicts here, it is not worth trying to find solutions on the two lower levels, either. It is obvious that with opposing ideologies clashing, neither factual data nor practical experience will enable the participants to convince each other. Whereas according to Renn (1992), debates on environmental risks are bound to take place on the third level, the level of values, because of the escalation of environmental problems, the ambiguities of technological advancement and the overall decline of trust in public institutions. The level of the conflict also determines the arguments that could make the other party change their opinion or behaviour. Emphasizing scientific findings may be effective on the first level, but it will certainly not work on the third level and may even act to deepen the conflict (see above, Faragó−Vári, 2002).

Environmental matters tend to involve large degrees of scientific uncertainty (i.e. there is no consensus even on the first level), oftentimes one does not even know what it is that they do not know (Dietz−Stern, 1998). The institutional level is characterized by the lack of trust. Accordingly, the issue of environmental risks appears to have overstepped the technical and institutional levels already,and now the conflict is on the level of values (Renn, 1992). The failure to resolve these conflicts would lead to the further erosion of trust, and personal frustration. Which is why there is a need for a rational discourse that ensures the proper conditions for such debates. The conditions, as formulated by Renn (1992, p. 494), for such a rational discourse are:

1. participants agree on the rules of the procedure,
2. base their factual claims on state-of-the-art scientific findings,
3. present factual evidence according to the rules of formal logic and argumentation,
4. disclose their values and preferences, and
5. strive to reach a fair solution.

These conditions may be provided by an appropriate risk communication framework. „Risk communication is defined as any purposeful exchange of information about health or environmental risks between interested parties" (Renn, 1992, p. 467). The objective of risk communication is, first of all, to make sure that all participants (recipients) are able and willing to receive and understand the information to be conveyed. Second, to persuade the audience to change their opinion and behavior concerning the risks in question. And third, to provide the conditions for a rational discourse, according to which all affected parties can take part in an efficient and democratic conflict resolution process.

2.1.5 „Science and Society" Argument

Others also came to the conclusion that science alone is unable to resolve conflicts that are characterized by multi-dimensionality, urgency, scientific uncertainty, mistrust and value conflicts (Dietz−Stern, 1998). As Funtowicz and Ravetz (1993) stated in their theoretical work on *post-normal science*, science not only has to face the complexity and uncertainty of natural systems, but also the urgency of issues, the enormous responsibility associated with the decisions and the diversity human values

and opinions. Post-normal science has to leave the traditional (normal) role of science behind and scientists ought to face the challenges of the present. It needs to be recognized that science is incapable of controlling natural processes and their uncertainties, and the deficiencies in our knowledge must be addressed at the same time. The uncertainty of data necessarily leads to uncertain conclusions. Post-normal science also has to rid itself of the illusion of ethical neutrality, and interpret the involvement of stakeholders in the process of scientific analysis, as well (Pataki−Takács-Sánta, 2004).

By requiring them to cope with the complexity and uncertainty of social-ecological systems, the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes can enhance their adaptive capacity and competency, as well (Reed et al., 2010). Participatory processes may stimulate and facilitate *social learning*, as learning and knowledge may be passed on by the individual to wider communities, as well. This way, public participation might facilitate a social learning process where people learn both from each other and from experts/scientist, and thus set into motion various social changes (Rodela, 2011).

Building new relationships and trust between the participating groups, society, science and policy makers could be one of the fundamental aims of public participation. The lack of trust in public institutions and corporations is of great significance to environmental issues given the multitude of wrong decisions they made in the past, the consequences of which have already started to transpire. It is this lack of trust, among other factors, that undermines the local implementation of public programs promoting sustainable development, as the average citizen sees no reason why these institutions should be entrusted with solving the problems that they had a key role in generating to begin with (Macnaghten−Jacobs, 1997).Which is why it is indispensable to combine science with deliberation, and to make decisions through an analytic-deliberative process that enables a structural discourse between scientists, decision-makers and the various interest groups (Dietz–Stern, 1998).

The analytic-deliberative process aims to consider and combine scientific findings and social values in a balanced way. The process is a mutual and recursive one, based on the discourse between experts and laypeople. As also stated by Kindler (1997), it is often impossible to separate facts from values (Kerekes-Kindler, 1997 p. 298). Our views on the facts shape our values, and our values in turn influence our interpretation of the facts. It is this back-and-forth influence that can be seen in the

analytic-deliberative process, where the two approaches complement each other. Analysis ensures technical knowledge and that the latest scientific findings are taken advantage of, while deliberation improves our understanding of risks and facilitates an agreement. Deliberative decision-making allows for a more refined identification of the problem, the enhancement of knowledge, the appropriate implementation of controversial analysis techniques, the clarification of the parties' positions and for more acceptable decisions (Stern–Fineberg, 1996).

The study on the analytic-deliberative process (Understanding Risk Report, Stern–Fineberg eds., 1996) and, hence, risk analysis received significant criticism from several sides. Raffensperger (1998) objected that risk management had been discussed as the one and only method in the case of risks, without mentioning any other approaches, such as the reduction of risks, or their elimination by discontinuing, or not even starting, the risky activity. That is, the starting point of the decision-making process in the risk management approach is to accept the existence of risk, making no attempt to reduce or to avoid it altogether, but only focusing on its management. The most crucial part of the criticism is that risk management fails to place proper emphasis on the precautionary principle[8]. Which principle essentially commands that one should only act in ways so as not to harm the environment, whereas risk management weighs the potential damages only directly before the action itself, giving no thought to avoiding them altogether. (Raffensperger, 1998).

2.1.6 „Behavioral" Arguments

According to rational choice theory, citizens tend to refuse to take part in collective decision-making. First, this is another case for the free-rider phenomenon: why should they participate knowing that others will do so, and so the right decision will be made anyway (Renn et al., 1995a). On the other hand, participation is not efficient: the utility to be realized (the extent to which the decision will affect their lives) is smaller than the cost of the participation itself (travel costs, time, information) (Király, 2012a). Rational choice theory asserts that all the citizens behave rationally and in all their decisions, they weigh the utility to be achieved against the costs to be incurred. Here, utility is if they can represent their interests and influence the decision, and if the decision has a favorable impact on their lives.

[8] 'When human activities may lead to morally unacceptable harm that is scientifically plausible but uncertain, actions shall be taken to avoid or diminish that harm.' UNESCO, [38, p. 14.]

The costs of decision-making are the information costs and the time required to participate. The utility to be achieved is, however, typically smaller than the costs, given that the impact that one individual alone can have on the decision is small: their time and energy expenditure will not be returned. And still, people do participate / vote, i.e. they behave irrationally (Johnson, 1999). There are several explanations, both theoretical and practical, for this irrational behavior:

- Poeple participate in decision-making because they think that the others will not, and if everyone stays at home, there will be no decision. The more they believe that there will be no others to represent their interests and that others will not benefit from their participation, the more committed they become.
- A typical non-rational reaction to the free-rider phenomenon is not to make one's choice based on individual costs and benefits, but on social constraints and desires – e.g. group belonging – instead (if everyone else is going, they do not want to miss it, either).
- There are some who participate out of moral / altruistic considerations, e.g. are committed to protect the environment or to shield their community from large capitalist corporations. Their commitment does not stem from individual interests, but some higher values.
- Some participate out of a sense of duty, because the utility from the participation itself exceeds that expected from the outcome of the decision-making process.
- If and when the participants have already got to know each other by their names, that gives rise to a certain atmosphere of solidarity, of a sense of common duty. It is already considered the crystallization of participation when the process turns self-sustaining, and reaches its full potential thanks to the strengthening of informal ties (Renn et al., 1995b).

From a behavioral economics point-of-view, participation in decision-making raises interesting aspects, which may be considered another argument in favor of public participation (Király, 2012a). Accordingly, it is a basic physical-psychological need of women/men to be in a position to decide themselves on the matters determining the conditions of their own existence. It has been proven by experiment that, both in the animal world and in certain human life situations, the life quality of those

individuals/subjects that hold decision rights improves, both in physical and psychological terms. The findings have shown that the life quality – and even the health – of people is significantly influenced by, for example, the degree of freedom they enjoy in making decisions at the workplace.

Other experiments seem to have confirmed that people much more appreciate those decisions or proposals in the making (or maybe just the formulation) of which they themselves were allowed to take part. The opportunity to decide is thus, from a behavioral economics perspective, a fundamental human need. Lacking control over the decisions determining their life conditions, people and animals alike tend to become passive and apathetic (Király, 2012a).

2.2 Summary

The approaches to the question as to why the public should participate in decisions on environmental issues are numerous, yet the answers themselves clearly correlate. The basic *democratic argument* is that the foundation of democracy is the power of the "people", and that participation might be the vehicle of that power. According to the democratic arguments, power can be given back to the people in modern representative democracies, and participation may as well be one of the means to reduce the democratic deficit. Just as it is a means of education, of educating people to inform themselves in public and environmental matters alike, of teaching people how democracy works. People's knowledge is enhanced, on both the personal and the social level.

According to the *Habermasian arguments*, decisions can only be legitimate if they are the result of some deliberative process where all the differing interests, views and opinions can emerge. The problems and solutions so identified then serve as a resource for the decision-makers, as well.

The *green arguments* for public participation are based on the principles of sustainability and environmental democracy. According to the theory of sustainability, public participation might be the means to harmonize natural and social processes. In order to do so, however, communication needs to be extended to not only involve humans, but non-human beings, as well. It is the deliberative type of democracy that can best promote natural values and sustainability. In the reasoning

of green democracy, deliberation may give room to green thought and ecological policies.

With respect to environmental matters, not even the consequences and risks of the decisions are clear, given the substantial differences in risk evaluation within the society. The risk *arguments* claim that risks need to be analyzed in a way that also takes into account, beyond scientific findings, the risk assessments of individuals and social groups. Since debates on environmental matters are mostly centered around values, conflicts need to be managed accordingly, too. The wider the range of values we manage to involve in the process, the more knowledge we gain; acceptance and trust will also improve, and we will be able to jointly manage the risks or to agree on how to avoid them.

The arguments related to the relation between *science and society* suggest that both the scientific uncertainty and the responsibility associated with environmental issues call for the involvement of the stakeholders. Which then acts to enhance mutual trust between the actors of science, society and politics, and to facilitate social learning.

Last but not least, the *behavioural arguments* postulate that all human beings need the possibility to take part in the decisions that have an influence on their own fate. This is a physical-psychological need of us all, a prerequisite of our well-being.

3. How Should the Public Participate in Environmental Decision-making?

In the previous chapter, we have discussed why citizens ought to participate in decision-making processes concerning environmental issues. As we have seen, even though the theoretical foundations are diverse, there is a consensus in the literature on this matter. Which, however, is by far not the case for the debate on how participation should take place in practice. The how of participation can, on the one hand, be approached by asking what it is that makes a participatory process efficient; or, on the other hand, what it is that makes a participatory process actually participatory. If we are looking for efficiency in participatory processes, we also have to ask what sort of participatory mechanism it can be achieved by and what the conditions are thereof. The present chapter will be centered around this question. First, I will examine how the individual participatory mechanisms can be distinguished from nonparticipation (or possibly from partial or fake participation), followed by a review of possible ways to define efficient or successful participatory processes, and to evaluate the actual, realized processes.

Concerning the definition of participatory processes, I will first look at the theoretical foundations that make the distinction between substantial and partial or fake participation or nonparticipation possible. The most widely known and used means to this end is Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. It is this concept, approaching the participation process from a power perspective, that the next subchapter will be dedicated to. The theory is particularly worthy of attention because it is focused on one of the decisive questions of public participation, namely, what the consequences of empowering the society – that is, its members – are. In this approach, public participation means the power of the „people", that is, democracy.

Afterwards I will summarize the theoretical definitions that define participatory mechanisms – and differentiate them from nonparticipation – from differing points of view, with power, information and discourse being the most important perspectives. Having presented the definitions, we will switch to the evaluation of participatory mechanisms, and examine how, based on the various definitions, the criteria of the evaluation methodology may be established and the different participatory

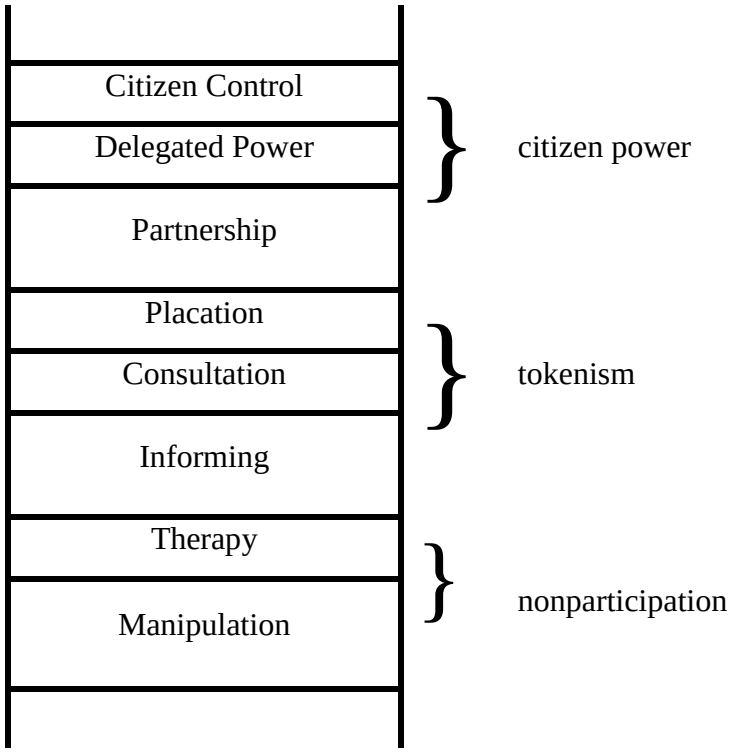
mechanisms may be evaluated. In analyzing the writings on the evaluation of participatory mechanisms, I will proceed from theory-building works towards empirical studies.

3.1 Levels of Participation

The starting point for the literature on the levels of public participation is Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969), therefore the following subchapter will be devoted entirely to presenting this theory, along with the criticism and the updates it received. The ladder of participation defines the various levels of participation from nonparticipation to citizen power, represented by the eight rungs of the ladder. The higher we are on the ladder, the higher the level of participation being realized. The theory implies a certain continuity and suggests that the levels are built upon each other.

The two lowermost rungs on the ladder of participation (therapy and manipulation) were, as a matter of fact, not considered participation by Arnstein. In these cases, participation is only a token effort by the decision-makers to have their decision accepted and legitimized by shaping the public's opinion (manipulation) or by trying to nurture and educate them (therapy). They do not seek public feedback, the information they provide tends to be limited in scope and its flow is by all means unidirectional. Informing, consultation and placation may already be regarded as partial participation (tokenism). In these cases, stakeholders may actually receive relevant information (informing), give voice to their opinions (consultation), and achieve certain forms of compensation (placation), but still have no substantial influence on the outcome, or at least no guarantee for such influence, even though information flow is already bidirectional. It is only the three highest rungs of the ladder (partnership, delegated power, citizen control) that represent substantial participation and citizen power. Here, decisions are made jointly or completely left to the stakeholders, possibly along with the implementation and review of the program in some cases. Participants are involved in each phase of the decision-making process from decision-shaping to implementation (Arnstein, 1969 cited in Matolay–Pataki, 2008).

Figure 2: The ladder of citizen participation



Source: Arnstein, 1969, p. 2

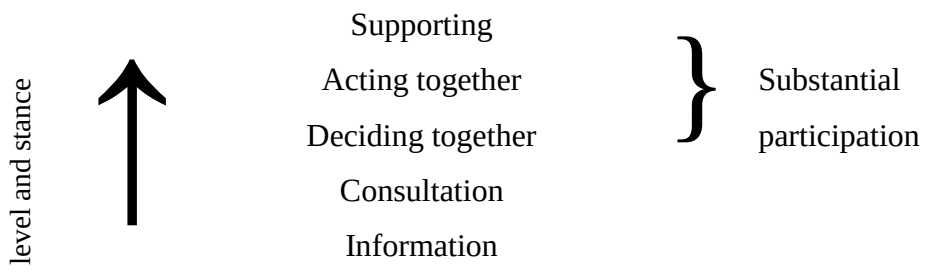
The reason I believe the ladder of participation theory is very important is that it expresses the definition that the purpose of public participation is to empower the members of society, and the more power we delegate to the „people", the higher the level of participation achieved. That is, what we approach by climbing that particular ladder is democracy, i.e. rule by the people. It is also important to realize, however, that fake forms of public participation do not put any power in the hands of the citizens, and if there is no change in power dynamics, the outcomes of our decision processes will not be any different, either. Neither will we experience the advantages expected from participation, like legitimation or the expansion of knowledge, but rather the opposite, these processes induce a loss of trust and apathy. And what nonparticipation processes disguised as public participation exercises serve is not democracy, but the dominance of the interests and the strengthening of the positions of those in power.

Besides this theoretical meaning, the ladder of participation also serves as a practical guide in implementing participation exercises, and gives a solid theoretical background for practitioners. According to May (2006), the ladder of participation is a theoretical framework that provides practical assistance, and constitutes a frame of reference, as well. He suggests that this is necessary in order to, among others, increase the number of decisions based on public participation, and to improve their quality. Determining the level of participation might aid the selection of the tool that best corresponds to the intended purpose of the participation exercise. Another consideration is that, in order to prevent disillusionment, participants should be clear about the level of participation, as well. Oftentimes, decision-makers and the population hold differing perceptions of the form of participation, i.e. the rung they believe the process to occupy is not the same for the two parties. Thus the ladder may even be directly applied in practice to avoid such a misunderstanding.

The ladder metaphor suggests that the uppermost rung is better than the lower ones, and hence „climbing the ladder" appears as a sort of development, what is more, it is a fundamental goal to reach the top rungs. There are a number of nomenclatures in use in the literature that draw upon Arnstein's theory. Biggs (1989), for instance, opted for the following terms: contractual, consultative, collaborative, and collegiate.

Wilcox (1994) reformulated the levels in the following way shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Levels of participation

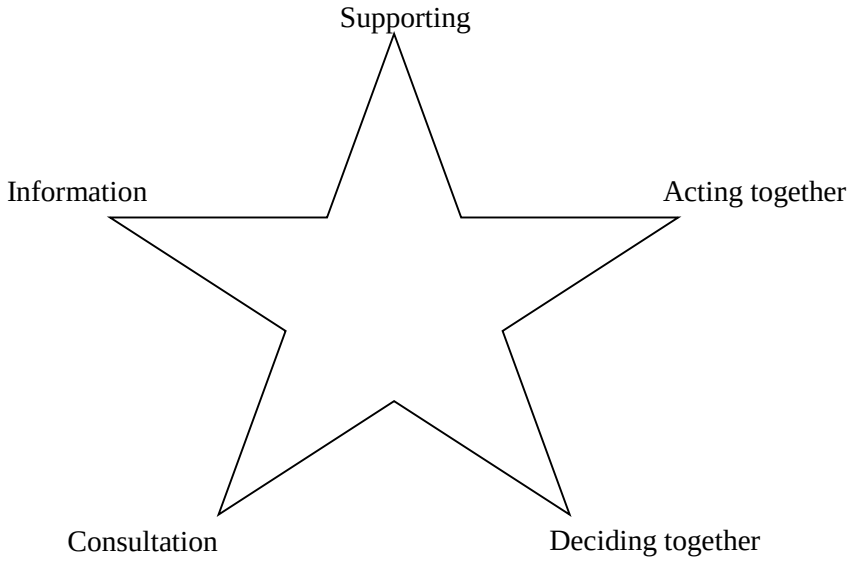


Source: Wilcox, 1994, p. 8

In Wilcox's (1994) formulation, none of the rungs is better than the others, for each situation and case is unique. Therefore the tool to be applied needs to be chosen according to what the given situation necessitates.

Applying the same approach, May (2006) rejects the ladder metaphor, and arranges Wilcox's five levels into a five-pointed star (fig. 4.), thereby ridding the different mechanisms of ideology and breaking the continuity between them at the same time. Which serves to express the theoretical criticism of the suggestion that more power would by all means be better and that the individual levels should be realized in a given order.

Figure 4: The star of participation



Source: May, 2006, p. 312

Following a similar train of thought, the literature also mentions a wheel of participation (Davidson, 1998 cited in Bodorkós, 2009), which emphasizes the legitimateness of the different forms.

These theoretical criticisms and updates may serve us well if we intend to use the ladder to select the appropriate participatory tool to be employed.

The ladder metaphor may, however, also be of assistance in answering the theoretical question of what should be regarded as public participation and what should not. Which are the initiatives that, even though they are actions related to the members of

society in an environmental decision-making process, cannot be considered substantial participation? Arnstein's definition is, in my opinion, not unambiguous in this respect, but it is a good starting point nevertheless. Considering, for example, referenda as a participatory tool, they delegate significant power to the participants, especially binding ones, where the decision lies exclusively with them. If however a referendum is not preceded by an appropriate information provision process, which could give room to multifaceted information, disputes, and active consideration, then, in the absence of information, which should otherwise be present at even lower rungs of the ladder, participation may turn into a vehicle of manipulation. Looking at the ladder, referenda appear to ensure substantial participation, but what does this classification signify if the lower rungs got omitted? From a power perspective, it is indeed a participatory tool; yet that is not sufficient for determining the level of participation, which thus seems to incorporate several further aspects beyond that of power, i.e. it is a multi-dimensional issue. The question arises whether participation can be substantial if a certain basic level of informedness is missing. If the lower rungs of the ladder are missing, is it possible to reach the top rungs at all? Are the ladder and its rungs even suitable for evaluating a participatory process? What are the factors that need to be considered in the evaluation of participatory processes?

In order to answer these questions, we first need to clarify what exactly counts as a participatory process. As we have seen, Arnstein's definition regards those decision-making processes as public participation, which put real decision-making rights in the hands of the stakeholders, who can therefore have a substantial influence on the end result; that is, not only do they voice their opinions, but that also has an apparent impact on the outcome of the process. Let us now take a look at those definitions of public participation that take an approach different from that of Arnstein (1969), and at how others go about distinguishing between participation and nonparticipation.

3.2 What Is "Public Participation"?

„Public participation", „public/stakeholder involvement", and „public engagement" are all expressions we may well encounter in the literature. For the purposes of present dissertation, I will not differentiate between these three expressions and use them as synonyms. Below, I will provide an overview of how the individual authors

define the concept of public participation, and what their distinction between participation and nonparticipation is based on. It is imperative that we get to know the principles the different approaches employ to capture the essence of participation, because later on, in the evaluation of participation mechanisms, it will be these very same principles that will determine how the success of a participation process and the criteria used to evaluate such success will be defined.

Let us see some actual definitions, as examples:

Arnstein, 1969, p. 1:

> „…citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future."

Renn et al. provide the following definition (Renn et al., 1995a, p. 2):

> „…forums for exchange that are organized for the purpose of facilitating communication between government, citizens, stakeholders and interest groups, and businesses regarding a specific decision or problem."

The definition excludes protests, expert workshops and any activities that serve the work of government bodies. Included are, however, public hearings, public assemblies, focus groups, questionnaire surveys, citizen advisory committees, referenda, popular initiatives, and negotiations conducted within the framework of one of the various available models (Renn et al., 1995a).

According to the definition of Rowe and Frewer (2000, p. 6):

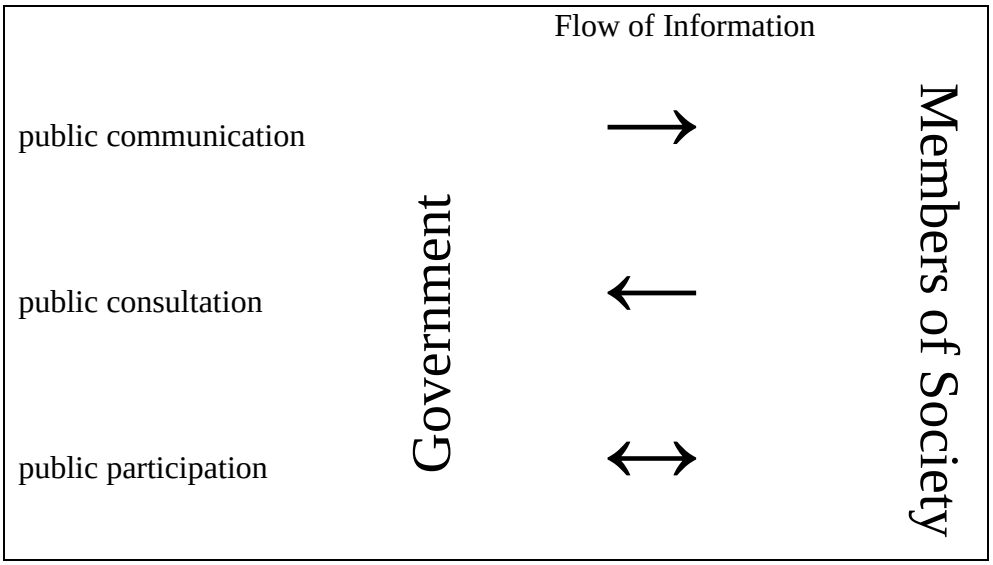
> „…encompasses a group of procedures designed to consult, involve, and inform the public to allow those affected by a decision to have an input into that decision." It is this input that distinguishes it from other communication strategies.

In defining public participation, Arnstein (1969) concentrates on the presence of power. According to her, a process can be considered substantial participation if its participants have power, that is, if they have the power to make or influence the decision. Under this very definition, more participation always means something better. Arnstein's definition is a very important starting point for all the further theories and the decisive questions dealt with in the literature of public participation.

In Webler's approach, built upon the Habermasian ideal speech situation, only a process in which a discursive environment – i.e. mutual dialogue – is realized can be regarded as public participation (Webler, 1995 and Renn et al., 1995a). Their definition is centered around bidirectional communication, that is, on the realization of a discursive environment. Accordingly, the basis for public participation is the dialogue between the state and members of society.

Other authors rely on the flow of information to tell participation and communication apart (Rowe−Frewer, 2000). A process where participants contribute a real input to the decision can be regarded as participation, whereas if such an input is absent, it is only a communication process. The authors further refine this definition, and distinguish between three basic types. If information only flows from the state officials towards the members of society, that is merely public communication. If information flow is unidirectional, but from the participants towards decision-makers, that is called public consultation, while public participation is realized if and when information flows in both directions (Rowe−Frewer, 2005). This distinction is illustrated by figure 5.

Figure 5: The three types of public engagement



Source: Based on Rowe−Frewer, 2005

Beyond the ones already mentioned above, the literature only features general definitions that give no indication of the presence of any theoretical roots that could be used to infer the principles that would make the creation of the definition theoretical. For the most part, these definitions are conceived in order to deal with the already mentioned distinctions in the terminology, and to exclude the activities that do not belong to the set of processes that their authors wish to examine.

Beierle and Cayford (2002, p. 6) provide the following definition:

> „…any of several „mechanisms" intentionally instituted to involve the lay „public" or their representatives in administrative decisionmaking."

A wide range of processes from town meetings to mediated negotiations, advisory bodies, citizen advisory committees and focus groups belong here, yet elections of representatives, referenda, popular initiatives, lobbying and citizens' lawsuits do not. It also excludes less regulated procedures like strikes, and illegal ones like acts of violence. It is organized, bureaucratic processes that it counts as public participation, not individual actions or the exercise of political power.

The authors make a distinction between public participation and stakeholder involvement: the former is the involvement of the lay public in local matters, while they consider the latter to be a broader concept, which merely covers the

involvement of stakeholder groups in decisions made on the political level. Nonetheless they use the expression public participation as a general umbrella term irrespective of who that public are, how they are represented, and how and what they are being involved in (Beierle−Cayford, 2002).

Others (English et al., 1993) differentiate between stakeholder involvement and public participation by stating that stakeholder involvement abandons the „we vs. them" type of relations and treats stakeholders as an equal party, and that the issues so discussed are greater in detail, yet smaller in scope. Thus they interpret stakeholder involvement to be a process more sincere in nature.

One may also find some definition-like explanations of the expression public engagement. Rowe and Frewer (2005, p. 254) give a broad interpretation to public engagement insofar as it is supposed to include participation, consultation and communication, as well, which they define as the three types of engagement. The expression engagement is, however, a rather novel one, and differs from the others in that it further tightens the partnership between society and science, which is why it actually is an engagement.

The definitions presented above capture the essence of public participation in the empowerment of society (Arnstein, 1969), in decision-making processes being based on deliberation (Renn et al., 1995a), and in the bidirectionality of the flow of information (Rowe−Frewer, 2000). All three theories have their origins in the concepts of democracy, and in that of Habermasian communicative rationality (Webler, 1995). The different definitions reflect differing approaches. Given that the individual authors attach differing motives and definitions to public participation, it may hardly come as a surprise that their views on what counts as a good participation process differ, as well. It is these evaluations that the following subchapter will provide an overview of.

3.3 Evaluation of the Participation Process

If we are to assert that the involvement of the public leads to better decisions; that participatory processes improve both the quality and the public acceptance of the

decisions made; and that the government needs to set aside resources for such activities, then the funder, as well, will obviously want to know whether the process they financed, the process that took up their money, time and human resources was actually "worth it". Is the decision made indeed of better quality? Do stakeholders indeed support the decision so made? Is more participation indeed better? Was the process itself democratic? Are the participants satisfied? There is a whole plethora of questions that one might be justified to ask in evaluating a participatory process.

In order to formulate the questions, we will first need to put it clear why we need to evaluate these processes in the first place. Basically, two approaches seem to dominate the literature. On the one hand, authors wish to evaluate the individual tools and processes in order to build a theory for the design of efficient participatory processes. On the other hand, they would like to evaluate, in retrospect, the actual realization of the individual processes.

Rowe and Frewer (2000) give four reasons for evaluating participatory processes:

1. financial reason: to utilize public funds in a good way;
2. practical reason: to learn from past mistakes, and to do it better in the future;
3. ethical/moral reason: to ensure fair participation, and that those involved can contribute to the decision in an appropriate way;
4. academic/theoretic reason: to expand our knowledge about human behavior.

As is the case with any other social program, the evaluation of participatory processes gives rise to the following problems (Rosener, 1981): 1) participation is a complex and value-laden process, 2) there are no widely accepted criteria to assess processes' success and faults against, 3) there are no accepted evaluation methods, 4) there is a lack of instruments/measures[9].

Furthermore, in developing the evaluation criteria, one has to face the following difficulties (Rowe–Frewer, 2004):

- data cannot be collected in a controlled environment;
- the environmental and other context of the cases might interact with the methods employed, therefore there is no single, generally applicable tool;
- the efficiency of the tool also depends on how it is applied;

9 Numerous analyses and researches have made attempts to eliminate these deficiencies, yet a generally accepted solution has not yet been found. The various opinions and research results represent completely different standpoints.

- instruments are not uniform – in some cases it is participants' satisfaction, in others some quantifiable result that is more reasonable to measure.

Not to mention that it is usually desirable to also warrant the satisfaction of the funder – that is, the state –, otherwise it might reject the results of the process.

There is a large number of publications in the literature on the evaluation of participatory processes, Rowe and Frewer (2000), for example, review 30 different papers on that topic in their study, and several more were only omitted for the lack of appropriate information. An important starting point for an overview of the different methods is what the individual authors derive their evaluation criteria from, how they define participatory processes, and whether they conducted empirical investigations to employ their methodology in practice or only evaluated the various tools in theory, in a hypothetical way. In order to establish an evaluation methodology, some of the authors presented below formulated theoretical criteria only, some others formulated such criteria and also contrasted them with practice, while still others solely relied on experience from practice in their effort. The majority of the authors engage in the analysis of some specific case study, and it is not always clear, what method their evaluation of the case is based on. However the studies that do, in contrast, have a theoretical foundation, sometimes lack the empirical examinations that would apply the given theoretical approach in practice so as to prove, test or possibly confute the theory in question.

Different authors define the success (efficiency, effectiveness) of processes in differing ways. The difference basically resides in which elements of the public participation process they emphasize: whether it is the outcome or the process itself that they wish to evaluate when judging its success, and what principles their success criteria are based on. Some evaluate processes based on their outcome only (e.g. Beierle), while others also introduce process-oriented elements (outcome- and process-oriented) (e.g. Moore), for these two are in interaction, after all, and the attributes of the process will no doubt have an influence on the output, as well. Still others entirely focus their assessment on the process itself (process-oriented) (e.g. Fiorino, Webler), irrespective of the quality of the result.

Another aspect under which these analyses differ is whose point of view they take. Earlier papers typically discussed the expectations set by the experts designing the

engagement process, the mediators and the agencies holding key positions in the decision-making process (governmental bodies, authorities), and their evaluation of the process in retrospect. Later works already started to look into how satisfied those being involved – the members of the community and the stakeholder groups – were throughout the process.

Naturally enough, these analyses of differing theoretical backgrounds also differ in which processes they believe their evaluation methods to be applicable to, and what exactly they call public participation, i.e. which of the tools fit into the definition they prefer. Not even their definitions of the borderline between participation and nonparticipation coincide – as we have already shown in the previous subchapter.

Below follows an overview of those works of the most acknowledged authors in the academic discourse that deal with the evaluation of participatory processes. We will start with theory-building works and proceed towards empirical studies.

Both Fiorino (1990) and Laird (1993) derived their evaluation criteria from democratic theory, and used them to evaluate a couple of generally used tools. Fiorino (1990) starts out from the idea that public participation basically needs to stem from the very foundations of democracy. A world in which people have lost their right to take part in the social decisions they are affected by clearly calls for new forms of participation. According to him, decision-makers ought to accept that people themselves are the best judge of their own interests, and that they are capable of acquiring the competences required to participate in governance/leadership. Participatory processes need to be evaluated as democratic processes, based on the following four criteria:

1. the process should allow for the direct participation of the lay public in decision-making;
2. the process should enable lay amateurs to collaborate in joint decision-making;
3. face-to-face discussions should be possible throughout the entire process;
4. an opportunity should be offered to citizens to participate in equality with administrative officials and experts.

The author assessed five basic institutional mechanisms against these four criteria: public hearings, initiatives, public surveys, negotiated rule making and citizens' review panels. This article of Fiorino from 1990 has served as an important origin for

later authors in elaborating their assessment criteria, as it decomposed democratic theory into concrete arguments and criteria with respect to participation.

Drawing from Fiorino (1990), Laird (1993) also relied on democratic theory in assessing public participation mechanisms, and went even further by contrasting and analyzing the theories of plural democracy and direct democracy. While Fiorino solely builds upon the theory of participatory democracy, Laird adds pluralism as another perspective, and compares the normative criteria that follow from the principles of pluralism versus those of participatory democracy. While pluralism advocates diversity and the participation of different groups, participatory democracy is centered around the individual, who takes direct part in the making of the decisions he or she is affected by. Laird concluded that even though both theories underpin the necessity of public participation, they infer two differing sets of criteria, and therefore the tools they regard as ideal are different, as well. Both theories presume a properly functioning democracy, where citizens' participation does not end with voting for their representatives. Both theories require meaningful participation, and in a dual sense at that. First, participants ought to recognize their interests in the process and how the decisions to be made will affect the prevalence thereof, and second, they need to be able to influence the outcome of the process. The fundamental difference between the theories of pluralism and direct democracy is, in Laird's view, that while for pluralism it is groups, for direct democracy it is individuals the participation of which is in focus. Pluralism basically gives weight to the outcome of the process, whereas direct democracy goes further by also attaching importance to the educational and psychological effects of the process. The table below presents the criteria Laird derived from the two theories.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria as derived from the principles of pluralism vs. direct participation

Pluralism	Direct democracy
number of participating groups	number of participating individuals
opportunity for learning	improved understanding of participants
opportunity for meeting the officials	amount of resources for participation
means of influence	extent of delegated power

Source: Laird, 1993

Both theories encourage to improve the quality and to broaden the scope of participation. From a participation perspective, pluralism is essentially about the participation of groups, while direct democracy about that of individuals. Another important difference is that pluralism regards participation as a means to an end, while in direct participation theory, it is an end in itself.

To summarize, these criteria pertain to the breadth (number of participants) and the depth (quality) of participation; there is however a minimum requirement that the quality of participation must not be allowed to fall below a certain minimum level, regardless how big the number of participants ever might be.

Laird assessed two participatory mechanisms against his system of criteria: negotiated rule making and citizen review panels. He labels negotiated rule making an archetype of the pluralist participatory process. All the interest groups are allowed to take part in decision-making, where they have a significant influence on the outcome, and have an opportunity to conduct an in-depth analysis in cooperation with the officials. The depth of the process is outstanding, yet the breadth of involvement is practically zero as far as the average citizen is concerned. This tool is unsuitable for the resolution of substantial conflicts of interest, yet it is very useful whenever reaching a consensus and meeting the deadlines is an imperative. Citizen review panels are the archetype of the direct-democratic participatory mechanism. They score high on the direct-democratic criteria with respect to both their depth and breadth, but less so on the pluralist criteria. This tool is built upon the participation of citizens as individuals, there is an opportunity for improving their understanding and, in certain cases, even for significantly influencing the outcome. Laird concluded that the choice between the pluralist and the direct-democratic approach should be based on the nature of the problem in question.

Applying a different approach, it was not democratic theory that Renn and Schweizer (2009) derived their criteria from, but the opposite way round: they elaborated six ideal types drawing on experience from practice, all of them based on some sort of philosophical principles and approaching the institution of public participation from differing perspectives. The distinction between the six approaches is based on what democracy means under the approach in question, and what role the participatory

process has in it. Each approach attaches a different objective to participation, hence the tools they employ are different, as well.

Table 2: The six approaches of the participatory decision-making process

Name of the approach	Objective	Instruments
Functionalist	Collection of all knowledge and values relevant to the case, improve efficiency and legitimation	Delphi method, negotiated rule making, public hearings, citizen advisory committees
Neo-liberal	Find Pareto-optimal decision alternatives (win-win or compensation), focuses on individual interests and preferences, efficiency	Referendum, focus groups, internet-participation, negotiation, mediation
Deliberative	Built upon Habermasian principles, diversity of participants and opinions, seeking consensus through negotiation	Citizen forums, deliberative juries, discourse oriented models
Anthropological	Common sense is the ultimate arbiter even as opposed to knowledge or values, jury-type model	Consensus conference, citizen juries, planning cells
Emancipatory	Represent underprivileged groups, as well, overcome the power status quo, let underprivileged groups have their interests represented	Town meetings, public meetings, activist-driven public meetings, tribunals, science shops, community solidarity committees
Post-modern	Reveal the interests and knowledge of stakeholders, and the power dynamics	Non-regulated, open tools: workshops, debate forums, online chat rooms, open forums

Source: Based on Renn−Schweizer, 2009, p. 180

The differences between these six approaches also provide an explanation why there is no single universal method for evaluating all participatory mechanisms. Each model emphasizes and prioritizes different aspects. For instance, while the

functionalist approach suggests that the quality of the outcome be the evaluation criterion, the post-modern and the emancipatory approach would rather opt for the attitude changes induced by the process.
The authors conclude that an ideal model that could suit any type of environmental decision situation does not exist. First, environmental issues are very diverse and second, the participants of different cased may set diffing priorities. The individual methods ascribe different weights to the various values, and may in fact include, and hence combine elements from more than one approach. For example, combining the functionalist and the deliberative approach could yield an analytic-deliberative process, and the co-operative discourse model also represents a blend of approaches rather than just a single one (Renn−Schweizer, 2009).

The theoretical foundations of the evaluation of participatory processes were laid, for a large part, by the work of Webler (1995). Based on the notion of the ideal speech situation proposed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, Webler outlined the theoretical criteria for the good participatory process, and formulated the two „meta-criteria": fairness and competence. He equated the concept of fairness to a situation when all the parties that are affected by or otherwise show an interest in the issue at stake are provided an opportunity to fulfill their due role in the decision-making process. Competence does not pertain to the participants, but to the quality of the process: a competent process is one that ensures that the decision made is the best possible decision that is attainable under the current conditions, with our current body of knowledge. Based on the two meta-criteria, he formulated the „discursive standard criteria". Fairness is materialized in the following elements of the process:
The participant

- may be present,
- may initiate a dialogue, make statements,
- may participate in the debates (may ask, respond and argue),
- may take part in the decision-making itself (may resolve disputes, may decide on closure).

Similarly, competence in a process means:

- access to information and the interpretation thereof,
- employing the best available procedure for resolving the disputes,

- employing the best available procedures in selecting the relevant elements of knowledge.

Since then, a number of authors have used these theoretical criteria to evaluate the individual tools (see the chapters of Renn et al., 1995b). Webler himself, and other authors, as well, later contrasted these theoretical criteria with findings from empirical studies conducted by himself and his co-authors (see later).

Seth Tuler and Thomas Webler introduced a very important and unique perspective to the literature according to which the quality of the process depends on what the members of the community themselves expect from the process and how it is realized. This aspect of evaluation is clearly process-oriented, for they sought to find out how the participants evaluate the process and what they think a „good" participatory process is like (Tuler−Webler, 1999). In the first phase of their research, they asked the participants of a real participatory process what they expect from the process and what the characteristics of a good participatory process are. The respondents highlighted the following aspects as important characteristics of a good participatory process:

1. Physical participation, physical presence in the process.
2. Power to influence the process and its outcome, who are allowed to take part in the process and how much say they have in it.
3. Access to information. Information flow is multi-directional, on the one hand, learning and on the other, education. They expected all information flowing between the actors in either direction to be public, throughout the entire process.
4. Structural characteristics that facilitate constructive cooperation, with special emphasis on the venue, time and accessibility of meetings, and the equipment/furniture in place.
5. Facilitation of constructive individual behavior. The most important qualities expected are respect, openness, honesty, sympathy and trust. Formal rules and the presence of a facilitator make it easier to achieve appropriate personal behavior.
6. Proper analysis – responsibility.

7. Ensuring that the social conditions for future processes are met. Proper management of conflicts in order to prevent them from escalating. Improving the relations between the interest groups, awareness of costs and efforts.

Webler and Tuler contrasted the results from the above case study with the criteria derived from Habermasian theory (Webler−Tuler, 2000). This comparison of theoretical standard vs. practical experience led them to the following conclusions:

- The question of power is not sufficiently represented in the theory, within the scope of fairness.
- The conceptualization of the notion of competence is not elaborate enough, practical experience attaches great significance to individual behavior, thus it needs to find its way into theory, as well.
- The theory completely misses the idea underlined by the participants in the case study: „ensuring that the social conditions for future processes are met."
- The participants of the process took its long-term consequences into account, whereas the theory completely neglects those[10].

While universality had been a definite goal in formulating the two meta-criteria, experience from the case study showed that there are fundamental differences between the views of participants. The authors nevertheless concluded that people's opinions support, if not without certain adjustments, rather than refute the principles derived from the Habermasian literature.

A further study by Webler et al. corroborated their earlier claim that even though there are certain generally accepted principles (fairness and competence) that participants agree with, there seem to be a number of different groups among participants with distinct opinions about what is to be considered a good participatory process (Webler et al., 2001). While some believe (1) legitimation to be the most important aspect of the process, others vote for (2) the manifestation of different values, and still others (3) for the prevalence of democratic principles (like impartiality and integrity) in the process. A fourth group suggests that the most important task is to (4) ensure an equality of power between the participants, and finally, a fifth opinion is that (5) the process should facilitate responsible leadership

[10] This way of thinking is closely related to the concept of social learning. See Rodela, 2011 for more on the topic.

and the seeking of compromise. An important merit of this research is that it underlines that different persons tend to assess the „goodness" of participatory processes against differing values. An interesting conclusion is that the classic conflict between opposing interests is not necessarily reflected in what the parties believe a good process is like.

This finding was also confirmed by a later research of theirs, which they conducted by interviewing the participants of ten different participatory processes (Webler−Tuler, 2006). There is a consensus on a number of matters, as certain characteristics are a common expectation of all participants. These are:

- access to the process for all affected parties,
- open and straightforward sharing of information,
- people get involved in meaningful interactions,
- where all the different interests are taken into consideration.

Under a couple of aspects, however, participants' expectations of the participatory process are clearly divergent:

- the importance of scientific analysis, and information,
- the sort of leadership the process requires,
- the way participants shall behave,
- the importance and the degree of trust,
- the division of power between the actors,
- the objectives of the process concerning its outcome.

Having drawn their conclusions from the analysis of the ten case studies, the authors pose the question: if participants' expectations of the process are so diverse, how is it possible to design and implement a process that is good from the participants' point of view, and how and against which evaluation criteria could the success of the process be assessed? Consequently, in a subsequent article they analyzed the influence that presumptions about the conditions, expectations related to the outcome and personal traits have on participants' expectations of the participatory process (Tuler−Webler, 2010).

They concluded that people's expectations concerning the outcome of the process also govern their expectations with regard to the process itself. People's organizational relations and their experience from earlier participation exercises also greatly determine their preference of participatory process. Those who have taken

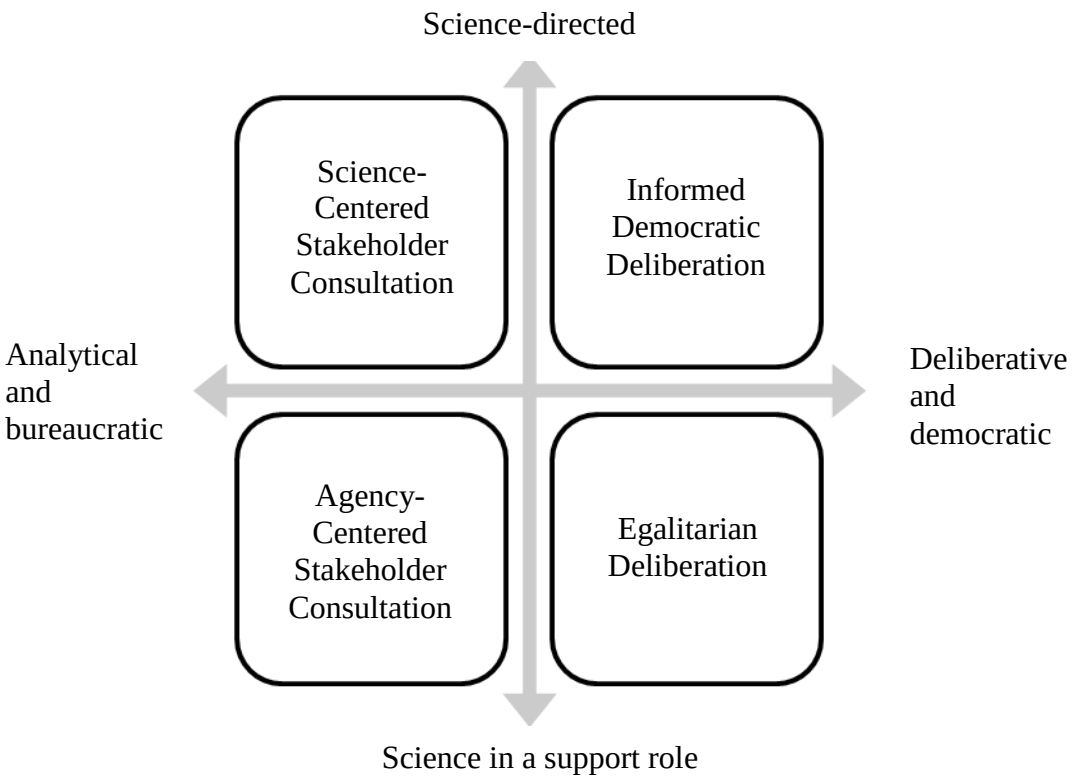
part in participatory processes before, give less emphasis to the role of government bodies and science, and more to that of deliberation. The characteristics of the environmental case or decision situation at hand do not, however, have a significant influence on participants' expectations concerning the process (though they stressed that the conclusions drawn from those ten case studies must not be generalized, as they were restricted to a mere three domains (forest management, hydrology and the decontamination of areas exposed to radioactivity) of environmental issues).

The main differences between the various opinions were detected along the following two dimensions: how they relate to the (1) importance of scientific analysis, and (2) that of deliberation. In other words, dimension (1) indicates whether science is assigned a decisive or just a secondary/supportive role in the process. Dimension (2) indicates what type of role government bodies and deliberation have in the decision-making process. These two dimensions allow for the clear distinction of four opinion groups, identified by the authors as follows:

1. science-centered stakeholder consultation,
2. egalitarian deliberation,
3. agency-centered stakeholder consultation,
4. informed democratic deliberation.

The figure 6 shows these four approaches.

Figure 6: Different approaches to participatory processes by participants' preferences



Source: Tuler−Webler, 2010, p. 263

Given their conclusion that their findings clearly indicate fundamental differences in people's ideas about a good participatory process, Tuler and Webler (2010) reasoned that it is impossible to draw up generally valid rules for designing good participatory processes. They recommend the adaptive management method, which requires that, throughout the entire participatory process, feedback be sought and participants be consulted on the progress the process is making; that the traits, experiences and expectations of the stakeholders be assessed right at the start, and that the findings be used to determine (potentially relying on the authors' theoretical model) the desirable attributes of the process (Tuler−Webler, 2010).

In contrast to the approach of Webler et al., Rowe and Frewer (2000) believe that today the purpose of scientific research in the evaluation of participatory processes is to establish which tool to use in which situation. Accordingly, the authors first developed an analytic framework for the evaluation and, based on the relevant

theoretical principles, formulated the evaluation criteria (Rowe−Frewer, 2000). Next, they outlined how a valid and reliable evaluation should be conducted (Rowe−Frewer, 2004), and relying on these theoretical grounds they performed the evaluation of a deliberative conference (Rowe et al., 2004), and later also elaborated a typology of participatory tools (Rowe−Frewer 2005).

Rowe and Frewer (2000) considered the theories of Fiorino (1990) and Webler (1995) important theoretical precursors to their own evaluation criteria. They themselves, too, regard the democratic criteria formulated by Fiorino as fundamental, the process criterion is, however, missing insofar as Fiorino did not consider that no matter how democratic a process is in theory, if the participants do not regard it as such, then it will be neither successful nor efficient. With regard to Webler's (1995) work, they explain that the discursive environment he examined does not pertain to the full range of tools, as Webler only considered intra-group interactions, which category includes, however, neither referenda nor public opinion surveys, the two mechanisms that Rowe and Frewer analyzed. The authors divide their system of evaluation criteria into two subsets: acceptance criteria and process criteria. Acceptance criteria pertain to the efficiency of the participatory process's content and application, while process criteria relate to its acceptance by the participants. In their view, a participatory process needs to meet both systems of criteria in order to be called successful.

The acceptance criteria they formulated were (Rowe−Frewer, 2000):

1. representativeness: the affected population needs to be represented by a representative sample (within the limits of practical and financial feasibility);
2. independence: participating layman and the management/facilitators of the process all need to be independent of the sponsor;
3. early involvement: stakeholders need to be involved from the earliest possible stage of the process;
4. influence: the outcome of the process needs to have a tangible influence on the decision/processes;
5. transparency: it must be ensured at all times that people can see what is happening in the process and how the decision is made.

Whereas the process criteria were:

1. resource accessibility: the resources required for them to successfully perform their function must be provided for (information, human resources, material goods, time);
2. task definition: precise definition of the nature and the scope of the function set for the participatory process in question;
3. structured decision-making: development and implementation of appropriate decision-making techniques;
4. cost-effectiveness.

They also call attention to the uncertainties about the application of their evaluation methods. These stem from, according to them, the various modes of application of the tools, and the differences in social and environmental factors.
Based on this theoretical system of criteria, they later worked out a research roadmap on how a participatory process should be evaluated (Rowe−Frewer, 2004). Their goal was to facilitate the preparation of a series of comparable studies that could contribute to developing the model of the successful participatory process. They argue that because of the lack of theoretical definitions, and the paucity and incomparability of previous research results, validity can hardly be warranted in today's research environment. Another problem is the lack of a detailed typology of methods, which would allow for the identification of the important characteristics of the tool being evaluated. They also mention the lack of variables to characterize the conditions under which the tool was applied.[11]

The research roadmap they outlined was:

1. define the efficiency/success of the participatory process
2. define how it can be achieved, what degrees of it we wish to distinguish, and how this concept should be measured
3. perform the evaluation with special attention to the detailed description of the tool in question and the environmental factors.

Following the above roadmap, they tested the practical applicability of their system of criteria by performing the evaluation of a deliberative conference (Rowe et al.,

[11] In one of their later articles (Rowe−Frewer, 2005), they made an attempt to establish such a typology of tools (see Chapter 3.4).

2004). They employed several different methods in the evaluation in order to explore the various perspectives. On the one hand, they surveyed participants' opinions through questionnaires and interviews, and an evaluative observation was also performed using a pre-determined checklist. Results from the questionnaires were, on the other hand, also supported by interviews. As they themselves realized, a shortcoming of their investigation was that they had not sought feedback from the organizers/sponsors, even though, as it later turned out, such opinions might be key to cost-effectiveness matters. Their findings shed light upon the deficiencies of this system of criteria, as well, for example the omission of the topic of learning. Moreover, they also indicated that the importance of some of the criteria is context-dependent.

Unlike the authors discussed so far, Beierle (1999) basically evaluates the outcome of the process, based on the extent to which the social goals he formulated are realized. He proposed the following five social goals:

1. incorporate public values into decision-making
2. improve the substantive quality of the decision
3. resolve conflicts between opposing interests
4. improve trust in institutions
5. educate and inform the public

As a sixth, additional goal he adds the criterion of cost-effectiveness.

It is the realization of these social goals that he equates the success of public engagement processes with. His analyses of the individual participatory tools focus on whether they contribute to meeting these goals. Accordingly he concludes that our choice of tool needs to be based on the context of the matter at hand, and on the social goal we wish to accomplish (Beierle, 1999). The table below presents his evaluation of a number of participatory mechanisms.

Table 3: Participatory tools and social goals

Mechanisms	Education & information		Social values	Quality of decision	Trust	Conflict
	participants	wider public				
Survey	0	0	++	++	0	0
Focus group	0	0	++	++	0	0
Public comment	0	0	++	++	0	0
Information provision	+	++	0	0	++	0
Public notice	0	++	0	0	+	0
Public education	++	+	0	0	+	+
Traditional Participatory Mechanisms						
Public hearing	+	++	++	++	+	+
Citizen advisory committee	++	+	++	++	++	++
Alternative Dispute Resolution						
Mediation	++	0	++	++	+	++
Regulatory negotiation	++	0	+	++	+	++
Public Deliberation						
Citizen Panel	++	+	++	++	0	+
Consensus conference	++	+	++	++	0	+

Key:

++ ought to achieve goal, + may be expected to achieve goal, 0 not likely to achieve goal

Source: Based on Beierle, 1999, p. 97

As far as Beierle's social goals are concerned, dispute resolution techniques – like mediation or regulatory negotiation – are in many cases more effective than other participatory tools. Even though the efficiency of these techniques is unquestionable in certain areas, that comes at a price. The two most important domains that their deficiencies concern are the information and education of the wider public, and the integration of their interests. These mechanisms always employ some sort of participant selection process, thus it is a rather small group that actually gets involved: they are experienced as participants, but obviously do not represent the

entire community. As the objective of the process is to reach an agreement, conflictive parties often get excluded (Beierle–Cayford, 2001).

In his analysis of the quality of decisions made via public participation processes, Beierle (2002) concluded that intensive participatory processes – where the number of stakeholders taking part is smaller, but their effort is more intense – are more successful in terms of outcome: they yield higher-quality decisions, with respect to both the application of scientific findings and the accessibility of information and expertise. It is these tools, as well, that tend to generate the highest net public benefit figures. The process may be more successful both in political and scientific terms, and the quality of the decisions may be higher, as well. Based on these findings, Beierle also dismissed the accusation that participatory decision-making processes do not rely on scientific findings to a sufficient extent.

Based on their later research, Beierle and Konisky (2000) suggest that the basic nature of the process has a more significant influence on its success than the conditions (context) under which it is completed. The factors most important to the success of participatory processes are 1) a good, consensus-seeking deliberation process, 2) bidirectional communication between the participants and the officials, and 3) government bodies' commitment to the process. The findings of Beierle and Konisky (2000) show that – in the case studies they analyzed – it was not the control authority or power delegated to the community that determined the success of the process, but rather the degree of flexibility and readiness demonstrated by the participating government agency. This result of theirs contradicts Arnstein's (1969) definition of power, according to which more participation is necessarily better.

In another paper, Beierle looked into the quality of decisions made via public engagement processes (Beierle, 2002). Decision quality was analyzed based on the following questions:

1. Is the decision more cost-effective than its alternatives?
2. Did the decision increase joint benefits?
3. Did participants contribute to the outcome through innovative ideas, useful analyses or new information?
4. Were scientific information and expertise accessible to participants?

He suggests that decision quality is related to the mechanism the process employs. According to him, there are four groups of mechanisms:

1. public hearing type methods, which typically offer open access to all interested citizens;
2. advisory committees that do not seek consensus;
3. advisory committees that seek consensus;
4. negotiations and mediations.

In Beierle's view, the intensity of participation increases with the decreasing number of participants (i.e. from public hearings towards mediations).

Results from his analysis of 239 case studies show that cost-effectiveness fails to receive due attention, even though there are cases when it is possible to improve it, given that the relevant parties (those who enjoy the benefits and suffer the costs) are involved in the participatory process.

Neither is there much emphasis on increasing joint benefits, and they do not often succeed in doing so, either. Less surprisingly, this factor is of utmost importance to negotiations and mediations, and results are typically positive, as well.

Concerning the contribution of new ideas and knowledge, results are positive for the majority of the cases. Whenever participants do not contribute to the analysis, the reason is not that they do not have the opportunity or that their opinion is neglected, but rather that they are getting involved for a different reason: to represent their values. Once again, it is the intensive mechanisms[12] that allow for participants to contribute new ideas to the decision-making process.

Access to scientific results and expertise is an aspect that arose in the course of the evaluation of the processes. The analysis showed that in the majority of cases, participants do have access to such information; if and when, however, they do not, that causes frustration. And restricted access to information may obviously be a strategic tool whenever the actual intention is not to involve the participants in the decision-making process. Intensive participatory mechanisms, however, deliver extraordinary results under this aspect, as well. After all, those selected to participate,

[12] In the author's interpretation, intensive mechanisms are those participatory tools that feature a smaller number of participants who, however, engage more deeply in understanding the problem and contribute more to the outcome of the decision-making process.

who are (or will be) better qualified and more experienced, have more time and resources available for acquiring information (e.g. hiring experts).

All in all, the most important conclusion of the study is that intensive participatory mechanisms – where the number of stakeholders taking part is smaller, but their effort is more intense – are more successful in terms of outcome: they yield higher-quality decisions, with respect to the application of scientific findings, the contribution of new ideas and information as well as the accessibility of information and expertise. It is these tools, as well, that yield the highest net public benefit. That is, the process may be more successful both in political and scientific terms, and the quality of the decisions may be higher under both aspects, as well. However, these very same mechanisms fail to perform well in informing the wider public and in incorporating its interests (Beierle−Cayford, 2001). Based on their findings, they also dismiss the accusation that participatory decision-making processes do not rely on scientific findings to a sufficient extent.

Beierle (2002) makes a distinction between the political and the scientific dimension of decisions, because he deems this duality to be an inherent characteristic of the processes. A similar duality is reflected in the two meta-criteria that Webler derived from Habermasian principles, i.e. fairness and competence (Webler, 1995). It is the mutual interactions induced by this duality that the analytic-deliberative process is built upon: scientific results and facts aid the value-driven deliberative process and, hence, resolve this duality.

Case study based evaluation methods are quite common in the literature. Here I will confine myself to presenting only one of them, as an example.

Moore developed an evaluation methodology to define what we can consider a successful resolution to an environmental dispute (Moore, 1996). She built her theory on the opinions of processes' participants. She originally meant her theory to be used to resolve environmental disputes, nonetheless she noted that it can also be applied to environmental decision-making processes with involvement from both the public and the government. According to her, however, the success criteria she formulated can only be employed in such evaluation if the decision-making process offers a true opportunity to reveal and incorporate the interests of the participants.

Moore's analysis underlines that success cannot be equated to getting an agreement. Her evaluation does not only focus on the **outcome**, but on the **process** itself, as well. She only regards effectiveness (whether the process is concluded with an agreement) as an element of one of the success categories (product-oriented success). She suggests that the success of the process must be evaluated along two dimensions. One is conditionality, the other is a category-based evaluation. From the conditionality perspective, a process may be unconditionally successful, conditionally successful or not successful. The other dimension incorporates five categories of success: the already mentioned product-oriented, politically oriented, interest-oriented, responsibility-oriented and relationship-oriented success. Moreover, Moore also makes a distinction between categories that evaluate the outcome (product-oriented, politically oriented and interest-oriented success) vs. the process itself (interest-oriented, responsibility-oriented and relationship-oriented success). Within the individual categories, she checked the following items: product-oriented: has an agreement been reached?, has the plan been accepted?, will the area, resource or natural assets be protected? and have all the issues that had been mentioned incorporated in the final agreement? The political category weighs the acceptance of the outcome by society as a whole, whether the agreement becomes widely accepted. In this category, the process-related question is whether all the parties' interests were represented. The interest-oriented category examines, with respect to the outcome, whether people have managed to protect their interests and, concerning the process, whether participants have developed joint interests, whether a joint interest has been formed beyond (or out of) the individual interests. The responsibility-oriented category of success looks at whether participants have, in the course of the process, developed a feeling of ownership for the process and its outcome. Which matter is, of course, also related to the implementation of the final agreement. Relationship-oriented success means that during the process, relationships have been built between the participating agency and the members of society, within the society, and what is more, even within the government agency in question.

Moore integrated the notion of fairness into her own model, into the politically oriented and interest-oriented categories; while the former evaluates the representation of participants' interests, the latter the enforcement thereof. Moore puts particular emphasis on the two basic qualities of success: its multifaceted

(because it has, according to her, two dimensions, and the second dimension tends to be described by more than one category, as well) and sequential nature (because the individual categories of success are built upon others).

3.3.1 Summary

As we have seen, the research findings and opinions we presented above about the evaluation of participatory processes are rather diverse. As suggested by Rosener (1978), some processes can be characterized by simple quantitative measures, while others call for complex, opinion-based analyses. According to Rosener (1978), it would not be reasonable to evaluate processes the sole purpose of which was participation itself according to anything else but the number of those present or those having voiced their opinions. In such cases, namely, participation is an end in itself, instead of a means to some other end. According to her, we first need to clarify what the purpose is, and whether the participatory process actually serves that purpose. If the purpose the participatory process is meant to serve is not defined unambiguously, and thus we do not even know whether the selected tool suits the purpose, that renders the evaluation of the process impossible (Rosener, 1978).

Another important criticism, or at least an uncertainty factor, of the evaluation is that even though a given tool might suit the decision situation and the conditions at hand, if however the government agency lacks commitment and thus the quality of implementation lags behind expectations, that might lead to dissatisfaction and poor results irrespective of the participatory mechanism employed (Chess−Purcell, 1999, Beierle−Konisky, 2000). Thus a key condition to participation is participants' willingness to implement it the right way and government bodies' commitment to the cause of public participation. According to Chess and Purcell (1999), success does not depend on the selection of the right tool, but rather on how it is implemented.

The question how much influence the circumstances, the socio-environmental context have on the quality of participatory processes was also looked into by several authors. Results from research so far, though neither fully comprehensive nor exhaustive, seem to support that circumstances have no decisive influence on either the quality of participatory processes (Beierle−Konisky, 2000) or the qualities expected of such processes (Tuler−Webler, 2010).

Questions arise over Arnstein's definition of power, as well. While Arnstein asserted that more power necessarily means better participation, certain findings appear to

disprove this theory. The findings of Beierle and Konisky (2000) draw our attention to the fact that in the case studies they analyzed it was not the control authority or power delegated to the community that determined the success of the process, but rather the degree of flexibility and readiness demonstrated by the participating government agency.

Some authors emphasize that the purpose of academic research is to establish a theoretical framework that will, on the basis of an in-depth understanding of the various tools, allow for finding the tool that best suits any given situation (Rowe−Frewer, 2000, 2004, 2005). Others argue that such optimization is not possible due to its complexity and the value-driven nature of participation, therefore the participatory tool to be employed needs to be selected based on the subjective value judgment of one of the actors. Renn and Schweizer (2009) suggest that the appropriate tool should be selected according to the values considered most important. Or according to the social goal they intend to realize, in Beierle's (1999) view. The approach applied by Webler et al. puts the emphasis on the values of another group of actors, namely participants, and maintains that the important question is what sort of participatory process the participants deem appropriate, thus they must be consulted and their opinions must be taken into account in designing an adequate mechanism, as well as throughout the entire process itself (Tuler−Webler, 2010).

3.4 Participatory Tools

The proper selection of participatory tools is, as we have already evinced, subject to extensive debate in the literature, and the viewpoints are highly diverse. One of the fundamental questions in this debate is whether it may be possible, by unveiling the basic characteristics of the various participatory mechanisms and drawing on existing experience, to describe which tool one should choose in which decision situation to ensure efficient public participation.

The selection of participatory tools also concerns the other fundamental question, the „who should participate?" issue, for one of the decisive factors in the selection of the right tool is the circle of those who should be involved, how they are selected, how representative they are of the population as a whole, and what the extent of their participation in decision-making will be.

Even though the definition of who should be regarded as stakeholders does not directly affect the selection of the participatory tool, I would still like to briefly discuss it at this point.

3.4.1 Who Should Take Part in Decision-making?

The definition of who should be regarded as stakeholders is a very controversial task, and usually the circumstances of the given case largely determine the answer to that question (Stern–Fineberg, 1996). The affected population (individuals) may come from different geographical, ethnical and social groups, and they might be corporations, municipalities, as well as other organizations. Interest groups may include commercial associations, consumer groups, trade unions, religious groups and pro-environmental groups. Sometimes they do not even know that they are affected until they receive notification about it. Chess and Hance believe the following questions to be key to identifying the stakeholders in any given case (cited in Stern–Fineberg, 1996, p. 88):

- Who are in possession of information or expertise that might facilitate the decision?
- Who have already taken part in participatory processes?
- Who have expressed their wish to participate before?
- Who may be affected by the risks?
- Who may be affected without knowing so?
- Who will be very angry if left out?

English et al. (1993) provide the following definition (p. 30):
„Stakeholders are those with an interest (a stake) that can be affected, for better or for worse, by a contemplated decision.” As a rule of thumb, in a process where all the stakeholders participate, all the legitimate interests ought to be considered, but only the legitimate ones. What exactly is considered legitimate, however, depends on the decision of those in power – though that might be subject to debate, as well.
In the same study, English et al. (1993) identify the following four groups in their effort to define who is affected. The paper deals with the future utilization of contaminated sites, but the definition they provide appears to be, in my opinion, applicable to other types of environmental matters, as well.

1. Owner or user of the affected site,
2. Holds a job or civic office with duties related to the case, hence responsible for it,
3. Lives near the affected site, is potentially affected – physically and/or financially – by the consequences of the decision,
4. Residual category: anyone else, i.e. those who have no ownership rights over or bear any formal responsibility for the site, and are not exposed to the related health or financial risks, either. Includes people that represent values like quality of life, the well-being of others, the protection of future generations and the environment.

The meaning of the first two categories is quite clear, even though mixed roles are quite common, e.g. the government might be the owner of the site or the company and (as the competent authority) the one responsible for the case at the same time. Concerning the third category, the legitimacy of stakeholdership is beyond doubt, yet power dynamics may have a significant role in its geographical or chronological delimitation. The evaluation of risks and the related uncertainties greatly influence who is to be considered affected. In other words: what are the probability of occurrence and potential impact values that make someone a stakeholder? The fourth category raises several questions, on the one hand because these stakeholders are not acting in their own behalf and are, therefore, not affected in the traditional (personal) sense, and on the other hand because anyone from the first three groups may also belong to this group, as well, whenever their own personal interests may potentially conflict the higher good they wish to represent.

Having defined the stakeholders, the next question is who should participate. One of the decisive factors here is representativeness, i.e. to what degree those involved in the participatory process are representative of the entire affected population. DeSario (1987) distinguishes between four forms of representation:

1. by electing representatives (formal political representation),
2. by commissioning (ascriptive representation),
3. by selecting representatives based on the attributes of the population as a whole (descriptive representation),

4. by selecting representatives based on the different viewpoints (substantive representation).

As far as public participation processes are concerned, it is the latter two forms of representation that might come into play, neither one is however better than the other (English et al., 1993). It is potentially beneficial to have competent and committed actors participating in such processes, which random selection or sampling (descriptive representation) are not necessarily able to ensure. In such a case, however, the quiet and less well-organized segment of the community may be left without representation. A fifth form of representation is grounded in the method of self-selection (English et al., 1993). The theoretical foundation of this approach is that everyone who seriously wishes to protect their own interests are willing to take part in the process. The method does warrant that those participating are indeed committed, yet there is a chance that less powerful groups still become excluded from participation, and thus the process might aggravate social conflicts. Furthermore, this procedure also carries the risk that the number of participants will be too small or too large, and thus unable to fulfill their task or to communicate in an effective fashion, respectively.

Representativeness and the quality of participation basically seem to be in contradiction. The wider the circle of those involved, the more superficial their contribution will be, yet if only a smaller group is allowed to participate that allows for in-depth deliberation and quality decision-making. What needs to be weighed in each case is which one of the two aspects is more important: to let all the stakeholders contribute to the decision or to have a smaller but better informed and more committed group contribute to the outcome after thorough consideration. And naturally enough, the funds available for financing the participatory process may also constitute a critical factor here.

One cannot regard the population as a homogenous group, who have similar interests and are able to represent those in a uniform fashion. May (2006) underlines that society ought to acknowledge those few of its members who are socially active, and able and willing to take part in participatory processes, which requires certain resources. These participants will not be representative of the entire community – which is not to be expected of a heterogeneous group anyway –, but they are committed, which is clearly a virtue with regard to public participation (May, 2006).

According to Beierle (2002), tools characterized by a higher intensity but less participants are, for the most part, more successful in meeting social goals, yet the education of the wider public and the improvement of people's trust in institutions get pushed into the background. Limiting involvement to a smaller circle may compromise representativeness, and what is more, groups whose opinions are liable to cause conflicts may get excluded intentionally (Beierle, 2002).

Different participatory tools offer differing modes of representation for communities. The debate over which factors need to be considered in the selection of the right tool has been going on in the literature for quite long. In the course of this debate, a number of different ways have been proposed to categorize participatory tools, all of which aimed at facilitating the selection of the appropriate mechanism. What follows below is an overview of these categorization efforts. It is important to note that currently there is no generally accepted typology for these tools, and soon we will also see why.

3.4.2 Types of Participatory Tools

According to Rowe and Frewer (2004), the categorization of participatory tools serves to provide a sufficient degree of distinction so as to enable us to assign the most suitable tool to any given case, based on its characteristics. Webler (1999), nevertheless, pointed out that due to the problems about the circumstances and generalizability, it is not certain that such an assignment is possible at all.

Others, too, gave voice to the criticism that the quality of implementation, rather than the basic features of the participatory tool itself, has more influence on the quality of the process (Chess – Purcell, 1999 and English et al., 1993), which arouses further doubt whether the use of the right tool is indeed the most decisive factor to the quality of a process. Renn (1992) maintains that whatever tool we choose, the main point is that any process is doomed to fail unless the participants accept the conditions and rules pertaining to its implementation.

In spite of these theoretical criticisms, let us take a look at what the typologies of the individual authors were built upon. The reason for doing so is to make it apparent which features of the various participatory mechanisms the authors believe to be key characteristics, and to outline the fundament upon which the evaluation of the two tools – referenda and public hearings – I intend to analyze in a later part of this thesis will be built, and to find their respective places in each typology.

As regards the categorization of the public participation mechanisms mentioned in the literature, the first difficulty is to name the tools we wish to include in the typology. By that I mean the problem that the literature knows a plethora of different nomenclatures and methodologies, however they do not always differ substantially, and the often incomplete presentation of methods does not allow for a sharp distinction between closely interrelated tools. To demonstrate the problem, Rowe and Frewer (2005) collected the names of all the public participation tools found in the sources they had screened. The list contains more than a hundred different terms (Rowe–Frewer, 2005, p. 257).

In her paper, Arnstein (1969) uses the rungs of her ladder for categorization purposes, as well. The ladder typology is based on how much power the given tool assigns to the members of the community. This typology, though highly popular, raises several problems (Webler, 1999). One of them is that certain circles are still unwilling to accept that the right to make a decision be delegated to anyone other than elected representatives. Second, the notion and theory of power is not elaborate enough in this theory, therefore a precise classification of the tools is not possible. Third, the methodology does not provide a reliable means for estimating the extent of power the individual participatory mechanisms can furnish the participants with. Partly, these problems stem from the typology's being one-dimensional.

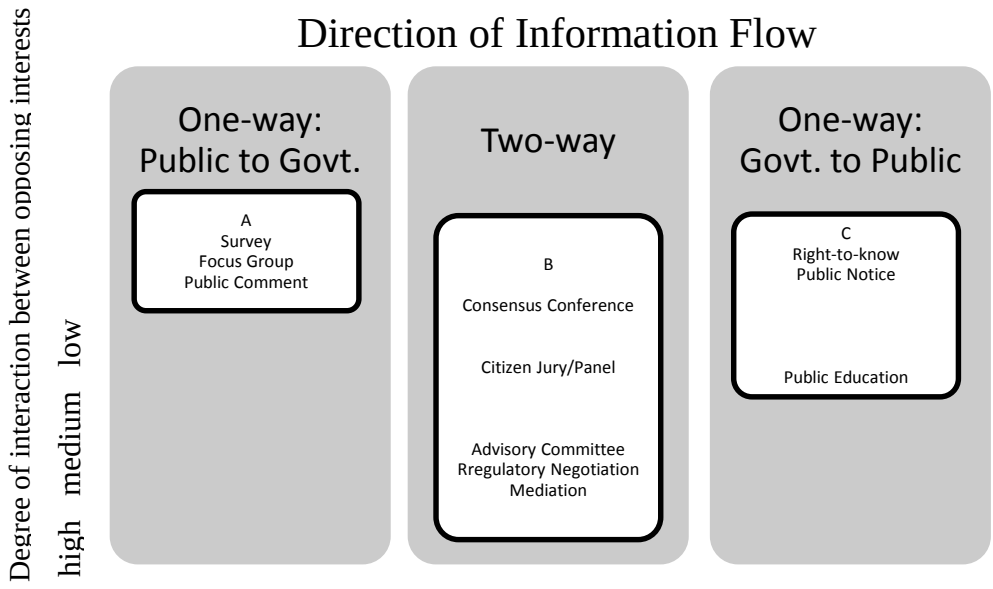
According to Beierle (1999), participatory tools differ from each other in the following four domains:

1. direction of information flow (unidirectional from society, unidirectional from the government, bidirectional)
2. degree of interaction between opposing interests (low, medium, high)
3. type of representation (self-representation, via representatives, via interest groups)
4. role of the public in decision-making (no role at all, advisory or decisional)

He positioned the various mechanisms along these dimensions in the way shown in Figure 7, and distinguished between three groups of tools (A, B and C). Group A (survey, focus group and public comment) only allows for information to flow from members of the society towards the decision-makers, with no room for deliberation

and no obligatory recommendations for decision-makers to follow, either. Group C (right-to-know, public notice, public education) also ensures unidirectional information flow only, yet from the government to members of the community. Though still passive, these tools might have an important role in educating the public and may also foster trust in institutions. The most dynamic one is group B, comprised of citizen deliberation methods (citizen jury, consensus conference) and alternative dispute resolution procedures (mediation and regulatory negotiation). Citizen deliberation methods serve as a means of communication between society and the experts, and the deliberative atmosphere greatly helps individuals' learning. The education of the wider public requires the active participation of the media, but they perform well in acquainting people with the different values and opinions. These tools are, however, less suitable for contrasting and resolving opposing interests. Dispute resolution techniques make decisions, as well, hence they might contribute a great deal of information to the decision-making process. They do well in unveiling values and opinions, and have a great potential in building trust, as well. Being consensus-seeking in character, conflict resolution is one of their greatest virtues. Nevertheless, the small number of participants renders them unsuitable for the information and education of the wider public.

Figure 7: Characteristics of participatory tools



Source: (Beierle, 1999, p. 88)

One of the most elaborate classifications was published by Rowe and Frewer in 2005. Its key characteristic is the well-defined purpose for which it was developed, namely the evaluation of participatory processes. Since the primary intention of the authors was to meet that very objective, they managed to establish a well-thought-out structure, which ensured the methodology would be well-suited for later uses, as well. The typology is based on the direction of information flow. Accordingly, the term public communication is used for processes in which information only flows one way, from the government towards the public, which does not allow for public input into the decision, hence it is not considered participation. Public consultation is their name for processes where information flow is only one-way, as well, yet from the public to the government. Finally, the processes in which information flows in both directions are called public participation (this sort of distinction is illustrated by Figure Figure 5 presented earlier).

The categorization of the tools was based on the following variables and values:

1. Selection of participants: controlled / non-controlled
2. Facilitator involved in information distribution: yes/no
3. Response mode: unlimited-open/limited-closed
4. Information input: set/flexible
5. Vehicle of information exchange: face-to-face/non face-to-face
6. Information transfer: structured/non-structured

In developing their typology, they also took into account how they intended to use it in the evaluation of participatory processes. What can be considered efficient for a given variable, and what cannot. Efficiency is influenced by the choice of mechanism in any given context (between-mechanism variables), as well as by how exactly the given mechanism is implemented (within-mechanism variables).

Their classification distinguishes between four types of public communication tools, six types of consultation, and four types of public participation. The following table lists the characteristics of these types of mechanism.

Table 4: The typology of participatory tools

Mechanism classes	Examples	Characteristics
Communication Type 1	television, newspaper, radio	Traditional communication mechanisms, typically used as part of information programs targeting different social groups.
Communication Type 2	public hearings	The public come to the information rather than vice versa. Participants volunteer to take part in the process. There is a face-to-face meeting with the officials, the information provided depends, to a small extent, on what participants ask.
Communication Type 3	internet, cable TV, drop-in-centers	The public are expected to come to the information. The scope of information made available depends on the sponsor. No face-to-face contact, no opportunity for questions.
Communication Type 4	hotline	Also rely on citizens to initiate the process, yet information is flexible. The variant with the phone as the medium is relatively close to face-to-face contact in nature.
Consultation Type 1	referendum, opinion poll	Provide answers to specific questions from large samples. Selection is highly controlled, with closed responses. The quantity of respondents is more important than the quality of the data. There is great variation across the individual mechanism in the influence they have on the decision (e.g. binding vs. consultative referenda).
Consultation Type 2	consultation document	Open-response methods with controlled selection. Typically, a document is made available to stakeholders with a limited time frame for them to comment on it. No face-to-face contact.
Consultation Type 3	electronic consultation, interactive website	Very similar to Consultation Type 2, yet with uncontrolled selection.
Consultation Type 4	focus group	Characterized by controlled selection, presence of a facilitator, open responses and face-to-face contact. Most importantly, they emphasize the quality of the responses and the number of participants is small.
Consultation Type 5	study circle, open space	Similar to Consultation Type 4, but selection is uncontrolled. Study circle: 5-20 people meet on a couple of occasions to discuss a topic or a book. Open space: large assembly of self-selected participants who identify issues, which are then discussed in smaller groups, concluded with a final plenary session.

Consultation Type 6	citizen panel	A small group of participants selected in a way similar to focus groups discuss certain topics in the presence of a facilitator, but unlike the focus group, the panel meet several times, discuss several topics and the members might be rotated, as well. Meetings are usually concluded with a vote.
Participation Type 1	citizens' jury, consensus conference, action planning workshop	Controlled selection, flexible information, facilitator, open responses. Oftentimes, experts are available to answer questions. The output of the process is not structured.
Participation Type 2	negotiated rule making, task force	Basically only differs from the former one in that there is no facilitator.
Participation Type 3	deliberative opinion poll, planning cell	Differs from Participation Type 1 in that the aggregation of opinions is conducted in a structured fashion. Requires a facilitator. In the case of deliberative opinion polling, respondents are polled twice. Planning cells use various decision aids to ensure that the different opinions are all considered and assessed.
Participation Type 4	Town meeting (with voting)	This class is fundamentally different from the other types of participation. Citizens volunteer for participation, and there is no facilitator, even though the aggregation of opinions / transfer of information happens in a structured manner. The archetype of this class is the town meeting, in which the debate is concluded with a vote.

Source: Based on Rowe−Frewer, 2005, p. 278-282

Subsequently, I will discuss in detail two participatory tools I chose for that purpose, namely public hearings and referenda. The reason I opted for analyzing these very methods was, on the one hand, that both are highly controversial mechanisms, and on the other hand that these are the two most widely-used processes in Hungarian practice (Szántó, 2008c). Public hearings are the most frequently employed form of participation not only in Hungary, but in the public participation practice of Western democracies, as well. In Hungary, public hearings are a mandatory participation mechanism for all activities that require an Environmental Impact Assessment, which practically means investments that carry significant environmental risks. It is due to this statutory obligation that public hearings are quite frequently held on environmental matters in Hungary, as well. Thus it seems justified to say that its widespread use has resulted in a significant body of practical experience. In spite of the method's long history in public participation practice and its extensive use in both Western democracies (US, Canada, Great Britain) and Hungary, the application of this tool has hardly ever been subjected to in-depth scrutiny (exceptions are Kemp, 1985 and Rosener, 1982). Researchers are inclined, rather, to present the mechanisms in a descriptive or prescriptive tone. A number of respected authors, like Webler and Renn (1995) or Stern and Fineberg (1996), have drawn attention to this deficiency. It is this hiatus that my dissertation is intended to fill.

The reason for including referenda, another controversial tool in the literature of public participation, was that its use is particularly widespread in waste management cases in Hungary. In the Hungarian literature, it is the dissertation of Szántó (Szántó, 2008c) that deals with referenda as a participatory tool. One of his findings was that in waste management related siting conflicts, referenda represent a particularly high share of participatory processes. We will take a closer look at this finding and analyze the reasons behind it.

It was these factors that compelled me to choose public hearings and referenda as the subjects of my analysis. Below, I will present in detail how these two participatory tools are depicted in the pieces of the literature we have just reviewed by examining how the individual theories discussed so far relate to these mechanisms. The question I will ask are as follows:

1. Can they be considered substantial participation according to the various definitions of public participation?

2. Which categories of the different typologies do these tools belong to and, hence, what are their key characteristics?
3. Based on the various criteria used to assess participatory tools, what were the evaluations of the individual authors of these tools?
4. What sort of strengths and weaknesses does practical experience infer with respect to these two tools?

3.4.3 Referenda

As already mentioned in the theoretical introduction (Chapter 2.1.1), referenda are the decision-making tool of direct democracy, and deliberation is not part of the process. Sartori (1999), who is basically an advocate of representative democracy, defines a referendum as a zero-sum game. If stakeholders use a referendum to reach a decision on a given matter, the decision will be made according to the majority rule. There will be both winners and losers to it, obviously, yet the sum of the game (that is, the sum total of winners' profits and losers' losses) will necessarily be zero, as opposed to some other decision-making methods[13], where it is possible for the sum to be positive. Another consequence of majority decisions is that minorities, who are generally pushed into the background in all decision situations, will not be able to enforce their interests and opinions in a referendum – after all, the majority principle prevails in all referenda. Consequently, making decisions by referenda may even aggravate social conflicts. What is more, referenda as a form of public participation might give room for manipulation by those in power, since whoever is entitled to formulate the referendum question is in a position of power. Which power resides in the right to decide what should be voted on (though that might happen through popular initiative, as well) and in the fact that the very formulation of the question may have a significant influence on the outcome. That is, the right to decide what should be voted on and how the question should be formulated warrants a position of power, and might become a vehicle of manipulation. Besides, Sartori (1999) also points out that in a referendum, people are left to themselves in making their decision. Whereas what they need for the due consideration of their options is not only information, but also the competence to process that information, which a

[13] According to Sartori, in the elitist model of representative democracy representatives are, through reconciliations and negotiations, able to attain positive-sum games (Sartori, 1999, p. 73).

referendum in itself is unable to provide. Referenda can only educate for democracy and enhance people's competence or knowledge if the cause receives special attention from those in power, which is hardly ever the case in practice (with a very few exceptions).

As evinced by the definitions of public participation quoted in Chapter 3.2, authors tend to evaluate referenda as a participatory tool differently. The definitions also tell us that referenda are not unequivocally regarded as a participatory tool to begin with. Let us review how the various definitions and typologies interpret referenda, whether they are considered participation or non-participation, and what their basic attributes are.

According to Arnstein's (1969) definition of public participation, a referendum clearly counts as participation, since stakeholders have the power to make the decision (if the result of the referendum is binding on the government). However, the power-related questions raised by Sartori cast a shadow over this theory, and the suspicion of manipulation may be relevant, as well, for as we have seen, the calling of a referendum and the formulation of the question may give room to manipulation, in the sense that the lowermost rung[14] on Arnstein's ladder represents. Examples can also be found in Hungarian case studies (Szántó, 2008c).

According to the definition given by Rowe−Frewer (2005), in a true participatory process, participants contribute some sort of input to the decision, and information flow is bidirectional. What regards referenda, and more specifically the voting activity itself, information flows from the public towards the government. Under this approach, therefore, a referendum does not constitute substantial participation, but public consultation only. Participation is only substantial if the vote is preceded by extensive information and consultation activities, and the population are acquainted with both sides of the decision. For which we have hardly any example from the practice. In the typology developed by Rowe−Frewer (2005), which we have already discussed earlier, referenda were characterized by the following attributes:

1. Selection of participants: controlled

[14] This is, in my opinion, the main weakness of the participation ladder. As I see it, the classification of referenda is dubious, for the way they are actually implemented greatly determines whether the community is indeed granted the power to decide or not.

2. Facilitator involved in information distribution: no
3. Response mode: limited
4. Vehicle of information exchange: non face-to-face
5. Information transfer: structured

Hence it is quite apparent that „who should be involved" is a key question to referenda, as well. Who will be eligible to cast a vote, residents of which townships? With participants being selected in a controlled way, the government is in a position of power in this respect, as well. It is also obvious that – as pointed out by Sartori (1999) – responses take a structured form, and minority opinions and opinions stretching beyond the scope of the referendum question are therefore lost. The process itself is impersonal, and there is no opportunity for deliberation or face-to-face discussion.

While in their definition Renn et al. basically equate referenda with the very essence of the public participation concept (Renn et al., 1995a, p. 2), Beierle's definition excludes the institution of referendum from the set of participatory decision-making techniques (Beierle−Cayford, 2002). The definition of Renn et al. (1995) is formulated to specifically include referenda and popular initiatives, though they later note that they refrain from analyzing this tool in their book, since even though it does meet the fairness meta-criterion put forward by Webler (1995), its application does leave no room for discourse at all. They maintain that referenda are a very good means to legitimize decisions that have already been made, but they need to be preceded by some sort of deliberative consultation with the public. Lacking such consultation, a referendum in itself will fail to meet the other meta-criterion, namely competence, therefore the authors claim that its application is reasonable only in combination with other tools (Renn et al., 1995a).

Proceeding along criteria derived from democratic principles, Fiorino (1990) stated that referenda provide an opportunity for laymen to directly participate in decision-making and that they are, as well, delegated the power required for that (in the case of binding votes), which may even secure for them a position of equality with government officials and experts. As far as democratic principles are concerned, these criteria evaluate the mechanism highly. This argumentation is underpinned by

the evaluation of Rowe and Frewer (2000), as representation, the independence of participants, influence on the final outcome and the transparency of the process are all warranted to a high standard. Both sources add, however, that referenda carry significant deficiencies, as well, and they concern the quality of the decision at that (Fiorino, 1990 and Rowe−Frewer, 2000). Referenda are, namely, only capable of detecting the direction of opinions, not their intensity or the weight of the differences in opinions. By its nature, the process can provide a snapshot of the current opinion of the public only, as it allows for neither a debate nor deliberation, which may otherwise be fora for the shaping and the in-depth exploration of opinions. Generally there are two choices only („yes" or „no"), and no room for consensus. „…referenda delegate decision authority to an uninformed or otherwise unqualified electorate…" (Fiorino, 1990, p. 232). The process does not give access to resources that could facilitate an informed decision, there is no opportunity for the clarification of misunderstandings or for a dialogue between the authorities and the public. Which is exactly why a referendum is not a suitable means of managing complex and multi-faceted problems and risks. Another drawback is that it is extremely costly, thus with the abovementioned disadvantages taken into account, the cost-effectiveness of such a decision-making process is highly questionable. The repeated holding of referenda not being viable in practice, the tool is unsuited for making decisions on regularly returning issues, as well (Rowe−Frewer, 2000). The Hungarian practice, however, features several examples of referenda being repeated several times in close succession on the very same issue (Szántó, 2008c).

The referendum is a traditional democratic tool, its most important strength being the ability to reach a decision on controversial matters. People are not required to have any competence whatsoever (not even literacy) in order to participate, they just have to be a registered elector. The short duration of the process acts to increase willingness to vote, and it is repeatable and generalizable (English et al., 1993). Its greatest weakness lies in that, even though anyone eligible for election is allowed to cast a vote, the jurisdictional delimitation, which falls under the authority of the government/municipality, may seriously violate representativeness. Complex questions cannot be satisfactorily answered with simple yes-or-no answers. After having formulated the question, it is impossible for new information or interests to be taken into account. The exact formulation of the question might significantly

influence the answers provided, and if not sufficiently informed, participants may even make an irrational decision. Campaigning, especially who it was done by and what quality it represented, has a decisive influence on how well-informed the members of the community are (English et al., 1993, p. 64).

3.4.4 Public Hearings

According to Arnstein (1969), public hearings are a tool at the fourth rung of the ladder of participation, i.e. consultation (p. 6). Information flow is two-way, yet there is no guarantee that the opinions and ideas of the public will actually be taken into account in making the decision, therefore the application of this mechanisms corresponds to the level of partial participation. The level of consultation is, in Arnstein's (1969) view, mostly a „window-dressing ritual" only, insofar as people have had the opportunity to participate in participation, the agency is content having counted how many came to the meeting, but substantial participation has not actually taken place. The consequence is the increasing frustration of stakeholders.

In the definition put forward by Rowe−Frewer (2005), public hearings are not a true participatory process, based on practical experience. Information only flows from the government to the public, and people do not really have an opportunity to contribute any substantial input to the decision. According to this interpretation, it belongs to the category of public communication. Its characteristics in the typology are:

1. Selection of participants: non-controlled
2. Information input: flexible
3. Vehicle of information exchange: face-to-face

The public hearing, as one of the tools with the longest history and the highest frequency of use, should theoretically possess several advantageous characteristics in the Rowe-Frewer typology, as well, yet in practice, it might easily become a medium for manipulation and therapy. Participants are typically self-selected, therefore representativeness is obviously not ensured, but participants' commitment is. Participants can (theoretically) express their opinions in their own words, which is however not the case in the majority of cases. Face-to-face contact is nevertheless a clear plus point for this mechanism.

Public participation as defined by Renn et al. (1995, p. 2) includes public hearings, as it is a forum for stakeholders and it might be possible, theoretically, to create a discursive environment. They do not however see room for true deliberation and an ideal speech situation, therefore they stress that it might play a very important role as an additional element of a combined, multiple-mechanism process.

Assessing public hearings against democratic criteria, it is plagued by an abundance of weaknesses, its position as the most frequently employed tool notwithstanding (Fiorino, 1990). Its advantages are, according to democratic principles, that laymen can directly participate and that a face-to-face relationship is established between the officials and the public. Participation does not, however, take place on a basis of equality with officials and experts, given that the circumstances, venue, time and agenda of the event are all determined by the agency. The experts themselves decide on what information and in which form they share with the public, who merely constitute the audience to their presentations most of the time, instead of taking an active part in the process. What laymen are left with is to protest and formulate objections – reactive behavior, that is. Chances for deliberation and learning are minimal. These weaknesses of public hearings call into question their fitness for the discussion of complex and dynamic environmental issues (Fiorino, 1990).

To the government or agency, public hearings may appear favorable for a number of reasons: they are quick, cheap and simply administered (Rowe−Frewer, 2000), comply with statutory participation requirements, make the appearance that the public has been involved, enable the legitimation of decisions that have already been made, and help defuse any counterarguments (Fiorino, 1990). These advantages set aside, they have numerous drawbacks when measured against democratic standards. Representativeness and voter turnout can be largely deteriorated by the choice of time and venue, communication is usually one-way, the number of questions put up for discussion is very limited, and they tend to take place late in the decision-making process, thus they serve to approve, rather than substantially influence, the decision. Therefore its impact is small, both on the behavior of citizens and the decision-making process. It promotes the transparency of the decision-making process to a limited extent only, and the independence of participants is typically not ensured,

either (Rowe−Frewer, 2000). Oftentimes, it gets dominated by some stakeholders' economic interests (Fiorino, 1990).

The two-way communication that public hearings (theoretically) ensure may imply that this tool might be able to enhance the community's knowledge and to acquaint decision-makers with the values represented by stakeholders, provide valuable information to aid decision-making, and to increase trust towards institutions by improving transparency. The lack of genuine deliberation foreshadows, however, that a public hearing will in reality score low on these goals (Beierle, 1999). And the confrontation of opposing interests may even result in the escalation of already existing conflicts.

Very often, both sides hold a negative image of public hearings (Webler−Renn, 1995). Citizens think of a public hearing as an event where only a few are present and where they get deprived of every last bit of power. For the officials, a public hearing is a battlefield, where they have to comply with the regulations and avoid a catastrophe at the same time. From their perspective, many people present is a herald of something bad. Obviously, all these views have their roots in public hearings' being typically held in some later stage of the decision making process, and that their structure only leaves limited room for discourse, only a small number of citizens get the chance to contribute and, what is more, with experts talking to laymen from a pulpit, the entire situation of communication is false to begin with. Furthermore, the real purpose of public hearings is, not infrequently, to comply with the relevant regulations instead of ensuring substantial public participation. Low turnout rates are a consequence of poor preparation for the most part, and of the information presented being dry and of a purely technical nature. The process usually favors those with substantial economic power, and citizens cannot see what impact the event has on the decision. Economic interests are often found to prevail, which is one of the reasons why citizens feel deprived of power at public hearings; though they may after all be a suitable forum for formulating the public's objections (Webler−Renn, 1995).

Objections formulated at public hearings may, however, have a significant impact on regulatory/agency decisions (Rosener, 1981). Having investigated a sample of 1816 cases, Rosener concluded that whenever the population had been present and had

voiced their objections, it had been a significant drive (more significant than that represented by expert opinions) for the agency to decide for a refusal. Accordingly, Rosener (1981) drew the conclusion that if the public perceives the problem to be acute enough to actually take part in the public hearing, then their opinion will indeed have an influence on the agency decision. The study also pointed out, however, that turnout rates tend to be rather low, that is, people only attend to public hearings if they believe the environmental risks or their own exposure to be high enough.

This finding was confirmed by other researches, as well (Chess−Purcell, 1999), in that they found that in reaction to public hearings, the government had changed their decision in a large number of cases. Due to the fundamental characteristics of public hearings, public protest usually receives a strong emphasis. This is the attitude that Chess and Purcell (1999) experienced in the majority of the wide range of cases the analyzed. The attitude of the agency essentially determines the success of a public hearing. Which success they may undermine by addressing potential participants in a poor way, by restricting access to technical information, by depriving citizens of their authority or by an unwillingness to engage in a dispute over social issues. Late involvement in the process is fairly typical. But officials can also contribute a great deal to the success of a public hearing, if they combine it with other participatory tools, provide appropriate technical support for citizens to develop an understanding of the case, actively seek contact with citizens, are willing to discuss social issues, and if they come up with a reasonable list of questions to be discussed in the course of the hearing.

Having looked into the power dynamics occuring at public hearings, Kemp (1985) confirmed the earlier statement that the agency and those with economic interests were in a strong position of power in comparison to the participating members of the affected population. Kemp examined whether the criteria for an ideal speech situation were met. Based on the results he drew the conclusion that the process had been the systematic distortion of a consensus. It was impossible for participants to realize domination-free communication. The rules of participation, the resources made available, and the legal environment, which classified certain pieces of information in the course of the process prevented participants from asking and arguing, which could otherwise have improved understanding. The presented facts

were biased because of the difference in the resources available to the parties, and the debate was almost exclusively about the economic aspects. Thus the institution of public hearing allowed neither for communication free of the distorting influence of power, nor for seeking a consensus along common interests. Therefore the public hearings so analyzed were not objective, nor were they rational or of an egalitarian nature. Instead, they turned into a stage for capital's and government's manipulation (Kemp, 1985).

In spite of its elementary faults, the public hearing is one of the (if not *the*) most frequently employed participatory tools, which can most probably boast the longest history, as well. Some try to counterbalance the process's weaknesses by various means, like developing an agenda in cooperation with stakeholders, employing an independent facilitator or, most of all, by conducting the public hearing as one of the elements in a longer participatory process (Stern−Fineberg, 1996). A strength of public hearings is that the different views, pieces of information and interests can all come to light, whilst its greatest weakness lies in its inability to address inequalities in power, increase trust or to foster true dialogue. Public hearings are rarely concluded with a consensus or with making a concrete decision, thus it leaves room for the government and the agency to ignore the opinions voiced at the meeting, probably resulting in increased mistrust (Stern−Fineberg, 1996).

The pieces of literature presented so far are mainly grounded in the extensive public participation practice of the Anglo-Saxon countries and in theories drawing upon German social theory. The situation in Hungary, however, also shows characteristics widely different from those described therein. Experience from public participation found its way into the American literature as early as the sixties and seventies. In Hungary, democratic mechanisms could only be used after the regime change. Accordingly, Hungary only has a mere twenty-something years of experience, and in contrast to the bottom-up processes typical for the US, their introduction here was directed from above, owing to the consolidation of Hungarian democracy and, later, to the country's accession to the European Union. All these circumstances have kept Hungary on a path of rapid legislative development, yet experience from practice still indicates substantial problems. Drawing upon the works of the most acknowledged Hungarian authors, the next chapter provides an overview of Hungarian public

participation experience and the peculiarities of the Hungarian setting, with special attention to the unique characteristics of public hearings and referenda held in Hungary.

4. Experience from Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making in Hungary

In Hungary, research into public participation in environmental decision-making is done by both academic institutions and non-governmental organizations. Research publications are, for the most part, case studies (for example Szíjártó 2010, Szántó 2008a, Kiss G., 2005, Baranyi et al., 2004), a significant share of which were authored by social researcher Anna Vári (Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Institute for Sociology). It was the case studies that performed an in-depth analysis of the dispute over the Dorog waste incineration facility, one of the first conflicts to surface during the period directly preceding the change of regime, that started the ensuing row of Hungarian analyses, and introduced international definitions and experience into Hungarian academic discourse and practice (Faragó−Vári−Vecsenyi, 1990). During the somewhat more than two decades that have passed, studies authored or co-authored by Anna Vári have analyzed the conflicts arising and the public participation experience derived from the construction of motorways (Vári, 1994) and power stations (Vári, 1997b and 2003), the management of nuclear waste (Vári−Ferencz, 2006, Vári, 1996 and 2009), the cyanide spill into the river Tisza (Vári et al., 2003), and the introduction of the Water Framework Directive (Vári et al., 2008). One of the environmental conflicts of the highest caliber and the greatest political significance around the time of the regime change was the case of the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Waterworks (Fleisher, 1992), the international aftereffects of which are still on the agenda. Case studies were prepared about our twenty-year experience with radioactive waste storage (Szíjártó, 2010), the siting of a battery recycling plant (Szántó, 2008a), and that of cement facilities (Szántó, 2008c) and a regional waste management facility (Kiss G., 2005 and 2006, and Baranyi et al., 2004).

An in-depth analysis of environmental conflicts in Hungary is provided by Viktória Szirmai in her book from 1999. In addition to the history of the individual conflicts, she also explores the interests and interest groups beyond them. The later studies of Szirmai et al. analyze public participation in urban development (Szépvölgyi–Szirmai, 2007a and 2007b) and explore the actors of public participation processes in

environmental matters and their interests (Szirmai et al., 2005). Richárd Szántó (2008b) completed an analysis of a specific type of environmental dispute, namely siting conflicts.

From amongst the comprehensive studies on experience from public participation, note must be taken of the historical overview by Anna Vári (1997a) and the work of Györgyi Bela et al. (2003) This latter study, providing a detailed analysis of practical experience from public participation in Hungary based on the opinions of the actors engaged in this field (scientists, civilians, officials), was prepared by Györgyi Bela, György Pataki and Ágnes Valené Kelemen in 2003. Their interviews with the experts outline the most important dimensions and problems of the Hungarian practice.

A review of the literature on public participation would definitely be incomplete without the works published by non-governmental organizations. Even though they are not academic papers, what they phrase are still very important bits of practical experience, and they assist in the implementation of participatory processes. The works I would like to highlight are those of EMLA (Environmental Management and Law Association) (Fülöp, 2002 and 2005, Baranyi et al., 2004), the practical handbooks of REC (Regional Environmental Center) (Fülöp, 2002 and Tóthné Nagy, 1994) and the studies of Védegylet (Kajner, 2004).

The recently published book of Pataki et al. (2011) is the result of cooperation between the academic world and NGOs, and comprises, beyond relevant scientific findings, the description of several civil initiatives and the experience therefrom.

4.1 Legislative Framework

In the more than twenty years since the change of regime, Hungary witnessed public participation in decision-making emerge along with the establishment of a democratic framework. Vári (1997a) provides a comprehensive overview of the development of public participation. She outlines that in the eighties, environmentalism played an important role in the emergence of civil movements, and that certain environmental cases offered an opportunity to protest against the regime. Most of this political load evaporated after the regime change, and environmental protection also got out of the limelight afterwards. The other factor that gave a significant boost to the development of public participation in Hungary

was the country's accession to the European Union. The legislation transposed during and after the accession, the access to convergence funds and the related tender conditions all brought about changes. As also emphasized by the majority of sources (Bela et al., 2003), Hungary's legislative environment has been supportive of the emergence and development of public participation ever since the regime change. Therefore I will now briefly present how the legislation determines the present practice of public participation in environmental decision-making.

The rights ensuring public participation in environmental matters are generally associated with the Aarhus Convention, which warrants three fundamental rights – (1) public access to information about the environment, (2) public participation in decision-making, (3) access to justice –, complemented by capacity building activities. These are the principles that pervade several domains of Hungarian legislation, as well. It is not only environmental regulations that comprise guarantees for public participation, but in more general terms, they are part of the constitutional rights, the Privacy Act, laws on spatial development, and the Local Government Act. There are several handbooks and guides to the labyrinth of Hungarian legislation prepared by various NGOs (Tóthné Nagy, 1994, Magyar et al., 1997), which give a detailed account of the regulations and the application of law to cases in this domain, therefore I will refrain from discussing these in detail and rather confine to the most important features of the legal environment and their evaluation (for more details see Fülöp, 2002).

The „environmental democracy survey", which was conducted by EMLA Environmental Management and Law Association in 2001 and repeated in 2004 (F. Nagy et al., 2002 and Fülöp, 2005), examined the legislation pertaining to public participation and its application in practice. Though the methodology drew some criticism even from the editors themselves, the findings still infer several conclusions of great import. The survey used the TAI (The Access Initiative) Assessment Method, and on both occasions it was found that the quality of the Hungarian legislation itself on public participation exceeds that of its practical implementation, and what is more, in some areas the creation of the legislative framework was completed to an exceptionally high standard. The methodology assesses the three pillars of participation, plus the related capacity building efforts.

Concerning access to information it seems justified to say that „user-friendly" environmental information is practically nonexistent, and online accessibility even

more so (the use of the internet in public participation is also hindered by challenges on the user side, as already pointed out by other research findings, see Vári, 2008). Moreover, I would like to underline that they found corporate environmental information to be particularly hard to access and of a low standard. It is not only the practice of public participation in decision-making that appears to be falling behind, but the provisions pertaining to public involvement of the public administration regulations relevant to environmental protection are not without deficiencies, either. Considering the practice, the most problematic issue is the timing of notifications (other sources voiced the same opinion, e.g. Bela et al., 2003). Clearly apparent is, furthermore, that marginalized social and economic groups remain left out of the decision-making process altogether, they are not even notified of the opportunity to participate. These results are in line with the findings of Szirmai et al. (2005) According to the analysis, the appeal procedures and remedies secured by the legislative framework sound very promising. Yet in practice, seeking remedy by appeal often turns out not to be a viable solution due to protracted procedures, and judges' attitude and limited knowledge in the field. Not infrequently, the investment is completed and the facility already operating by the time the appeal procedures are concluded. (This is also evinced by other legal cases, see Szilágyi, 2009.) One of the areas where research results indicate the most severe deficiencies is the practice of capacity building: hardly any effort is made to equip government officials and bodies with the necessary knowledge (see Boda−Jávor, 2011 for more on the topic). Even though the opportunities set out in the regulations would theoretically be more than satisfactory under this aspect, as well.

Other pieces of the literature confirm these findings (Bela et al., 2003). Experts' opinions coincide with the conclusion that the legislative conditions of public participation are in place, what is more, the general rules constituting the legal foundations of participation represent an expressly high standard, yet the practice always lags behind, albeit to a varying extent. Generally speaking, environmental policy is more supportive of public participation than other policy areas, therefore it is this field the environmental regulation and the practice of which can be considered outstanding (Bela et al., 2003). „It is not an overstatement to say that environmental protection has become a key area of democratic practice, yet it is undeniable, too, that it is this very area where the democratic rules of the game are the most elaborate (their functioning being a completely different matter)." (Fodor, 2006, p. 62) Also

the creation of the post of Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations was by all means a forward-looking measure, even though the present framework of the institution definitely represents a step backwards from the work the Office of the Ombudsman had been doing previously.

In the present practice of Hungary, public participation is not a bottom-up process, but one that has been and is shaped by legislation. Thanks to the international conventions and Hungary's integration into the European Union, the legal framework had been established first, and then followed by the practice, apart from a few exceptions. While the United States is characterized by bottom-up organization, participation tends to be initiated from above in Germany, as well (Vágvölgyi, 1994). Which is also where most of the criticism of the legislative framework stems from. The practice, not being initiatory in character, is bound to lag behind legislation, and participants generally exhibit a lack of initiative. That makes it easy to blame legislators for not having regulated the rules of the procedures to sufficient detail. Experts deem the legislative framework and the provisions stipulated in the underlying statutes to be sufficient and appropriate for the most part, whereas they claim the rules pertaining to implementation to be incomplete or lacking in detail, and call attention to there being a discrepancy between the application and the spirit of the laws concerned (Bela et al., 2003). Because of which the law is incapable of ensuring wide public participation in decision-making (Szirmai et al., 2005). If, namely, those who apply the law wish to find an excuse for avoiding their obligation to involve the public, then they will certainly be able to find a way to turn participation into a mere formality while still complying with the letter of the law. Another criticism is the lack of adequate sanctions, the inability of the legal environment to ensure the selection of the proper participatory mechanism, an adequate means of notification, and the involvement of the public at the appropriate stage of the decision-shaping and decision-making process (Bela et al., 2003). In practice the rights of NGOs, as well, allow for a low level of participation only by granting no veto power, but a right to participate and advisory power only (Bela et al., 2003, Szirmai et al., 2005).

Though not a legal requirement in the literal sense, but the need to comply with tender conditions, which require – or at least prefer – the public to be involved, does constitute a certain obligation in the areas co-funded by the EU (Szirmai et al., 2005, Kiss G., 2005). Thus it can be concluded that besides the unique historical

background, international conventions and the country's accession to the European Union also had a significant influence on the evolution of public participation in environmental decision-making in Hungary. Relevant examples can be found in the field of waste management (Baranyi et al., 2004), as well as hydrology (Vári et al., 2008).

4.2 Actors

The actors of participatory processes have different opportunities and competences. Below I will give an overview of the usual attitude and the experience of the most important actors.

The agency usually strives to deliver the required minimum, turning public participation into a formality. The ideal of participation does not fit into bureaucracy's system of institutions. Government bodies need to change their attitude. They accept the necessity of participation, but they would rather keep its level and extent very low, also in terms of who gets involved (Szirmai et al., 2005). They listen to people's opinions, but information flow is generally one-way, they are not familiar with any participatory tools, they do not incorporate the opinions. The culture of public participation is missing altogether. Moreover, „it is still very rare for a decision-maker to look upon the population as a real partner" (Vári, 1997a, p. 294), a view Vári had first written down in 1997 and then repeated in 2003 (2003, p. 440). Thus, according to Vári, nothing had changed in this respect during the time between the publication of the two papers.

The most recent research results (Boda−Jávor, 2011) from Hungary suggest that agency staff basically display a positive attitude towards the institution itself of public participation. Its implementation as part of their job, however, is regarded as a time-consuming extra duty. They are badly informed about both the choice of participatory tools and the potential advantages that the agency might gain. Interestingly, it was the officials with a wider experience in the field that had more favorable views with regard to participation. These findings underline that government bodies are missing the capacities that the application of public participation tools would necessitate, even though their attitude appears to be supportive, to a certain degree. That is, capacity building deficiencies are not unique to NGOs or the public – government bodies are affected just as much. Hungarian society has been detected to make hardly any progress in the learning process.

The following quotation, taken from the website of the National Development Office (in Hungarian: Nemzeti Fejlesztési Hivatal or NFH) is a good (or maybe I should write sad) illustration of the attitude government bodies have. The title of the study implies that this document is meant to inform the bodies (municipalities) implementing the various – among others: waste management – projects financed by the Cohesion Fund on the „Information and Publicity Requirements for Cohesion Fund Projects" (NFH, 2005, p. 36).

> „In identifying the target groups, special attention needs to be given to environmental non-governmental organizations. These organizations seem inclined to organize events seemingly militant in nature, strive to cause a stir, and to use the press, always hungry for the unusual, to influence the public in their own favor. For some reason or other, some green organizations think they can do the most for a clean, healthy and beautiful environment by creating some sort of ideal natural society, and by realizing that goal even against the will of the majority. They would probably be more successful if they offered useful knowledge and practically feasible solutions to the environmental problems of our modernized world. Informing them is inevitable for the success of our programs, yet the their reception of the projects will still vary according to the character and the „temper" of the individual organizations. It is a possibility that certain NGOs (like some of the patients' societies in health care) will represent the interests of specific investors or operators, therefore the neutralization of their actions may become a recurring topic in risk management."

The public is characterized by a loss of trust, because for a very long period before the regime change, they had not been allowed to represent their interests and opinions, and since then, they have become disillusioned with politics. They trust neither political leaders nor experts, who are usually commissioned by the investor, and they are distrustful of corporations and even of government bodies (Vári, 1994, Szántó, 2008). In such an atmosphere, it is hardly a surprise if a decision-making process meets public resistance.

According to some researches (Szépvölgyi−Szirmai, 2007b), it is this distrust that is reflected in the scope of tools used by the public to enforce its interests. The tool deemed the most efficient by the urban population surveyed was the seeking of

individual responses, which indicates the underdevelopment of community-based interest enforcement methods. Accordingly, the public fails to take advantage of the civilian institutions a constitutional democracy offers, which is proof for the lack of a base for NGOs. Moreover, the public thinks that it is local political leaders and foreign investors the needs of whom are given the most weight in local decision-making, with the needs of the public and the individuals ranking last (Szépvölgyi−Szirmai, 2007b). Another questionnaire survey evinced that the institutionalization of methods of conciliation is weak (Szépvölgyi−Szirmai, 2007a). From amongst the local actors, it is the population and the municipalities that are linked by the highest number of institutionalized methods of conciliation, partly because this area is regulated (e.g. public hearings), and partly because this is what local political interest necessitates. Notwithstanding the above, non-institutionalized relations are rather strong, for example between local economic actors and municipalities. It seems probable that non-institutionalized forms of economic influence have a greater impact on decisions than institutionalized methods of seeking public opinion do (Szépvölgyi−Szirmai, 2007a, p. 83).

Some opine that environmental **non-governmental organizations** exhibit a high level of activity (Bela et al., 2003, p. 70), which, among others, is the reason why emphasis on public participation is greater in cases related to environmental matters. In Hungary, NGOs have an important role in public engagement. On the one hand, they may have a role in information provision, and a significant one at that, considering the public's general lack of information (Kiss G., 2006). On the other hand, they might as well assume the role of mediator or a representative of interests (Szirmai et al., 2005). The assumption of these roles may however be hindered by the factors mentioned in our overview of relevant legislation. NGOs, even if granted the opportunity to give their opinion on a given matter, are often unable to enforce their interests, which implies the lack of a social base, the existence of a gap between NGOs and the population, and the immaturity of public participation as an institution (Szépvölgyi−Szirmai, 2007b). A particularly severe problem of the civilian sphere, as repeatedly pointed out by Szirmai (1999 and Szirmai et al., 2005) is the lack of a social base – the lack of a broad middle class, which could provide the base for NGOs intellectually as well as financially.

It is oftentimes the struggle of various **enterprises** for the environmental market that stands behind an environmental conflict (Lányi−Persányi, 1993). A large portion of environmental / waste management investments, like setting up a landfill, practically constitute the provision of a public service that requires that the enterprise be operated under some sort of control or influence from government bodies (municipalities). The promoter is often the municipality itself or an organization co-owned by the municipality, and thus investor interests and public authority tasks become interwoven. Empirical research yielded interesting findings concerning people's views about the investor (Lányi, 2000). Participants, namely, do not really hold an image of the entrepreneur, who remains a faceless, almost invisible actor, and does not even have direct contact with the public. The public rather emphasize the roles of the municipality, the government and the authorities. Which is most probably not unrelated to the promoter often not communicating directly with the community, but the decision-makers of the municipality only (Vári, 2003).

4.3 Levels of Participation in the Hungarian Practice

Among the most serious problems with the situation in Hungary, experts (e.g. Lányi, 2001 and Bela et al., 2003) also mention that involvement only takes place in the final stages of the decision-making process, when there are no real decision opportunities or alternatives left. It is usually ready-made plans that they have to decide on. Thus participation does not reach, or only very rarely reaches, the level that would potentially include joint planning work (see the introduction of VKI, Vári et al., 2008). The level of participation does not usually reach beyond informing, listening to opinions and, sometimes, integrating the opinions into the decision, though typically without any substantial impact on the decision, but some minor influence on the particulars of implementation or the compensation offered. Involvement in decision-making often takes the form of veto power, insofar as the public may reject a project by way of a referendum, or the municipalities might object to it, or it may fail to be implemented as a consequence of civic initiatives and protests. We must not, however, regard this level as substantial participation, as there is no joint decision-making, no other alternative is chosen.

Because of the deficiencies public participation suffers from, a great deal of decision situations generate a conflict among the stakeholders. According to Lányi (2000), the

emergence and the escalation of the conflict often stems from the broad layers of society only getting to know about the investment, their opinion only being sought when there are no alternatives any more, and thus the actors are on an inescapable path, they do not actually have a choice. This is a sort of inverse proportionality between the breadth of social discourse and the room for maneuver left. In such a situation, protesting green NGOs may indeed appear to be laying about blindly, for „who would be ready to forego tangible advantages for the sake of hazy concerns and dubious prognoses?" (Lányi, 2000, p. 9) Which is, also, what gives rise to the perception that environmental interests can only be enforced at the cost of other, more important interests. In such cases, stakeholders do not typically have any other means but to thwart the project, which often leads to a situation that is unfavorable for most of the parties affected (Vári, 1997a). This was mentioned by a number of sources (Vári, 1997a, Szirmai, 1999, Lányi, 2001) as one of the problems of green NGOs. If and when, namely, the public only gets involved in the final stage of decision-making with only one single alternative left, greens have no other choice but to halt the investment, which then again may harm their public support.

Szántó (2008c) found that the last ten years have seen corporations' communication in siting conflicts become more open and more professional. Compensation mechanisms have become more refined, as well. Yet participation exercises still remain on the level of communication, consultation or compensation, and do not reach any further.

Let us now review the Hungarian practice, advancing along the rungs of the ladder of participation. The two lowermost rungs (therapy and manipulation) are defined as non-participation and will hence be omitted. We will commence with the grades of partial participation instead, and proceed upwards.

4.3.1 Informing

Szíjártó's (1998) concise summary of the results of the Hungarian researches analyzing environmental conflicts from the eighties and nineties was that the primary problem had been the lack of information provision. „The local conflicts would not have arisen if the local population, the society had possessed sufficient information about the location, the circumstances and the conditions of the siting" (p. 32). With respect to the informing process, Hungarian practitioners often failed to consider that involving engineering professionals is not enough, communication experts need to be

called in, as well. In Hungary, however, this typically only happened after the conflicts had already developed and escalated (Vári, 1994). A frequent communication deficiency is that the majority of stakeholders only become aware of the investment through the media, the incentives for their presence at public meetings are insufficient (Vári, 2003). Oftentimes, the investor does not negotiate with the community itself, but its opinion-forming elite – the mayor, for instance – only (Vári, 2003). Concerning promoters' attitude towards informing, a common opinion is that „promoters tend to consider information provision a necessary bad, and public remarks and requests a sort of nagging" (Kajner, 2004, p. 140).

Public participation processes are often characterized by a kind of communication overdose, insofar as advocates and opponents of the decision both start a communication campaign, and strive to convince the population of whatever is in the interest of the party in question. The result is a plethora of withheld information, overstatements and false truths (Szántó, 2008c, Baranyi et al., 2004). Accusations and personalities are not unusual, either (Szántó, 2008c). If the case is about the siting of a state-owned facility, however, information provision is often manifested in the exact opposite way, that is, a lack of information (Baranyi et al., 2004). Withholding the exact technical parameters of a facility would not at all be unprecedented, either (Vári, 1997b and 2003, Szántó, 2008a).

The most frequently used communication tools are:

- press coverage
- study trips, company visits
- events
- information hotline, information center
- exhibitions.

Selecting the right tools for informing the public may be critical to the entire communication process. Experience and surveys both indicate that a significant portion of the Hungarian population rely on local newspapers and local television channels as sources of information, and that the internet has not yet become a viable communication channel in Hungary (Szirmai, 2007 and Vári, 2008). On the one hand, interest groups are typically not regular users of the internet and, on the other

hand, electronic mail is not accepted as an official means of communication (Vári et al., 2008). Poor accessibility by the public is not the only problem with online sources though, they tend to be badly neglected by the authorities or other information providers (corporations), as well (Fülöp, 2005). Recent years have witnessed a constant improvement in internet penetration due to the expansion of access options and the spreading of mobile devices. Data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office also reflect these trends. In spite of the expansion, the share of those actively using the internet in the 16 to 74 age group is a mere 62 percent (KSH, 2011). In 2006 and 2007, this same ratio amounted to 45 percent and 52 percent, respectively (KSH, 2008). Despite the changes mentioned above, certain groups of society still remain completely excluded from the circle of internet users (Varga, 2011).

4.3.2 Consultation

Public hearings are an institutionalized and legally regulated tool of public consultation. The public hearing is, on the one hand, a statutory requirement for all Environmental Impact Assessment procedures and, on the other hand, a mandatory consultative element of municipalities' activities in a variety of cases.

Experts' opinions on the role of public hearings are, however, contradictory (Bela et al., 2003). The contradiction resides in the potential that a public hearing could actually be an efficient tool if it was organized in the proper way. The other group suggests that this is not possible at all. The two opinions are in agreement that the agency typically lacks the competence to properly conduct a public hearing. And to top it off, the event is often organized in a way to keep people away (by the form of notification and/or time chosen), and not to give people an opportunity to voice their opinions (e.g. no time left because of the experts' presentations). There are counter-examples, but it all depends on the attitude of the agency. It is promising however that experience has shown some government bodies to consistently exhibit a positive attitude and a willingness to show initiative. Which does not, however, reach beyond the legal requirements (Bela et al., 2003). For some, experience gave rise to the doubt (Szántó, 2008c) whether public hearings are an appropriate vehicle of information provision and for presenting opposing arguments. The „often intense

atmosphere and the disruptions make it practically impossible to listen to the arguments of the other side, to engage in a meaningful exchange of views" (p. 127).

4.3.3 Placation / Compensation

Compensation has a significant role in the Hungarian practice of environmental decision-making. Experience has shown that the population rejects the compensation offer whenever they deem the risks associated with the facility to be too high or if they are not convinced that the technology employed is safe (Vári, 1994). One must proceed with care in selecting the community to be compensated, as well: it may not be enough to only compensate the municipality that has administrative authority over the facility, as other municipalities in the vicinity might be affected by the effects of the facility just as much. Compensation, therefore, can only be efficient on a regional level (Szirmai, 1996).

Compensation is often used as a means of convincing the population of the affected municipalities, particularly because a very large proportion of the local governments in Hungary are in a permanent state of financial difficulty. This is also related to location choice, most of all concerning waste management investments (Szántó, 2008a): waste disposal facilities are liable to be set up in low-income, low-population localities. Underprivileged municipalities with high unemployment rates, low incomes and local governments short of funds are generally eager to welcome such projects on account of the compensation offered and the economic advantages expected.

The problem with compensation offers in the Hungarian practice is, however, that promoters' conception of the circle of those to be compensated is often wrong. A typical siting conflict is when the municipality that has administrative authority over and hence expects tangible financial benefits from the facility supports the project, whereas the neighboring localities, which obviously cannot hope for the operation of the facility to yield additional (e.g. tax) revenues for them, but are naturally also affected – sometime even to a higher extent – by the related environmental and health risks, are against the project and their protest finally thwarts the investment. Even though the competent local government indeed has sole discretion in deciding about the facility's license, public protest by the localities affected yet not compensated by the project can be taken for granted, and it may well have a

significant influence on the licensing procedure, as well. This has been a common experience, according to the literature (Szántó, 2008b, Baranyi et al., 2004, Szirmai, 1996). Organizations intending to locate at a given site have, apparently, not yet recognized this and hence, with very few exceptions, fail to take advantage of the various compensation tools. One must not forget, either, that conflicts that have arisen at the level of values cannot be resolved by emphasizing the benefits and relying on technical arguments (Renn, 1992).

4.3.4 Partnership

Based on case studies published in the literature, I will present two examples from the Hungarian practice for the level of partnership: experience from power plant constructions and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Hungarian regulations on the siting and construction of energy facilities stipulate special requirements with regard to the information of the community. First, an expert organization must be commissioned with the task of informing the community and, second, for the purpose of overseeing the community information process, a committee of independent experts (Independent Expert Committee) shall be called into life, which then shall supervise the process and issue a resolution to the authority handling the case. That is, the regulation of this field opts for a tool that involves an advisory body in the siting process, thereby establishing a dual-level guarantee that the information of the community will be conducted in a proper way. As far as the regulation is concerned, the process may even be implemented in a way that qualifies as partnership-level participation. Let us now see whether the practice follows this regulatory intention.

One of the procedures conducted in the nineties was that of the siting of the Litér Secondary Reserve Gas Turbine Power Plant (Vári, 1997b). The process was completed in line with the spirit of the regulations. The promoter ran a professional information campaign, was willing to incorporate people's opinions into its decisions, was flexible about the participatory process and reached an agreement with the population on the compensation to be provided, as well. The Independent Expert Committee worked in a supportive atmosphere, they completed their task in accord with the regulatory intention, and found the information process to have been appropriate. Their supportive proposal was incorporated by the licensing authority

into its decision. The problems formulated in the course of the case were: the delimitation of the area of authority, the identification of stakeholders and the uncertainty of environmental data.

The power plant in Sajószöged was installed at around the same time and following a similar pattern. There, too, the affected municipalities managed to bargain for a compensation (Kajner, 2004). As regards the Algyő and Iharosberény power plants, public protests made the promoters back off of those projects altogether.

By the late nineties, however, processes had already begun to show signs of a different nature. The Ajka power plant project was already smitten by acts of serious maladministration (Vári, 2003). The balance in the composition of the Independent Expert Committee shifted in favor of the representatives of the ministries of economy and energy, which raised serious doubts about the impartiality of their decisions. The community information process was plagued by severe deficiencies, what is more, it was deceptive, and the public hearing was one of the manipulated and meaningless kind. Outside mediation experts' opinion calling attention to these problems was, however, ignored by the Independent Expert Committee, which therefore ruled that the community information process had been appropriate. Thus in this case, the regulations' spirit aiming at a partnership between the parties was not realized, and what is more, its place was taken by gross deception and manipulation. Whereas to an outsider, the outcome might still have appeared as the result of an appropriate process, during which the regulations had been adhered to, as certified by an independent supervisory body. In reality, however, those with an economic interest openly took advantage of their position of power, and gained the „support" required to be issued a license by way of deception, in a participatory process that was, as a matter of fact, a mere formality. Experience thus shows that with time, processes have shifted towards apparent partnership and manipulation.

A further lesson from these cases was that local governments either did not exercise their right to participate in the committees or their participation was largely influenced by the municipality's dependence on some large-scale investor or other, which rendered them incapable of properly representing their people's interests (Kajner, 2004).

Our second example for the level of partnership is the preparation of the drainage basin management plans required for the implementation of the Water Framework

Directive, where the affected interest groups also got involved in the planning activities (Vári et al., 2008). The sample project was designed and run by a team of communication professionals and sociologists. The first step was a questionnaire survey, based on the results of which they identified the tools to be employed. The population itself was not directly involved at any time during the project, instead there were multiple stages of intensive consultation sessions with the affected interest groups. The first stage featured fora to reveal those problems and areas to be developed that stakeholders considered most important. To do so, participants were asked to rank the problems. Based on that, experts in interactive cooperation with a smaller group of participants formulated possible action alternatives. The individual measures were evaluated by the planners, and the results were then presented at a subsequent series of fora, where participants could evaluate the measures themselves. Based on the results of these fora, the planners drew up the package of measures they then submitted to the decision-makers for authorization. The identification of stakeholders was performed with due care. Interest groups were involved in multiple stages of the planning process, right from the beginning. Throughout the process, the actors strived for mutual dialogue and to incorporate stakeholders' opinions into the plans. So far, the story sounds like a fairy tale, participation indeed reached the partnership level, even though it was not possible to involve the wider public.

The application to the entire territory of the country of the implementation strategy so developed was, however, severely hampered by some factors, thus the way it was actually implemented was fundamentally different from the process detailed above (Varga, 2011). Implementation faced the following difficulties:

1. lack of financial resources
2. delay in planning processes
3. poor PR activity

Because of these reasons, the public engagement process accompanying the preparation of drainage basin management plans comprised substantially fewer elements than the sample project (only one forum instead of three). Due to the delays, social actors did not have sufficient time to give their opinion. The primary means of communication chosen for the project was the internet, a channel the deficiencies of which had been given special emphasis in the results of the sample project (see Vári et al., 2008), which suggested that local newspapers and television channels be used for this purpose. As a consequence, turnout remained far below

what had been expected. Planners failed to take into account all the opinions received, which led to a wave of indignation and mistrust from the participants (Varga, 2011).

The participatory tools employed across the country during the implementation of the Water Framework Directive were, thus, very different from those seen in the sample project, which raised serious doubts about their efficiency. The conclusions drawn on the basis of the sample project were disregarded, which may at least partly be attributed to the lack of funds and time. Which is, however, not the case with the was just another project that had turned into a consultation, instead of a partnership, by the time it was realized. The participatory process met the EU requirements even so, but the conclusion can still be drawn that this case, as well, transformed the regulations into a mere formality, devoid of all substantial meaning. Thus participants' complaint that the resources committed to the participatory process did not yield the desired results seems to have been justified.

4.3.5 Delegated Power / Decision Authority

A tool that may qualify as representing this level of participation is the referendum, quite common in the Hungarian practice, especially considering waste management cases. At the time of writing this thesis, local referenda are regulated by Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments[15]. The Act distinguishes between the following types of local referenda: mandatory and discretionary (optional) referenda[16].

Discretionary referendum: upon an initiative by at least one quarter of the municipal representatives or a committee of the body of representatives or the managing body of a local association, the body of representatives may resolve to call a local referendum (Section 47 subsection (1)). The body of representatives may order a local referendum in matters falling within the jurisdiction of the body of representatives or to confirm a municipal decree (Section 46 subsection (3)). Mandatory referendum: the body of representatives must call a local referendum if it has been initiated by the number of electors laid down in its municipal decree, which

[15] Even though the new Local Government Act (Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on the Local Governments of Hungary) went into effect on 1 January 2013, the provisions pertaining to local referenda have not changed.

[16] Source: http://www.valasztas.hu/hu/ovi/25/25_2_3.html accessed on 29 March 2012 and Act LXV of 1990 on Local Governments

must not be less than 10 percent, nor more than 25 percent of the electorate (Section 47 subsection (2)). Information about the required number of initiating electors shall be provided by the local/regional elections office. In a village with a population of less than five hundred, the body of representatives may delegate the local referendum to the competence of the village meeting, on the condition that the decision of the village meeting only qualifies as a local referendum decision if more than half of the electors attend the village meeting (Section 47 subsection 4).

As we have already mentioned previously, in subchapter 3.4.3, the decision authority delegated by way of a referendum might be questionable depending on the circumstances under which the process is conducted. Their authority to formulate the referendum question and to determine the conditions (e.g. time) of the referendum ensures a position of power for those calling the referendum. Which position of power often constitutes, at least in Hungary, a means of trespassing upon the public's rights by being used as a leverage to influence the outcome of the referendum. This influence may take the following forms (Szántó, 2008c):

- the question's formulation is too complicated,
- the question is formulated in a way that implies certain assumptions,
- the question is formulated in a way that implies an opinion,
- the response is deceptive or not unambiguous (a 'yes' response means refusal, a 'no' means support),
- the time the referendum is set to take place may lead to a low turnout.

The outcome of a local referendum is always binding on the body of representatives, which therefore must not make a decision that goes against it or deviates therefrom (Local Government Act, Section 48). No local referendum may be called in respect of the same issue, even if the local referendum was unsuccessful (Local Government Act, Section 48). The rule does not however apply to neighboring municipalities, that is, the opinion of the population of one municipality is by no means binding on the body of representatives of a neighboring locality. And after the one year period stipulated in the Act has passed, a new referendum may be called on the very same issue, in the very same municipality. If the referendum is unsuccessful, the body of representatives may decide on the matter put to the referendum. A local referendum

is valid if more than half of the electors have cast a vote, and successful if more than half of the voters have provided the same answer to the question asked.

As a result of the application of this regulation, in some cases the very same question was again put to a referendum after the required period of one year had passed (e.g. the waste disposal facility in Királyszentistván or the cement plant in Bükkösd). Sometimes, as many as three referenda were held on the same matter. It is a fact that such series of referenda were always concluded with an outcome in favor of the project in question, in spite of the initial refusal. In relation to which issue Szántó poses the question whether „the insistent repetition of referenda necessarily leads to the strengthening of the faction in support of and the weakening of those against the facility" (Szántó, 2008c, p. 149).

The manipulation of the circumstances and the „habit" of repeating the ballots may both contribute to a significant share of local referenda on environmental matters being invalid. Voter turnout tends to be higher for referenda that were initiated by the citizens themselves (Nagy−Tamás, 2004).

According to the Local Government Act, anyone who is eligible to vote in the municipal elections may take part in a local popular initiative (Section 45). In the case examined by Szántó (2008c), a remarkably high number of people had registered themselves as permanent residents of the municipality in question right before the ballot. The referendum is usually ordered by the body of representatives of the municipality that will have administrative authority over the facility. Whereas the circle of affected people and municipalities may be much wider. Yet a referendum in some neighboring municipality is bound to be in vain, since the outcome is not binding on the body of representatives of any other municipality than the one in which the ballot was held. Which draws attention to a contradiction between the legislation and experience from practice. After all, stakeholders tend to be defined as those living in the vicinity of the site, those who would enjoy or suffer the effects of the facility. Vicinity, however, relates to spatial distance, and not some administrative unit (English et al., 1993).

Szántó (2008c) also notes that in the cement industry siting cases he examined, the actors surveyed did not deem the referendum to have been the appropriate decision-making tool (p. 150). The reasons they named included the poor information of the population, and that they believed the voters to have been laymen, the information to

have been manipulated and the decision of the public to have been made on emotional grounds.

4.3.6 Citizen Control

I did not manage to find any examples for full citizen control among Hungarian environmental decisions-making cases.

4.4 Experience from Public Participation

In Hungary, the history of public engagement as an institution dates back more than twenty years. This period has proved to be too short for the actors – the people, authorities, NGOs and corporations – to make sufficient progress along the learning path of democracy. To learn democracy. To learn their rights and obligations. To learn the tools they can use to ensure public engagement. To learn the potential advantages of substantial public involvement in decision-making. What they have, in contrast, managed to master is the ability to strip participatory processes of all substantial meaning, to exclude the public from actual decision-making while still complying with the law, to turn well-functioning institutions into something that is inefficient and loaded with politics, to manipulate the processes and to deceive their participants. And the people, as well, have learnt that they still must not trust corporations – nor authorities or experts, for that matter. If and when they did begin to trust, and a participatory process turned out to be successful in the sense that the participants, too, were satisfied, then some sort of change suddenly rendered it impossible to keep using it. The public have also learnt how to thwart a project even if no one bothers to inform them or to ask for their opinion. And non-governmental organizations, as well, have learnt to make the absolute most out of the opportunities they are granted by the law.

What neither of them has succeeded in are: trusting the others, being open and drawing upon their experience to be even more enthusiastic and even more efficient the next time. There are some, nevertheless, who have learnt a lot during these two decades: they are the academic researchers, for whom the case studies constituted an

abundance of research opportunities. And there still is a lot to be experienced with respect to the development of public participation in Hungary.

5. Background and Methodology of the Empirical Research

5.1 Choice of Topic and Research Questions

Why did I choose waste management related participatory processes as my area of focus?

Firstly, it was the case of the Pest county regional waste disposal facility that my earlier research activities concerning public participation were centered around. The analysis of this case study raised a number of unanswered questions, for example whether the participatory tool employed in this very case, the referendum, is indeed an adequate and efficient means of public participation in waste management decisions.

Secondly, several authors (Szántó, 2008a, Szirmai, 1996, Lányi−Persányi, 1993) note that one of, if not the, largest segments of environmental conflicts in Hungary is that of waste management related siting conflicts. And public participation may well be one of the most important tools for preventing and resolving conflicts.

Thirdly, it is clearly reflected in statistical data that the last ten years have seen significant changes in waste management infrastructure. The system of landfills is undergoing a transformation, thus instead of the 2667 landfill sites listed in 1999 (Phare–KvVM, 2008), there are now 72 such facilities in operation, all of them in compliance with the relevant regulations (Köztisztasági Egyesülés, 2010). By virtue of our accession to the European Union, the required legislation on wastes was developed in the course of the 2000s. Moreover, pre-accession (ISPA) grants and the Cohesion Fund, meant to assist in meeting the pledges agreed at the accession negotiations, also supplied significant financial resources for the modernization of our waste management infrastructure. It was not only the modernization of landfills and the recultivation of former landfills that were promoted, but recycling, an approach that ranks higher among waste management priorities, as well. Similarly, the introduction of separate waste collection and the reduction of the proportion of biologically degradable organic waste that gets deposited in landfills were big steps forward.

The current waste regime in Hungary according to Gille (2007) concept is based on end-of-pipe technologies. In the time of EU accession the development of waste

management system was built on these technologies. Reducing waste as the primary priority of waste management legislation is not in the focus of the environmental policy in Hungary. Although recycling and separate waste collection has bigger emphasis in the public discourse.

All these changes have made an impact on society, as well. Part of that is the application of public participation tools in the siting of waste management facilities, which, in my opinion, was also influenced by the requirements set for the projects that made use of EU funds. Certain papers from the literature also seem to suggest so (Szirmai, 2005).

Why did I opt for public hearings and referenda as my subject of analysis?

As I have already explained in earlier chapters, the literature suggests that, from a practical point of view, both of these mechanisms are full of controversies. Still, they are the two most frequently employed tools in the Hungarian practice. With regard to public hearings, other authors have already pointed out the lack of in-depth analyses (Webler−Renn, 1995 and Stern−Fineberg, 1996). And the reason why referenda became a focus topic was that, as also underlined by Szántó (2008c, p. 90), „the proportion of decisions made by referendum is particularly high among waste management related cases".

What is the purpose of the analysis?

The purpose of the analysis is to evaluate the two aforementioned tools with respect to the Hungarian practice of waste management related decision-making. The goal is to find out

1. how efficient, from a participant perspective, public hearings and referenda are in their function as public participation tools,
2. whether the outcomes of such processes have an influence on the decisions made,
3. how satisfied participants are with the results of the decisions and the quality of the processes themselves.

The literature also provides some guidance concerning effectiveness. The public's objections being voiced at a public hearing may push decision-makers towards a refusal decision (Rosener, 1981, Chess–Purcell, 1999). Experience from Hungary, as well, shows that public protest has prevented implementation in about 40 percent of

all siting cases (Szántó 2008c). Analyses of this aspect in the literature are, however, scarce, and thus a more thorough examination of the issue seems justified.

As I have demonstrated earlier, the evaluation of participatory processes in the international literature comprises criteria that assess the success of the process based on participants' opinions (Tuler−Webler, 1999, Webler et al., 2001). These researches are based on the idea that a participatory process can only be successful if its participants deem it to be such. Others wish to underline (Rowe et al., 2004) that the opinion of the financer must not be left out of consideration, either, when assessing the efficiency of a participatory tool.

In Hungary, no research has been done so far into how satisfied the stakeholders, and the local population in particular, were with the public engagement process, and how they evaluated it in retrospect. In the international literature, it is the in-depth analysis of public hearings that exhibits certain deficiencies, and the participant evaluation of these tools has not yet been dealt with, either.

Based on what I have presented so far, the questions I set out to answer by analyzing public hearings that were held in connection with waste management facilities were as follows:

1. What was the turnout?
2. What was the composition of the participants like?
3. What interest groups were present?
4. How did the knowledge of the population change in the course of the period examined?
5. How were power dynamics reflected in communication?
6. What influence did the opinion of the population have on the final decision?

The other participatory tool my research was targeted at was the referendum. During the period between 1999 and 2012, a total of 38 local referenda were held on matters related to waste management activities (based on Szántó, 2008c and data from the website valasztas.hu). The number of cases is far too low to permit statistical analyses, yet the related experiences raise certain questions, which I undertake to answer in this paper. These are:

1. Did voters, in their own judgment, possess true decision authority in these referenda?
2. Were voters satisfied with the processes?
3. Did voters find their participation to have been fair?
4. Was there an expansion in community members' knowledge on waste management and on the waste issue as a whole?
5. What is the reason for a large share of the referenda held on the matters in question having been invalid?
6. Are the members of the community satisfied with the results of the decisions in retrospect?
7. How did the outcomes of the referenda influence the decisions?

Concerning methodology, I opted for qualitative research methods, namely because, as I have already mentioned in connection with my choice of topic, the in-depth analysis of public hearings is almost completely absent from the literature. Research findings so far either concerned the influence the disapproval of the public had had on the decisions (Rosener, 1981) or attempted to draw conclusions about public hearings by contrasting the type of communication characteristic for such events with the Habermasian ideal speech situation (Kemp, 1985). Given that in-depth analyses of public hearings have been missing almost completely from research so far, exploratory research is necessary, and qualitative methods may be a suitable means to that end. Furthermore, the information the sources available to me can provide are of the hard-to-quantify type to begin with. The uncertainties in the research process necessitate flexibility in the application of the methodology, which is also a quality that only qualitative research techniques possess (Héra–Ligeti, 2006).

I intend to answer my research questions by analyzing a case using qualitative methods. The reason why it is just this one case is that this was the only waste management related referendum held during the research period. In the absence of previous research into the topic and the literature lacking empirical experience about the public's attitudes with respect to referenda, my research is bound to be of exploratory nature. In the research project, I monitored, from beginning to end, the process of a referendum called as part of a waste management decision-making procedure, and explored the population's opinions on a case study basis, employing multiple types of data collection techniques.

The research plan originally devised two separate processes for the observation and analysis of public hearings vs. that of the referendum. In the course of the actual research process, however, it occurred that it would be reasonable to also include in the same examination, in addition to the waste ballot itself, the public hearings to be held in connection with the referendum. This way, the two participatory tools – the public hearing and the referendum – could be studied in a single case study.

I applied a variety of different qualitative methods, which enabled me to do an analysis of a multifaceted nature and an exploration of sufficient depth. This way, the methods complement each other in supporting the validity and reliability of my research results. The analysis of data that were collected using several different methods allows for statements and conclusions to be double-checked and presented from multiple perspectives. My research being a qualitative one, the idea was that I would strive to be flexible in handling any problems arising in the course of the process – and there have been a few such cases, indeed.

The research process will be presented in the next subchapter.

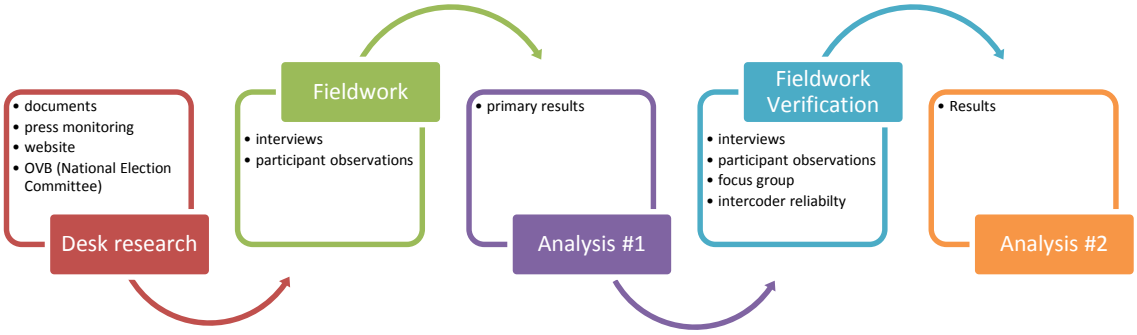
5.2 Structure of the Empirical Research

My research consisted of the following steps:

1. Identifying the case to be examined
2. Desk research: collection of related documents, press monitoring, online sources
3. First phase of fieldwork: conducting semi-structured interviews and participant observation
4. Primary analysis
5. Verification of primary analysis results, expansion of the sample with further interviews and a focus group
6. Final analysis, establishing research results.

The research process comprising the above stages is shown in Figure 8:

Figure 8: Research steps



As also evinced by the figure, I strived to provide for continuous feedback throughout the process and to flexibly match the methods applied with the results. Even the identification of the sample was done in a way that tallied with the phases of theory building. The flexibility that qualitative methods allow had to be applied to the fieldwork, as well, as my field visits repeatedly took unexpected turns (for instance, the public hearing was cancelled or the weather prevented me from leaving the village). Yet all these steps finally led to a grounded theory and reliable results.

5.2.1 Identification of the Case to be Examined

The outcomes and questions of all the local referenda that were held in the country since 1999 are accessible through the website of the National Election Office (http://valasztas.hu/hu/ovi/26/26_2_index.html). From amongst the local referendum questions listed in this database for 2012, there was only one related to waste management matters. The most recent waste related referendum before that was held in January 2009. The three years that had passed between the referendum and the time of my research seemed too long to permit the effective examination of the population's opinion about the ballot. This is how the case study happened to „take place" in Pári, a village where a referendum was held in 2012 about two temporary waste collection sites. Thus the subject of the case study were the referendum held in Pári and the other events related to it (collection of signatures, public hearings,

decisions). The circle of participants was well-defined, as it comprised the inhabitants of the village.

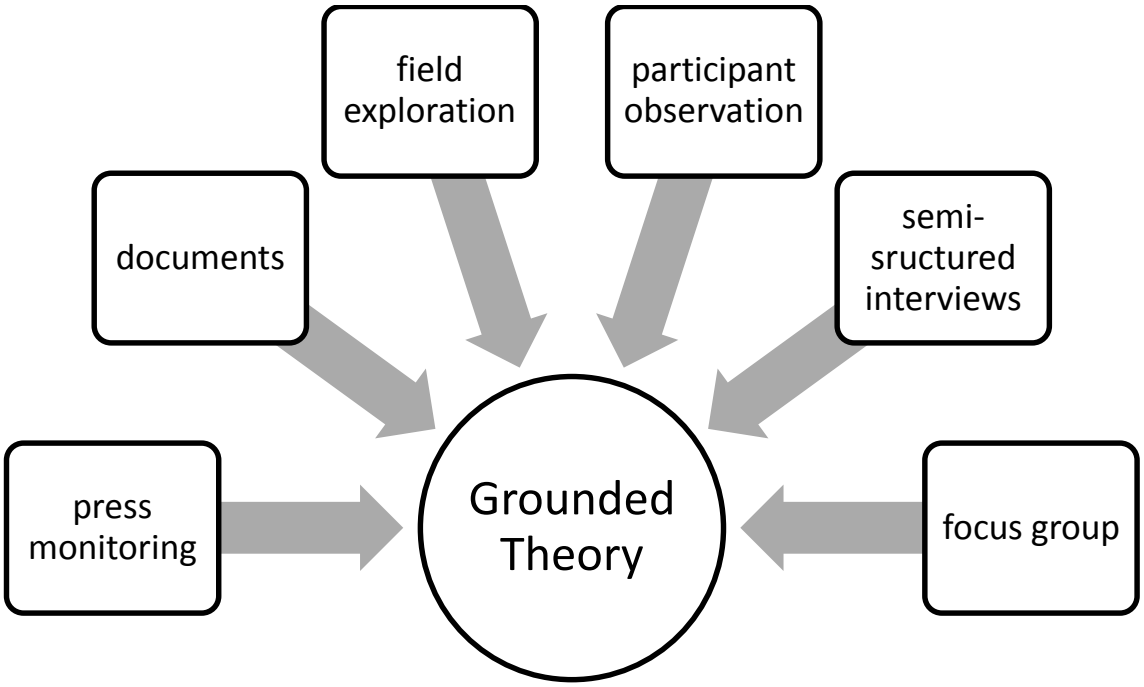
The decision making process included several public hearings, which dealt with the setting up of the waste collection sites, and, upon an initiative by the public, also a referendum. This way, the examination of the two targeted participatory tools (public hearings and referenda), the analysis of the relevant documents and the participant observation of the events could all be performed as part of the same case. Accordingly, and in divergence from the plan, I set out to answer my research questions through the in-depth analysis of one single case, instead of looking into multiple ones. Which solution appeared to offer several advantages. I managed to gather a more thorough understanding of the domain and to develop personal relationships with the residents. Given that my primary aim was to investigate participants' evaluation of these two tools, this arrangement enabled me to examine the question from more than one aspect and to perform an in-depth analysis. The participant observation, the analysis of documents (minutes, press coverage), the interviews and the focus group inquiry could all be conducted on the same subject matter, thus there were multiple „pillars" supporting the research, there were multiple ways to support and verify the results.

The following data collection techniques were used in the project:

1. press monitoring
2. analysis of documents
3. field exploration
4. semi-structured interviews
5. participant observations
6. focus group

Figure 9 shows a summary of this set of methods.

Figure 9: Data collection methods applied in the empirical research



Below, I will discuss the above data collection methods in some more detail.

5.2.2 Press Monitoring

The press monitoring was performed by myself, and covered local newspapers and news items from MTI (the official Hungarian news agency) in the period between December 2011 and December 2012. From amongst the newspapers available online, Tolnai Népújság (approx. „People's Gazette of Tolna County") devoted as many as six articles to the referendum and the events related to it. These local newspaper coverages were my first sources of information about the case. The names of the most important actors in the referendum process and the municipality in general could be found in these articles, as well.

Besides, I also studied the website of the village (www.pari.hu), which painted a straightforward picture of the locality's facilities and qualities, and provided access to the regulations and decrees passed by the municipality, as well. The forum section, as well, contained posts and comments concerning the waste collection sites.

A local NGO published a monthly local magazine titled Ébredés (approx. „Awakening") in the village from April 2008 until September 2009. Its electronic issues are available through the website, as well. The articles and readers' letters published in the magazine granted a glance into the everyday life of the village, and gave me a rough idea about which organizations and events were the more important

ones. The writings gave hints as to who might function as opinion leaders in the village, which information was quite useful in identifying the key informants and my interview subjects.

The referendum itself, its result and the decision made by the body of representatives was, based on releases from MTI, covered by national media in just a few lines, on two occasions altogether (e.g. hvg.hu).

5.2.3 Analysis of Documents

As regards my knowledge of the history and the life of the village, it was my first interview with the mayor, and his thesis (Gere, 2012) that got me started. Another source of historical information was a book (Bordács, 2002) recommended by one of my interviewees that told the story of a family that had been resettled to Pári from the Felvidék (approx. „Upland", a southern region of Slovakia that once belonged to Hungary).

The official and unofficial documents that the town clerk and the mayor made available to me also greatly contributed to the accurate knowledge and reconstruction of the events (minutes of public hearings, referendum reports, leaflets (pro and con), development plan, authority report). Access to these documents ensured that I would be able to verify what I was told by the interviewees.

The review of the public hearing minutes and the conclusions drawn therefrom also meant a valuable contribution to the research analysis.

5.2.4 Participant Observation

The technique of participant observation was applied on four occasions. First was a field exploration, where I was accompanied by a local resident (9 May 2012). Next on my list of field observations was a community event, the grape harvest festival, the experience from which was very useful in identifying potential interview subjects and in observing their community embeddedness (29 September 2012). Furthermore, I had the opportunity to take part in a meeting of the body of municipal representatives (14 March 2013) and a public hearing (20 March 2013). The purpose of this latter two was to acquire personal impressions, as well as to evaluate what had been said and to contrast that with my own experience.

At these community events, I could observe the relationships, groups and roles within the community (Babbie, 2003), because of which participant observation was of vital importance to the various research phases. Some of the observations – those

that served to prepare for and facilitate the interviewing process – were conducted in parallel with the semi-structured interviews, thus they will be presented together, as well. The remaining part of participant observations (at the meeting of the body of representatives and the public hearing), the purpose of which already was to enhance the primary results from the interviews, was completed after the main interviewing phase. These will be detailed, in keeping with the chronological order, in the subchapter following the one on the interviews.

5.2.4.1 Field Exploration

My first opportunity to get to know the area was a walk through the village in the company of a local resident. We visited the two locations designated to accommodate the waste collection sites. The pictures taken of these areas can be found in Appendix 2. Next, we took a short stroll through the village and visited its remarkable sights. We also included the nearby fishpond, vineyards and the cemetery in our walk. My local „guide" told me quite a lot about their everyday lives, which was however neither recorded, nor used in my later analysis, as such a conversation in the course of a participant observation cannot be considered an interview (Héra-Ligeti, 2005). Later, I also conducted a semi-structured interview with this person, whom I had managed to establish a good personal relationship with during the exploration and who, hence, was willing to share with me information on potential key informants. Accordingly, they can be regarded as one of the informants in the field research (Babbie, 2003).

5.2.4.2 Participant Observation at the Grape Harvest Festival

In order to get to know the village better, I went to the one most important annual event of the village, namely the grape harvest festival – also known as the Minimum Festival –, which was held on a day during the interviewing phase. This allowed me to create in my mind a more detailed picture of the village's residents and their customs, as well as to observe my interview subjects in a community environment. Part of the purpose of my participation was to recruit, based on the community relations I would witness, further interview subjects; people who make the impression of holding a key role, of being an opinion leader in the community, of having a broad network of relationships. I also aimed at letting villagers get to know me better in the hope that personal acquaintance and trust would promote my further efforts.

My experience from the participant observation was that the personal relations linking various people, like friendship or kinship, became quite readily visible at the event. Also, having seen who had some role in the event and who appeared to have a broad network of relationships gave me a good idea of who may be the key persons in the community. Another benefit was that I managed to establish a good relationship with the mayor, and was acquainted to his friends, as well. My later personal conversations with the mayor greatly contributed to the success of the research. Having been to this event meant a useful piece of experience, and some of my later interviewees would also note that they saw me at the festival. Many people felt good about my interest in the event. Later, during the interviews, several subjects mentioned my presence at the festival, which helped to create an atmosphere of personal trust. What is more, my list of interviewees was complemented with some additional names, as well. The pictures taken at the festival can be found in Appendix 3.

5.2.5 Semi-structured Interviews

In the first part of the research, between May and October 2012, it was the key persons of the village and the referendum who I conducted semi-structured interviews with. My selection of the sample was based on whether the person in question took an active part in the events, and whether they could in general be considered an opinion leader in the village community. Key informants were identified on the basis of the press monitoring, the documents and the findings from the participant observation. I also employed the snowball method in selecting my interview subjects.

The objective of the interviews was to have respondents openly tell their opinions and impressions about the local referendum and the public hearing. Appendix 4 contains the interview guide I used. The subject of the first one of these semi-structured interviews was the mayor. The purpose of this conversation differed from that of the later interviews insofar as it basically served (beyond answering my research questions) to gather information on the circumstances of the referendum and to verify the information that had been published in the press. I sought to gain a picture of the decision-making process, the events related to the referendum and the official procedure. All this gave me an overview of the entire course of events.

Another important point was to identify key informants and to prepare for the later interviews.

Following the conversation with the mayor, I conducted ten more interviews between August and October 2012 with the following persons, whom I had identified as key informants:

- the initiators of the referendum and all participants of the signature collection (3 persons),
- the members of the body of representatives (2 persons),
- a key person in the village community,
- the representative of the minority local government,
- a married couple who often voiced their opinion at the public hearing,
- a young employee of the municipality and
- the town clerk.

When I ended the interviewing phase it was because it appeared to me that any further interviews would not substantially contribute to what had already been said, and that things were beginning to get repeated, that is, I reached what qualitative researchers call the stage of saturation, when further interviews provide very little new information and when the researcher hence needs to switch from collecting data to analyzing it (Kvale, 2005). The number of interviews – eleven altogether – did not seem troubling in retrospect (when building the theory), either, and I was convinced I had included all the significant key actors in the sample. I also found that apart from the key informants, there were very few people who actually had a definite opinion on the topic that also was relevant to my research questions at the same time, therefore I deemed the costs of any further interviews to be disproportionate with the potential value added. The application of multiple data collection methods did, nevertheless, ensure the proper depth of the analysis. As also noted by Kvale (2005), that the number of respondents depends on the purpose of the study. The purpose of my research was to explore people's opinions about the case under scrutiny and to reveal participants' evaluation of the process. In my eyes, a case study with intensive in-depth inquiries seemed a practicable means to that end, and I was convinced that, complemented with the results of the other data collection methods, the eleven interviews I conducted would be sufficient.

Primary results from the analysis indicated a need for further interviews, namely in order to clarify the role of underprivileged groups. Accordingly in March 2013, I conducted a semi-structured interview with a public worker of Roma origin and a group conversation with elderly people from the nursing home (10 people).

5.2.5.1 Participant Observation at a Meeting of the Body of Representatives and a Public Hearing

The participant observation at the meeting of the body of representatives and at the public hearing took place as part of the second phase of fieldwork, in March 2013 (see Figure Figure 8:). The meeting of the representatives and the public hearing are both perfectly suitable for participant observation (Babbie, 2003), as they take place within a small span of time and space, and what is more, the evaluation of public hearings is one of the most important subject matters of my research. As the public hearings and the meetings of the body of representatives were both topics that I had covered in the interviews, I thought it was important to personally take part in these events, on one occasion each. This way I could gain insight into how such events happen. I compared my experience from the participant observations with the results from the interviews, and could thus confirm those results and verify their reliability. Accordingly, participant observation deepened my understanding of the topic and allowed a more refined theory to be developed (Babbie, 2003). The pictures taken at the public hearing can be found in Appendix 5.

I happened to become an active participant of both events. At the meeting of the body of representatives (14 March 2013), I was asked to take the minutes in the absence of the town clerk, and I could also contribute to the dispute that emerged in the closed session. The members of the body were open to my participation, and listened to me as an equal party. This way, from a participant observer I turned into an active participant of the meeting.

At the public hearing (20 March 2013), I was addressed by the mayor in connection with a question concerning the waste collection sites, so I stood up and introduced myself. That is, I became an active participant of the observed event once again.

5.2.6 Focus Group

In order to confirm the results from the interviews, I conducted a focus group interview about the general characterization public hearings and referenda on 15 March 2013. The agenda of the focus group session is presented in Appendix 6.

The purpose of the focus group interview was to verify, refine and develop a better understanding of the primary research results. The interviews actually also served to lay the groundwork for the focus group session, which I deemed to be necessary (instead of further interviews, for instance) because subjects may be more willing to open up in the company of other residents they know. Even complex opinions and the motivations behind them may be revealed, and the explanations for people's statements might be uncovered, as well (Krueger – Casey, 2000). A focus group may even reveal particularly incisive and nuanced opinions, as well as more detailed arguments for any statements made during the interviews (Vicsek, 2006). Moreover, the social situation – that is, the process of interpersonal interactions – and the natural situation – i.e. that the members of the group know each other – may act to elicit opinions that would not emerge if we were to talk to the individuals one by one (Letenyei, 2005). The focus group method can be conveniently combined with other data collection techniques – with semi-structured interviews and participant observation, as well (Vicsek, 2006). I involved my former interviewees in the focus group, except for the senior officials of the village (mayor, town clerk), because I thought their presence would influence the opinions of the other participants. One aspect in the selection of participants was personal acquaintance, as I hoped for a higher turnout rate that way. On the other hand, the aim having been to clarify what I had learnt from the earlier interviews, those conversations constituted an important preliminary to the group discussion. I also intended to give a brief feedback to those in the focus group on what I found to be the main lesson from the analysis of the interviews.

Due to the heavy snowfall on March 14 and 15, the public hearing scheduled for March 14 was cancelled, and the blocked roads got me trapped in the village for two days. So I had to flexibly adjust to the situation that arose during my fieldwork. The mayor arranged for me to be put up on the premises of the adult day care center, the rooms of which I was also allowed to use. This episode of involuntary captivity provided me with an opportunity to accomplish the focus group session. The venue was given, too, so in spite of certain theoretical considerations to the contrary, I

conducted the session alone, and the location was not a formal one, either, as we conversed in the lounge of the communal building. And the number of participants was three. I made an audio recording of the conversation, and a word-for-word transcript was prepared later on. Despite all these circumstances, this group discussion of ours may still be regarded as a focus group (Vicsek, 2006), since communication between the members of the group was realized, and it concerned two focused topics, which I introduced as a group assignment, with myself in the role of moderator. As Lilla Vicsek (2006 p. 18) put it, „in basic social research […] they call it a focus group even when there are only three of four participants, the conversation takes place in the field instead of a formal venue and the group is led by a non-professional moderator…" Such a small number of participants (mini focus group discussion) was nevertheless enough for me to confirm the results of the primary analysis and to explore people's opinions about referenda and public hearings in more depth.

5.3 Method of Qualitative Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected during the fieldwork, i.e. the transcription of my interview recordings, on the basis of grounded theory, using the Nvivo software. Below I will briefly describe the essence of the theory and the course of the analysis, and then switch to the presentation of my findings.

5.3.1 Grounded Theory

The principle of grounded theory is to break down the text into its smallest units during the coding process, and then use these bits of text to build the theory (Glaser – Strauss, 1967). The process is characterized by constant comparison, verification and feedback. Constant comparison ensures that the theory built of the text units is consistent and grounded. The process comprises three phases: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss – Corbin, 1998).

I started the analysis with the open coding phase, which served to determine the codes that represent the topics appearing in the text. According to the theory's original approach (Glaser – Strauss, 1967), the researcher performing the open coding should rely solely on the text and strictly confine to analyzing what is contained within, putting aside any and all connections that had already been reported in the literature earlier. Later approaches (Charmaz, 2006) are already more

permissive to the seeping-in of previous findings from the literature, and leave more room to the personality of the analyst, as well. Given that in this case the subject of the analysis was a series of semi-structured interviews that consisted of concrete questions that had been formulated based on the literature, I did not exclude any codes that seemed to originate in this background (e.g. competence), yet most of the codes were words or expressions that appeared in the text itself (e.g. influenced). This is the first step in the analysis, the extraction of those bits of text, the breaking down of the stream of text. It is in the subsequent steps that the building phase begins. Certain approaches call these axial coding and selective coding (Strauss – Corbin, 1998), and require the identification of strict causal relationships. A number of different approaches to this issue exist in the literature of grounded theory (Kucsera, 2008). I opted for that of Charmaz (2006), which permits greater flexibility for the researcher.

The first step I took in the building phase was to review the resulting code system, by comparing the topics appearing in the various pieces of text. This led to some codes being merged, abandoned or renamed. For example two of the codes I used in the open coding, „elderly" and „gypsies", were abandoned and placed under other thematic codes, like „gypsies at the public hearing" or „elderly in the referendum". It was in this building phase that I began to arrange the codes into groups and to devise a hierarchy. These groups could already be considered categories. Their names were already abstractions, derived through the analytic interpretation of the content, and not directly adopted from interviewees' wording, e.g. „deficiencies in infrastructure" concerning wastes. This classification process led to the emergence of the five main categories that expressed the essence of the resulting theory as based on the entire corpus of texts: decision, democracy, participatory tools, waste and story. The main categories cover all the coded text parts, are independent of each other and reflect the message well (Tuler–Webler, 1999).

A widely acknowledged problem with the methodological approach of grounded theory is that the coding disrupt the flow of the text (Coffey et al, 1996). So even though using bits of text as building blocks allows for the consistent development of a grounded theory, unfortunately it also disrupts the system of relationships carried by the text. It was these broader relationships unfolding over the entire span of the individual interviews that I intended to retain by preparing and using interview summaries.

Grounded theory is not just a data analysis method, but also affects the determination of the sample, since the analytic process, theory building and data collection constitute a process of interrelated steps that is based on the constant comparison of those elements. Therefore, the phase of data collection is not simply followed by that of theory building, but the two run parallel throughout the research process. Accordingly, the turns that the formation of the theory took made it necessary to extend the sample in the open coding phase, that is, I had to apply theoretical sampling. This was why it became necessary to involve underprivileged groups in the sample and to conduct further interviews with some of their representatives at a later stage.

5.3.2 Choice of Method

The use of grounded theory for the purposes of the present study is justified by a number of circumstances, which can be summarized as follows:

- Context and subject matter cannot be separated.
- My research questions can only be investigated using qualitative methods.
- The subject matter of the research is well-defined.
- The requirement of reliability necessitates the use of multiple information sources (documents, participant observation, interviews, focus group), which grounded theory is well-suited to handle.
- The opportunity to answer more than one research question presented itself. Originally, I visited the village because of the referendum, but in the end I managed to answer several of my questions related to public hearings, as well.
- My research questions basically presumed methods of a qualitative nature. The literature does not report previous experience in this area that would be comparable in spatial and temporal terms with the subject matter of the present research, as experience from public participation in Western Europe, and especially North America, can hardly be said to bear comparison with the peculiarities characteristic for Hungarian society.
- Some earlier researches based on grounded theory can be considered important preliminaries to my project. To evaluate their results and compare them with mine is nothing short of a must.

- The goal was to systematically uncover, to the greatest possible depth and in the most thorough fashion, the content of the interviews, to reach the deeper strata of the topic.
- The most important research questions concern the deeper dimensions of the evaluation of referenda. Given that in my approach, the evaluation is based on people's opinions, I would like to free myself of my theoretical knowledge and arrive at an evaluation that is built upon empirical data only and nothing else. And grounded theory is the one most suitable method for this purpose.
- It was a particularly interesting phenomenon, and also a decisive factor in my choice of methodology that fairness and competence, the two definitive criteria in the literature, did not appear in the Hungarian case, or were only mentioned in passing. Because of this – i.e. that the concepts contained in the research questions that I formulated based on my review of the literature did not appear in respondents' evaluations at all –, I was convinced that grounded theory ought to be my method of choice, after all, it seemed reasonable to assume that the values reflected in the empirical information to be collected would substantially differ from what the theory suggested.

5.4 Reliability and Validity

The theory I constructed, which was based on the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews, was later enhanced with the results of the focus group and the subsequent interviews.

In order to warrant reliability, one of my fellow researchers also performed the coding using the code system I devised, after the open coding phase, when the codes had already been established. My colleague's coding of the interview was 92 percent identical to my version. This way, the intercoder reliability of my analysis has been verified. According to the approach suggested by Charmaz (2006), this type of reliability testing is not necessary, as in her view, the character of the researcher is reflected in the analysis to a great extent, and their personality by definition has a role in the formation of both the codes and the theory, which circumstance they themselves have to reflect on. As a consequence, the construction of the theory and the analysis, as such, are irreproducible. And qualitative research needs to embrace that fact, according to the postulates of post-normal science.

Construct validity was ensured through the use of multiple information sources (documents, participant observation, interviews, focus group). This way, data drawn from the various sources can be compared and verified.

5.5 Presentation of the Case

5.5.1 The Village

The village of Pári has several centuries' worth of history. Today it is home to a population of some 700 people, yet before the Second World War, its residents were all of Swabian origin and amounted to twice the present figure. As a result of the displacements and resettlements following the war, the Hungarian and the German-speaking inhabitants began to mingle, and Roma also started to settle in the village. It is these three nationalities that live here still today, with Hungarians accounting for nearly half of the population, and the German and Roma minorities for somewhat more than one quarter each (Gere, 2012).

The merger with Tamási in 1970 was a decisive moment in the history of the settlement. Even though beneficial in the beginning, the union became more and more of a drawback for Pári with the escalation of the center vs. periphery situation. After the union of the two localities had been granted city status in 1983, the development of Pári, as an outskirt, began receiving less and less attention. By the nineties, they did not even have a municipal representative any more. It was then that the idea of the village's separation first came up. Upon popular initiative (by today's mayor), a referendum was held in 1991, which however was invalid because of a low turnout, and the majority voted against the separation anyway. Thus the decline of the village continued. The turn came about at the end of the nineties. In those years, several NGOs were formed, that was when the „awakening" of the village started, as they say. With these movements gaining ground, the idea of separation returned as well, and this time it was actually sanctioned by a second referendum in 2003 (54 percent turnout, 75 percent voted 'yes'). Consequently, Pári began to function as an individual township after the municipal elections in fall 2006. „The population of the village was simply not prepared for making a decision that affects their very own future in such a direct way. Far more factual information and sober communication

from trustworthy people, that is what they were missing" – Gere opined on the municipal election in 2006 and the referendum in 2003 (Gere, 2012 p. 27-28).

The buzz around the local elections in 2006 was quite remarkable. Voter turnout was, at 73 percent, far above the national average. The mayor as well as most of the municipal representatives elected ran for their posts as independent candidates. At the next election four years later, where as many as almost 75 percent of the constituents actually cast a vote, the mayor (one of the founders of the NGOs) was re-elected in a landslide victory, and all four seats in the body of representatives were won by independent nominees (source of election data: valasztas.hu, the website of the National Election Committee).

5.5.2 Public Participation Experience in Pári

In Pári, the most frequently used means of informing and seeking out the opinion of the residents is the public hearing. As a matter of fact, it is mandatory for the municipality to hold at least one public hearing each year, according to the Local Government Act[17]. The same is laid down in the Organizational and Operational Rules (OOR) of the Local Government of Pári; usually it is held jointly with a meeting of the body of representatives. Practice has shown, nevertheless, that there tend to be at least two public hearings each year. As regards the waste collection sites, three public hearings were held to address the matter. Apparently the leaders of the village often rely on it.

According to the OOR mentioned above, the municipality might also opt for a citizens' forum to inform the people, yet that is not usually the case.

In keeping with the relevant laws, the meetings of Pári's body of representatives are open to the public, anyone can attend them. This publicity serves to ensure the transparency of the work that representatives do and, on the other hand, also to inform the people, as it gives residents an opportunity to acquire first-hand information on what their leaders are engaged in. In Pári, as well as in any other Hungarian municipality, residents can acquaint themselves with the current matters of the village by taking part (passively) in the meeting of the body of representatives, attending the public hearing or paying a personal visit to the mayor or the town clerk, where they can also give voice to their opinion. These face-to-face visits are a quite popular form of participation, as well.

[17] Section 54, Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on the Local Governments of Hungary

The OOR of the municipality says that „[c]onstituents exercise their rights for self-government through their elected representatives in the body of representatives and by participating in local referenda" (Section 2 subsection (1)). As already mentioned before, there were three local referenda with varying outcomes in Pári during the last two decades. Table Table 5 provides a concise factual summary on these ballots.

Table 5: Past referenda in Pári

Year	Question	Turnout	Valid	Outcome
1991[18]	separation	ca. 40%	no	no (ca. 90%)
2003[19]	separation	54%	yes	yes (75%)
2012[20]	temporary waste collection site	49.6%	no	no (84%)

On all three occasions, the referendum was held upon popular initiative, that is, local residents started collecting signatures to put the given issue to a referendum. Albeit the number of signatures collected was above 25 percent in each case, voter turnout was always around – but only once above – 50 percent. Nevertheless the people of Pári typically demonstrate great interest in municipal elections, with voter turnout rates approaching 75 percent.

Generally speaking, its self-government right is something of a novelty to the village. Among the changes brought about by the establishment of their own local government body in 2006 was that the residents could elect their representatives themselves, and thus Pári, as an independent settlement, entered a new era of democratic consolidation. From a historical perspective, it certainly is interesting that for this village, true self-governance and representative democracy only became a reality sixteen years after the regime change.

It is important to note, as well, that the local referendum in 2012 was already the third one held in the course of the last twenty years in Pári. They also are fond of another participatory tool, the public hearing, and make use of it even more frequently than it is required by the law.

[18] Source: Gere, 2012
[19] Source: National Election Committee, valasztas.hu
[20] Source: National Election Committee, valasztas.hu

5.5.3 Waste Management in Pári

Doorstep waste collection and transportation in Pári is provided by BIOKOM Ltd. Bulky waste collection is performed once each year. The waste collected in Pári is transported to the regional waste disposal facility in Som, some 30 kilometers away. Recent years have seen a sharp rise in the price of waste management services due to the installation of the Som Regional Waste Disposal Facility. Illegal dumping around the village is significant. Time and again, the municipality cleans up illegal dumps at its own cost, yet they keep reappearing. People's attitude to wastewater disposal is similar. It is common knowledge that certain residents illegally dump their wastewater into the ditch in the middle of the village. In order to solve the problem, the local government has put forward applications for funding for developing a sewage system and a wastewater treatment facility.

As I have already implied, the waste management service provided to the residents does not include anything beyond mixed collection, and bulky waste pickup once a year. The residents themselves are expected to see to the proper disposal of any hazardous waste they generate, and the same applies to electronic waste, recyclable materials and construction/demolition waste. Under the current circumstances, the public service provider has no plans of extending collection to these fractions. The aforementioned waste management facility in Som is at a distance of 30 kilometers. The neighboring township of Tamási has several free mini drop-off sites for recyclables.

5.5.4 The Story of the Waste Collection Sites – The Conflict

On 25 March 2012, a local referendum was held in Pári on the following question: „Do you agree that a temporary waste disposal site should be set up in the interior zone of Pári?" Out of the 536 constituents, 266 participated in the ballot (269 would have been necessary for it to be valid), with 223 votes against and 42 votes in favor. That is, 84 percent of those that cast a ballot voted no to the waste disposal sites.

The purpose of setting up the two waste disposal sites was the collection, temporary storage and transfer for disposal of construction/demolition waste, bulky household waste, hazardous waste and yard waste. In practice, this would manifest itself in the form of a fenced area, partly covered in concrete.

The „lower" site is located at the end of Nagy Street; this is the part of town where the Roma live, mostly further out from the designated plot. The only neighbor of the

plot is Mrs. M., one of whose relatives was a key figure among those opposing the plan.

The „upper" site is in Kis Street. The neighbor is the sibling of the resident organizing the opposition against the sites. A map of the village indicating the location of the two sites can be found in Appendix 7.

The mayor claims the following aspects to have played a role in the selection of the two locations:

- Should be „right on the way"
- Should be nearby
- Is owned by the municipality
- Waste is already being stored at these places anyway

Those opposed to the plan raised the following objections[21]:

- Neighboring properties' value will drop
- These should not be located in between the houses, but outside the village
- Unpleasant sight
- Smells
- Why should the neighbor have everyone's garbage in front of their eyes
- If it is an unpleasant sight on the fringe, why bring it into the village
- Bringing it into the village will not make it less harmful to the environment

The setting up of „household waste collection sites" is contained in Pári's development plan, which was approved in 2010. They were granted the funds needed for the setting up of the collection sites (material and personal expenses) by the Start Work Program. The public discussion of the development plan can be considered the first step in the public participation process concerning the waste collection sites. The development plan was publicly posted, as required by the law, yet no substantive comments or opinions were received. The development plan was approved at the jointly held meeting of the body ofcomm representatives and the public hearing on the plan. There was no debate.

A public hearing was held in December 2011. The subject of setting up the waste disposal sites was brought up, as well, upon which the participants gave voice to

[21] From a flyer

their disapproval. After the public hearing, the direct neighbors of the affected plots and their relatives initiated a signature collection for ordering a local referendum in Pári on the setting up of the two waste collection sites. Officially, the signature collection was initiated by a single resident on 23 December 2011. A total of 160 valid signatures had been collected, upon which, on January 19, the body of representatives set the date for the local referendum, and on January 26 the Election Committee approved the proposed referendum question.

That was when the „campaign period" started. The local government decided not to campaign – as the mayor put it: „…I was just sitting in the corner trying to establish whether it was working…"

They employed the following tools:

- they had an article published in Tolnai Népújság,
- distributed flyers, and
- held another public hearing.

Those opposed to the plan campaigned by:

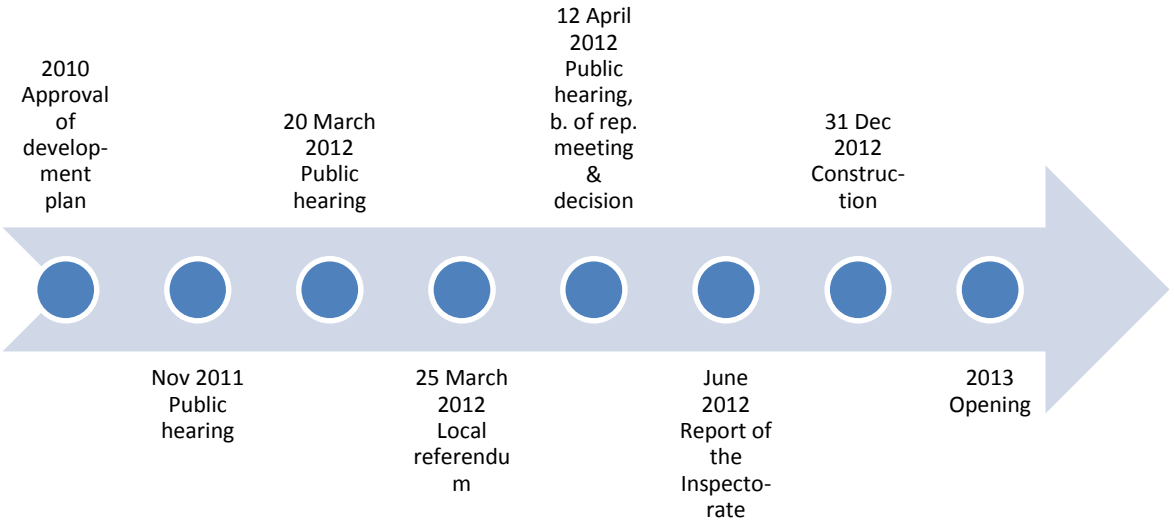
- canvassing the entire neighborhood in the course of the signature collection to present their arguments face-to-face,
- distributing flyers, and
- voicing their opinion at the public hearing.

The referendum took place on March 25. The majority voted against the project, however the referendum turned out to have been invalid. Afterwards, the municipality called another public hearing, held jointly with the meeting of the body of representatives. It was there that the decision was made to commence the construction of the two disposal sites, but only put one of them (the less conflictual one, the one in Nagy Street) into operation, and install a basketball hoop at the other location. And yard waste was removed from the types of waste allowed to be dropped off. After that, no further objections were raised at the public hearing.[22]

[22] An interesting point is that in the development plan the two facilities are denoted as „household waste collection sites", which is however not among the types listed in current legislation. The plan was, nevertheless, reviewed and approved by all the competent authorities. Following the decision, the opponents of the project filed a complaint with the competent environmental protection authority. Submitting to the pressure, the local government asked (in May 2012) the competent environmental protection authority for an official statement on what type of license is required to open the facilities and which category these facilities belong to. According to current legislation, as the Inspectorate explicated in its response, the facilities qualify as „waste collection locations" and shall be licensed accordingly.

Figure Figure 10: shows the most important events related to the case in chronological order.

Figure 10: Timeline of the most important events



The construction of the waste collection sites was finished in December 2012. As of now, they have not yet been put into operation.

Thus, in summary, the purpose of the research was to assess participants' evaluation of the participatory tools (public hearing and referendum) employed in the case of the waste collection sites. Understanding the steps of the decision-making process and evaluating the final decision also were focus topics of the research. The purpose of the analysis is to evaluate the use of public hearings and referenda in decision-making practice, in order to establish

1. how efficient, from a participant perspective, public hearings and referenda are in their function as public participation tools,
2. whether the outcomes of such processes have an influence on the decisions made,
3. how satisfied participants are with the results of the decisions and the quality of the processes themselves.

Another indication of conceptual confusion was that while the development plan mentioned „household waste collection sites", the referendum question said „temporary waste disposal sites".

6. Results of the Empirical Research

The resulting theory contained the following topics. One large group was that of waste-related problems and their potential solutions. I named the other group democracy, even though this very word had only been pronounced by one single respondent during the entire research. Nevertheless, it was basically opinions belonging to these two groups that made up public participation in waste management decision-making. This is illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Fundamental elements of the topic of *public participation in waste management decision-making* in the analysis

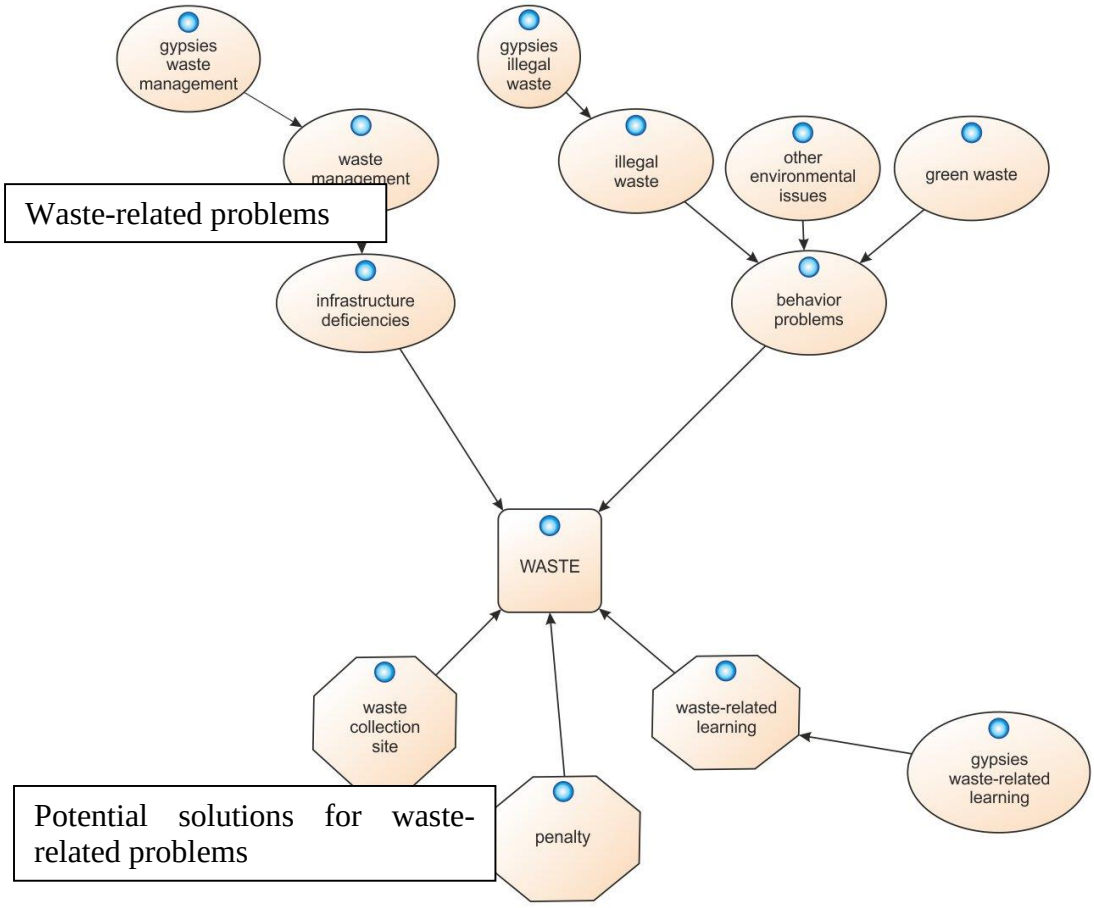
Within the topic of democracy, the decisive – and the largest – category was the evaluation of participatory tools, not limited to referenda and public hearings only, but also including the evaluation of other tools, like face-to-face contact. Respondents also touched upon the topics of representative and participatory democracy, though neither of these very terms was used specifically. The third most important topic was the evaluation of the decision; here, it was the acceptance of the decision, the compromise and the impact of the participatory tools on the decision that were discussed more in detail.

The presentation of the most important findings for each topic follows below.

6.1 Waste-related Problems in the Interviews

Waste-related opinions were centered around two topics of problems: **infrastructure deficiencies** and the **population's attitude**. The most important ones were illegal waste disposal and the inappropriate use of common containers (these are denoted by the code 'waste management'). Participants mentioned several types of potential solutions to waste-related problems. These were the setting up of waste collection sites, penalties for litterers and waste-related learning/education. Many even associated the planned facilities with illegal dumping and considered them as a solution effort, yet they still were not supported by everyone. Figure Figure 12 shows the waste-related topics (codes) we found.

Figure 12: System of waste-related codes



Let us have a closer look at these topics. Respondents collected waste-related topics around a couple of larger problems. The illegal dumping of wastes was considered one of the most significant waste-related behavior problems. A number of interviewees reported that the phenomenon had been present in the village for a long time and had almost become „routine procedure".

"Well, there was a habit here and, unfortunately, there still is, that there are certain spots in the village where people have been dumping waste ever since my childhood. Whereas an organized waste pickup service has been in place for 20 years." (Mayor)

"The cause itself, the problem hasn't disappeared, because the problem is that people keep littering on the street, and not just on the street. There are certain wastes that Biokom doesn't pick up, doesn't collect, doesn't know where to take it, where to put it. So they chose the simplest possible way, and this isn't something new, they idea's a hundred years old, people then loaded it onto the horsecart, now load it onto the utility trailer, and, sadly enough, take it to the fringes and dump it there, 'cause there's no other choice in the neighborhood." (Main initiator)

"…'cause I am pretty upset myself that there's no place to take all these sorts of things to, and ever since I can remember, I've been seeing, in the ditch, near the vineyards, along the dirt roads, a TV-set here, a fridge there, a sink over there. This just isn't alright, I think." (Local minority self-government representative)

Several ideas were voiced as to who dump their waste illegally in the peripheries. A couple of interviewees suggested that the bulk of illegal waste is discarded by the gypsies (see the chapter on gypsies), while some reported waste having been dumped in Pári by non-locals. What is more, the 'Other initiator' stated with conviction that „it's not here, the center of the village, where it comes from".

"It happened a couple years ago, I was on my way to Tamási, and a former Pári resident, who still keeps coming back, still has their house, I thought my eyes were betraying me, he was driving along the other street, where he lives, then I saw it even clearer, I knew exactly whom I saw, I just thought my vision was playing tricks on me, they lifted out a bag, put it down on the side road, and drove along. He had been a public employee, until he worked. What I thought was that my eyes were deceiving me." (Member of the Swabian community)

"…a car stops, they throw the bag into the bin, the container. (…) was born in Pári, but lives in Kónyi. Later we realized who they were, the neighboring village, and some said, those who live there nearby, they see that strangers bring their waste here, but it's still better that they throw it into the container as if they dumped it on the roadside, I just can't get it why they need to drive somewhere for that, to another village, this is an interesting thing." (Married couple attending public hearings)

Behavior problems were connected to the attitudes towards sewage, insofar as illegal dumping is one of the most severe problems of the settlement with regard to sewage, as well, because there is no sewer system and the solutions of the individual households are not controlled by anyone. Thus the illegal disposal of sewage was mentioned by several respondents in connection to waste-related behavior problems.

> "This *(sewer system)* is a divisive topic in the village, too. A whole lot said that even tomorrow, if only it was there already. While others don't want it, are against it, which is a sort-of secret, those who live along the ditch, those discharge into it, they do. "(Municipal employee)

> "Sewage is a great problem of this village. Cause we have a creek on the margin of the village. A large part of two of the village's streets discharges their sewage there, underhand or in reality, or pump it out there from their cesspit."(Mayor)

As regards behavior, the issue of green waste also cropped up: certain interviewees pointed out that it should be solved by home composting, and no community-level treatment methods are needed. The reason why this was considered a part of behavior problems was that they believed that it was not the generation and treatment, in itself, of this type of waste that was problematic, but that it got dumped into public bins along with household waste, instead of being composted at home in. The topic surfaced, on the one hand, in connection with the use of containers and, on the other hand, because originally the waste collection sites were meant to also receive green waste.

> "We're in the countryside here, it's not hard to make a composter, I'll show it to anyone myself, and it's useful, too. That's it. " (Local minority self-government representative)

> "Composting would be a viable way. I compost the grass, everything, right in the backyard. It makes such good soil, really. Everyone can do that at home." (Other initiator)

The other major set of problems is related to the deficiencies in the waste management infrastructure. Waste management in Pári comprises a couple of elements only: the regular pickup of household waste and bulky waste collection twice a year. Regular waste pickup does not cover the entire settlement, as those parts of the village that are, according to the service provider, not accessible by their

collection trucks (unpaved roads), are only partially served. They need to take their household waste to a common container. The use of these common containers is the other major source of waste-related conflicts and problems. The common use of these leads to a multitude of conflicts, and the ’polluter pays principle’ is rather hard to enforce, unlike with those who have their own bins.

> "…there’s no paved road there, I don’t know how well it *(garbage truck)* can manage there, but there’s a large container there, which they can throw their waste into, and which, after having been emptied on Wednesday, is already full again by Wednesday evening, with all the bags lying around, and all that right there in front of the houses. Everyone has to smell it, I wouldn’t think that’s a very good situation, either." (Municipal employee)

> "Because we can dispose of our household waste, because we pay those considerable sums to Biokom. Whereever Biokom doesn’t go, those have the garbage containers, that’s where people should take their waste, which they do not." (Main initiator)

The use of the containers again evoked the issues with the Gypsies and their attitude to waste. Once again, opinions were voiced that they are the ones who use the containers in inappropriate ways. What is more, in the streets where the Gypsies live, regular waste pickup is not available, and these interviewees believed that they were not even paying the disposal fee (see Chapter 6.2).

> „why the most garbage is in the upper layers is that they don’t pay anything to Biokom at all, they have no bins.” (Municipal employee)

What several respondents named as the most severe infrastructure deficiency was the lack of a reasonable way of disposing of certain types of waste (e.g. hazardous waste, small amounts of construction/demolition debris). These are the wastes that people cannot have either the regular or the bulky waste rounds pick up. The costs, in terms of both time and money, of the correct disposal of these wastes would be significant, which according to the interviewees is why many opt for illegal dumping.

> "And how are the waste-related problems in the village?
>
> Big. More severe, in my opinion, than in the region around us. Ever since this organized waste collection has been in place, and those sites where the population used to bring their waste to were closed down, they have been big, in my opinion. Cause the wastes that aren’t picked up, and that you can’t put into the bin, until now

> you could take that to the landfill, possibly with your own utility trailer, or, whatever, but now you can't. You could only do that by taking them to the collection sites which specialize in the collection of these. And those are rather far from us." (Town clerk)

> "If someone goes to the trouble, at the time of the fall or spring bulky waste collection, I don't know whether you can put it out then, I'm not sure of that, 'cause then they expressly ask that no paint, hazardous waste, etc. be put out by anyone. And you cannot throw it into the bin, either, so it's a good question. To some sort of landfill, some place like that. That's where you could take it, I guess."(Local minority self-government representative)

Interviewees mentioned several potential solutions to the infrastructure deficiencies and behavior problems. First, the possibility of fining (penalizing); second, the setting up of the planned waste collection sites; and third, learning/education. Thus one idea was to reduce waste-related problems by penalizing those engaging in illegal activities, but some thought this would be ineffective. Furthermore, it might become a significant source of conflict in the community.

> "…hasn't achieved anything in the past, either. They were penalized if it could be proven."(Local minority self-government representative)

> "Actually I think that the people who've got something to do there, 'cause they have their cabin there, and go that way, they could be eliminated, but no energy, capacity for that, and I say it wouldn't even be a solution to start fining the villagers, 'cause everyone could be fined, instead we should create the conditions for trying to do it differently this time." (Main initiator)

> "The same thing with trash, that we aren't consistent enough, and not fining as we should. Well, okay, if because of the sidewalk, because of the sewage, because of the drainage ditches, because of littering, and if we fined everyone because of everything, how many in this village of ours would remain without a fine?" (Mayor)

The other potential treatment mentioned was to provide for more ways of waste disposal. This did not only surface in connection with the elimination of illegal waste, but the separate collection of waste was also brought up in some of the interviews. Some opined that first the conditions should be created for people to be able to correctly dispose of their waste, and the appropriate behavior can only be

achieved afterwards. That is, they prioritized the development of the infrastructure, which basically meant the waste collection sites.

> "The only solution I see here is that we set up even more containers, give an opportunity to have somewhere to bring it to, that's the only way waste's going to disappear from the village." (Other member of the body of representatives)

> "Because I couldn't think of a smarter and better idea for the village than that we have to have a waste collection site. We really do need it very much." (Member of the Swabian community)

Concerning the operation of the planned waste collection sites, the majority underlined the need for it. They did not agree about the exact mode of operation. It was clear, however, that the greatest risk they saw with respect to operation was that the population would not use them in the proper way, and Gypsies' attitude towards wastes again became a topic of emphasis.

> "Those Gypsy kids didn't bother, so I thought this takes more time, maybe you can have them adjust themselves to it, and they would've had this waste collection site right around the corner. Surely they would've taken their garbage there, and put it in there, even if they might've put in there things that didn't belong, bottles or plastic bottles or anything, the municipality would've been even happier to have its own car haul it away, but at least it would've been in a place meant for that, not like if they dump it all around the fringes of the village. That's why I think it's a good thing, it sure takes a lot of time for them to get used to it, to learn it or to even do it, to get the message that it's there that they should put it and not just dump it anywhere. Give the opportunity to have a place to take it to." (Other member of the body of representatives)

Several interviewees mentioned a learning process as related to the resolution of waste-related problems. The connection here is a multi-faceted one. On the one hand, many believe that a learning process is necessary in order for people to learn to use the waste collection sites. On the other hand, the learning process might result in a reduced amount of illegal waste. Some respondents talked about learning separate waste collection and an advanced level of waste management. The multi-generational nature of waste-related learning also came up. Some believed that the education of children was very important, that this learning process would take so long that only the next generations would actually have learnt it.

> "Well, it's not sure it will be working very well in one year's time. That takes very long. They said there that maybe there would be a six-month trial period. For some things, six months will be enough, but for this thing to work perfectly, it surely won't; for that, it's been much too long since we've been littering all over the place. That is, as long as we don't even make it to the bin." (Local minority self-government representative)

> "People can learn this mentality, but it takes a generation, or two." (Mayor)

> "What I can do? What I think is the most important I ought to do is to educate the next generation so that it'd be self-explanatory to them, to teach them, to not have to hold a forum, like this bin's for this, and that's for that. So that it's not an everyday recurring issue to put the garbage in the right place." (Local minority self-government representative)

To the research question what the impact of the participatory process was on waste-related knowledge and whether it had expanded, the following answer appeared to emerge. It is not the participatory process that the locals expect the expansion of knowledge from. Instead, learning was much more associated with the operation of the waste collection sites, they expected learning to primarily come with practice and it was the facility itself that they attributed a sort of educational role to.

> "On the other hand, if it's already functioning, we might well use it to test whether we can do this, whether its operation is indeed viable. Maybe such a waste collection site can help us get the feel of it. Then we'll see whether it was a good idea or not." (Local minority self-government representative)

> "…villagers will get the hang of this thing, too, and a certain order will eventually emerge. If and when we already see that it's working out perfectly here, and they don't take their garbage to the ditch, but to the waste collection site, or if, maybe, they take so much waste there thay they'll become too small, then we can relocate it to where it should be picked up from, but by then they'll have learnt that trash must be taken to the collection site, and then they'll probably be willing to take it down there. This might actually be educational to some extent."(One member of the body of representatives)

On the other hand, some respondents used the terms education/re-education in this respect, which seems to indicate an externally orchestrated process rather than an

active learning process. In such a scenario, the body of representatives and the mayor might be the educators.

> "There's been no re-education, so to speak, society has not yet matured to the point that they themselves would want to, would desire to have a tidier, clean environment and would take care of it." (Main initiator)

> "This is very interesting, this re-education of the population. When it will finally reach us." (Member of the Swabian community)

Hardly anyone acknowledged the impact of the participatory process (collection of signatures / referendum) on waste-related learning; the general view was that even though it had become a more popular topic as a result, that interest quickly passed after the process had ended.

> "But because it was brought up rather often, people have become more aware of it. I'm not saying there's less litter lying around, but maybe it'll improve." (Municipal employee)

> "Of course, but that, too, was just a periodic thing. When we started it, we talked about it, a wonder lasts but nine days." (Main initiator)

> "I felt this whole thing was a nine-days'-wonder sort of matter. "(Local minority self-government representative)

One member of the body of representatives, however, considered it an achievement of the process that they had made progress in the recognition of the problem. Moreover, they thought it had been the next step in the same process that they had discussed the problem (the problem of illegal waste, that is).

> "…it's become apparent that people do care, at the reps meeting and the public hearing everyone saw that this indeed was a problem, just no one really saw a solution. We tried one, but the inhabitants of the village didn't really like it that much, but we'll see how it works out, I'm sure half the battle is won now that everyone's realized the problem, that we need to find some sort of solution.

> Has this been a change, had it not been like this before?

> It was, we just didn't talk about it. (...)

> What do you mean that you talk about it? Do you mean that it was mentioned at the public hearing?

> Yes, yes, that we've talked about the problem with the residents of the village." (One member of the body of representatives)

Waste-related problems could thus be grouped around two topics: deficiencies in the infrastructure (frequency of pickups, collection of special wastes unsolved) and behavior problems (illegal dumping, behavior of Gypsies). Most interviewees agreed that the setting up of the waste collection sites would improve the situation as regards the infrastructure. Whereas their educational role could induce a change in behavior. They attribute this educational role to the operation of the facilities rather than to the participatory process itself (that is, to the collection of signatures, the campaign, the public hearings and the ballot collectively). Thus according to them, the emerging practice is the most likely vehicle of waste-related learning, i.e. they expect an experienced-based learning process. The impact of the participatory process on waste-related knowledge was hardly acknowledged, the only tangible results were the formulation and the recognition of the problem.

6.2 Underprivileged Groups in the Interviews

During the first – the open – coding phase, „Gypsies" and „elderly" were two individual codes. Later, they were eliminated and blended into the other topics, yet it is still important that we discuss them on their own, as well. It turned out that both Gypsies and the elderly can be regarded as underprivileged groups from a public participation point of view, and that they are less able to defend their interests, as we will see later on. Both of these underprivileged groups were mentioned in the interviews in multiple contexts.

The circumstances of the Gypsies in the village were mentioned by several respondents. These social issues will not be dealt with in the present thesis, the Gypsy population's situation will only be discussed to the extent it is relevant to my research questions. The Gypsy population frequently appeared in the interviews, almost every respondent talked about them or at least mentioned them (the exceptions were the town clerk and a member of the Swabian community). This minority accounts for approx. one fourth of the village's population. They were most frequently mentioned in connection with illegal waste, and a more harsh wording suggesting that they are the ones that litter was also present.

"They have for long, especially as we go, I think it's them who take it there, it's not here, the center of the village, where it comes from." (Other initiator)

"But what I'm saying is that those in the upper parts, well, quite a lot of them bring out there to the fringes of the forest etc." (Local minority self-government representative)

"The littering is done by the Gypsies for the most part, 'cause that's the truth." (Other member of the body of representatives)

The other topic in connection which they received particular emphasis was the problems related to the use of the street containers.

"The container is right there next to J's place, and that's the route they usually take. They come down, hurl it in. I'd rather not tell you what their place is like, 'cause that's a horror." (Other initiator)

The other important topic is how they, as a minority, take part in participatory processes. Several interviewees underlined that they do not typically frequent public hearings, or only very few of them. It was also mentioned that they did, nevertheless, participate in the referendum (turnout unknown).

"Do the Roma usually go to the public hearings?

No, a couple of people, the more reasonable part, they usually go, but otherwise no." (Other initiator)

"Their president, ex officio, just like me, she/he doesn't always come, but she/he's still there now and again, if things turn out that way. Maybe I did saw a handful of the public workers sitting there, but it's not typical." (Local minority self-government representative)

"I was very much surprised by the sober judgment of the Gypsies, they don't ever go to public hearings, or extremely very rarely." (One initiator)

"No, they don't come. There are a couple of families in the village who are already trying to live a bit more like other people do. They see the model, and work, engage in an enterprise, 'cause there are some entrepreneurs, too, who do regular work, educate their children, make sure they attend school, not one of those good-for-nothings. Those, sometimes, become curious, and turn up; still, they don't go as far as to contribute, either.

At public hearings?

Yes, these families, but not the others. If those make an appearance, that's only because they haven't received their benefits or some other gripe along those lines. They don't care about anything else.

So they didn't care about this waste collection site, either?

No, no, absolutely not." (Other member of the body of representatives)

"…did Gypsies vote? What do you think, did they cast a vote?

Yes, in one of the streets, at the end of Nagy Street, there's a family there, who live in some 6-8 houses, they promised they would vote. The didn't make good on that promise, 'cause they didn't cast a ballot, but in the other streets they kept nagging each other, you should go, don't you miss this one, and they took them along……and those on the committee, they told us privately afterwards that he was there from that street, and her, too, and him, and him, and we also knew, who wasn't. (...) I think is that after all, the majority of the Gypsies participated in the vote, as well."(One initiator)

Comparing the Gypsies' participation to that of the elderly as an underprivileged group, a common point is that neither of the two groups takes part in public hearings, which are the most important vehicle of public participation in the village. The Gypsies (in contrast to the elderly) do not even participate via face-to-face contact.

"No, they really don't frequent any such place that you could know something about them." (Other member of the body of representatives)

Another interesting point is that the Roma are associated with several waste-related issues (illegal dumping, inappropriate use of containers), yet as they don't take part in participatory processes, it seems that these public participation tools cannot be expected to deliver solutions to the problems, given that the key stakeholders are not involved in the processes, including informing and the voicing of opinions.

"They do come, mostly, but usually the thing is that whomever the subject concerns most, and now, too, I can say that those who litter the most, it's exactly those who weren't there, neither at the public hearing, nor about the wastes. As is usual in such cases, the guilty parties don't frequent such events, they don't care." (One member of the body of representatives)

"…we have a couple of problematic *(Gypsy)* families here about whom we know that they do 90% of the littering, those don't really attend *(public hearings)*." (One member of the body of representatives)

The other underprivileged group appearing in the interviews is the elderly. Elderly people, as a group, were very frequently mentioned by our interviewees, therefore I used a separate code for that, matching the phrase they used: „elderly". They, as a group, were mentioned in all but a few interviews (exceptions were the town clerk and a local minority self-government representative). Nearly all our interviewees called attention to the fact that the elderly constitute a very high percentage of the village's population. Some of them were particularly attentive to the circumstances of the elderly in the village. This is connected to multiple topics. On the one hand, they appear as an underprivileged group with respect to their ability to defend their interests. One manifestation of that is their marked absence from public hearings, as reported by several respondents.

"You mentioned that Ms. M. didn't dare to tell, either.

Yes. Well, OK, she's old. There are a lot of elderly living in the village. It's rather the middle-aged who usually go to the public hearing. The elderly don't." (Other initiator)

"Do the elderly frequent the assemblies, as well?

Not the very old, but maybe from there, who walk over from the Életház." (Married couple attending public hearings)

"What I mean is that elderly people don't go out in the evening. (…) held usually around five or six, and elderly people don't go out that late, at least not easily. (...) Well, there are some who do go, but the problem rather is that they don't even read those small slips of paper that are posted, 'cause the times, you know, are different, it's rather the subject, that's what they rather hear about from the others. Not because he's read it, but someone told him that this will be the topic. May well be that he heard this one from me, 'cause I meet him and ask him, have you heard that the next meeting will be about that? No, and this is the way it is."(One initiator)

Moreover, those who only leave their homes occasionally are at a disadvantage in practicing face-to-face contact as a participatory tool, as well. In terms of face-to-face contact, however, the elderly receive special attention from the mayor,

especially those who attend the day care center. This group is attended by several people, and they also receive information from the operators of the service.

Given their high share in the population, the participation of the elderly in the referendum was a topic of emphasis. The initiators were particularly attentive to their participation in the ballot, and highlighted the use of electoral visitor voting.

> "A lot of people applied for electoral visitor voting. Obviously, the elderly are very hesitant to leave their homes, to walk across the entire village, so yes, the electoral officer went to their homes. (...) Yes, it was a good referendum, ’cause those who didn’t go, ’cause I’m sure that many wouldn’t have gone. If it wasn’t for the possibility of electoral visitor voting. Or, say, there were some who asked to be picked up by the bus. The bus picked up some four people from a street, and took them to cast their votes, and that was a good thing to have. If it wasn’t for this possibility, they wouldn’t have come." (One initiator)

During the analysis, the situation of the elderly was also mentioned as related to the topics of „influence”, „competence” and the weighing of the alternatives. On the one hand, several respondents implied that the elderly were easy to influence in the course of the signature collection, because they often had no other information sources.

> „My neighbor, this nice old man, also signed it right away, as M. visited him. Afterwards, it came up and we had a chat. He also attends the day care, and the (mayor) visits them on a daily basis, they discussed it, and then he, too, saw it in a different light. That was the kind of sudden impulse, just in a flash, M. went there, related what they wanted from their own perspective, and then of course they signed it.” (Married couple attending public hearings)

> „For the most part, this is how it went down – I know how this works in such a small village, I was touring the streets once, mainly in the first term to collect nomination slips – you walk in, nice elderly couple sitting there, and then they tell them what Mr. Mayor wants, how terrible, and the body of reps wants to bring the trash here, and they want to make a waste collection yard. Many figured, like, ooooh, we shan’t let that happen, and signed the paper. They don’t have no responsibility, they signed the paper.” (One member of the body of representatives)

Concerning competence, the only question raised was how the elderly were able to contemplate the issue of the waste collection sites. Several interviewees reported that

when weighing the alternatives, they had taken into account how the elderly would be able to use the planned waste collection sites.

It is an interesting fact that while neither of the two underprivileged groups frequent public hearings, members from both minorities did take part in the referendum, though the exact numbers are unknown. **Fairness was, thus, more characteristic for the referendum than for the public hearings.**

A consideration concerning both underprivileged groups is that while practically none of the forms of informing (public hearing, face-to-face contact) reach them, large shares of them participate in the referendum. Which raises the issue already suggested by theory: that referenda delegate decision authority to uninformed groups (Fiorino, 1990).

These underprivileged groups received special emphasis in the interviews, which is why I thought that for the analysis to be complete, it would be necessary to confirm what had been said through conversations with people from these groups. Therefore I expanded the sample, and conducted interviews with a Gypsy woman and a small group of elderly people, as well.

The former interviewee confirmed that the Gypsies did not typically attend public hearings, and that even though she herself usually did, she had never, even once, contributed.

> „…I hear them out. I listen to what they have to say." (Gypsy woman)

To the question where the Gypsies have their information from, she told me it was by word-of-mouth. Of course, the news always get transformed a bit.

> „They keep asking me, too, what I've learnt. Go and hear for yourself. That's what I tell'em." (Gypsy woman)

Regarding illegal waste, again she confirmed that most of it came from the Gypsies, though they were not the only ones to litter.

> „…that's where most of the litter is, the upper parts. And they're the only ones around there." (Gypsy woman)

During my conversation with them, the elderly also confirmed that they did not attend public hearings at all, and resort to face-to-face contact for information purposes.

> „It's late, it's already dark by the time I'm coming home"

„… elderly don't have much say"

„It's late, dark night by the time they finish"

„well, sure, he *(Mayor)* always comes and always tells us what happened"

„so that we also know something"

The importance of casting a ballot was emphasized in both conversations.

„Well, you definitely have to attend that"

„the electoral officer comes"

„We go to cast a vote"

„Inconvenient as it may be, we still go"

My personal experience from the participant observation did, however, not completely coincide with what had been said. Only a very few (2-3 persons) of the elderly attended, indeed, but at the public hearing I was present at, the Gypsy minority was represented by a significant number, approx. 15 persons (there were about 50 people present altogether), and several Gypsy residents actually contributed to the discussion. Most of them (around 10) sat in the last row and left early, whereas the contributors seated themselved further up front. Apart from my own observations, this was confirmed by one of the interviewees only:

„Do the Gypsies attend these public hearings, do they participate?

Certain families do, not everyone.

Do they contribute, participate actively, or they just listen?

Usually yes, there are three or four among them who usually contribute. It happens that one or the other needs to be sent home, too, 'cause of the off-color language." (One member of the body of representatives)

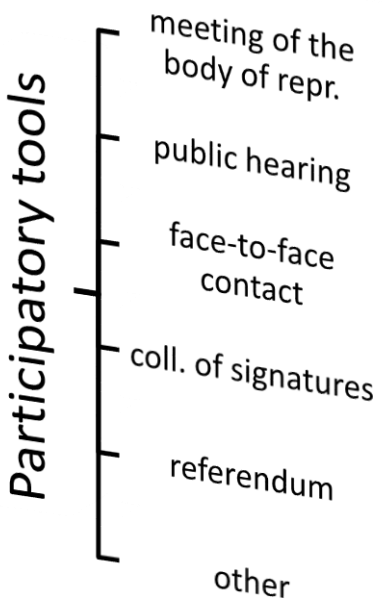
It is apparent that with respect to my research questions concerning the Gypsies, respondents' answers were sometimes biased. It is peculiar, for example, that illegal waste is always dumped by Gypsies or non-locals. Most probably, this is not entirely true. Another exaggeration about the Gypsies was that they do not attend public hearings at all, for this was not supported by my personal observation. This could be

partly due to the villagers treating the few assimilating families differently from the so-called „good-for-nothings”. It is nonetheless surprising that while the majority related that this minority did not attend public hearings at all, my own experience showed that they accounted for approx. 20% of those present, which more or less corresponds to their share in the population. No similar bias was detected with respect to the elderly.

6.3 Evaluation of Participatory Tools

My primary research questions concerned the evaluation of the public hearing and the referendum, as participatory tools, by the participating local population. During the interviews about the referendum and the public hearings, however, it transpired that other forms of participation were present in the village, as well, and respondents also opined on those. In addition to answering the key questions of the research, below I will also present the case study population’s general evaluation of the participatory tools. Figure Figure 13 shows the system of participatory mechanisms revealed by the analysis.

Figure 13: Participatory tools in the interviews



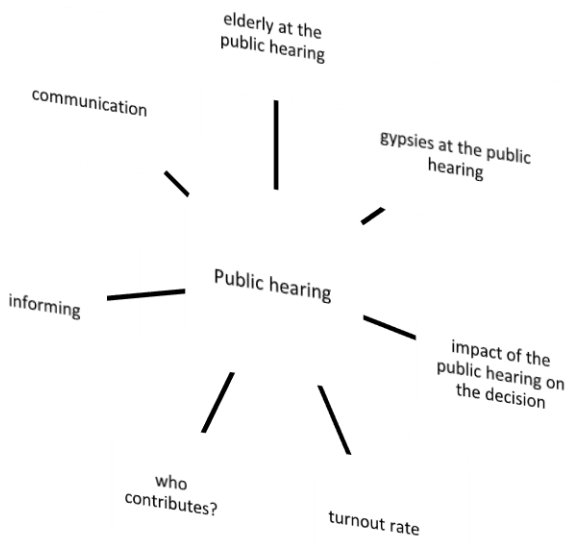
As we can see, beyond the referendum and the public hearings, the participatory tools mentioned also included the meetings of the body of representatives, face-to-

face contact, the collection of signatures and some further mechanisms. Next, I will present the evaluation of the individual tools, each in a separate subchapter.

6.3.1 Evaluation of the Public Hearing

The most characteristic subjects associated with public hearings were turnout rate (how many and who exactly participate), who contributes and the impact of the public hearing on the final decision. The participation of underprivileged groups was a topic of particular interest here, as well. Concerning the function of public hearings, informing was the primary response, interviewees made no reference to a substantive debate. Figure Figure 14 shows the system of codes derived from the interviews, refined and complemented with a couple of important features based on the findings from the focus group session and my experience from the participant observation.

Figure 14: Topics associated with public hearings



The general view on public hearings was that whilst people hear the mayor out, hardly anyone contributes or asks questions. Several interviewees related that there were a few people in the village eager to contribute on most occasions, but that the majority did not share their opinion.

„…and then it’s the bold who come to the public hearing. So, it’s the natural born leaders who come, and who then relate biased information, ’cause they tell their own, and the rest just remain silent and don’t really put in their two cents." (Mayor)

„…if there are some 100 people at the public hearing and 8 of them share their opinion, especially if those 8 are of the vehement sort, and I’m of a different view, then I won’t stand up any more, ’cause otherwise they’d lash out at me." (Mayor)

„You said, there were a hundred there last time, how many of them contributed?

Not many. There are a couple of people, who –. What I think is that everyone has an opinion, yet a whole lot of people become frustrated by the crowd and there’s only a few who dare to voice their opinion in front of others. We find it more difficult to talk in front of others than at thome in front of anyone. It’s only a very few who contribute at public hearings, and it’s the very same people most of the time. The problem is not that they don’t have an opinion, but that there is this strain on people that, like, jeez, now I should speak in front of the others, I should say something that the others don’t agree with, then I’ll rather tell’em at the grocer’s or the pub." (Main initiator)

"And do they usually voice their opinion? (…)
Some. I’m not saying they’re too many, there’s five or maybe six of them in the entire village who regularly contribute. There aren’t too many who voice their opinion. (…) I think most people aren’t very keen on speaking in front of others, I don’t know why, in such a small community they just aren’t. It might work out very well, but it doesn’t. By the way it’s always the loud ones who don’t even bother to phrase things politely, whatever comes, they just say it out loud. Sure, let them say it. Usually it’s them who get some sort of communication started. Now, you may well expect that to evoke some reaction, from someone in the rows who doesn’t agree, or someone who does, for that matter." (Local minority self-government representative)

That is, interviewees believed that it was not the majority view that the opinions voiced at the public hearings reflected, but rather the ideas of a couple of assertive individuals. As one member of the body of representatives put it:

„we’re all too familiar with that from the public hearings. It’s pretty easy to fiddle the atmosphere. People’s state of mind can be influenced effortlessly in such a small settlement.(…) such a public hearing is exciting, it’s worth listening to. Especially

> when the topic is such a problematic one, believe me." (One member of the body of representatives)

In spite of the above, the town clerk meant that public hearings are quite eventful in Pári, as compared to other settlements.

> „Well, some 10 to 15 people, at a minimum, contribute, quite a lot. In other townships, there's just a couple of mouthpieces, participation is much wider and far more active here. (…) Public hearings are pretty communicative here, I believe." (Town clerk)

Still, many interviewees thought that the public speaking situation keeps people from voicing their opinions.

> „and then he (*the mayor)* asked whether anyone had anything to add. No one had. What are people like? Why don't they say anything, why don't they share their opinion? " (Main initiator)

To me, the analysis of the interviews revealed that people tend to underline the informing function of public hearings, i.e. that the fundamental purpose of public hearings is to inform people on the affairs of the village.

The debate was a topic of emphasis in the interviews, and had its own code, as well. Even though many considered the debate to be important, they could not name a forum where it could take place, except maybe for the local pub or in front of the grocer's. Public hearings were not characterized as a forum for debate, only as a „pointless debate" at most (mayor, local minority self-government representative).

According to the interviewees, the underprivileged groups (the Roma and the elderly) participate in public hearings in very small numbers only (for more details, see Chapter 6.2). This was also confirmed by the focus group, who underlined the absence of elderly people. The participation of the Gypsies was, however, not brought up here, yet it was discussed in more detail that it was not only the elderly, but also the young locals who were missing, which the group members attributed to a general lack of interest. It is those between 40-60 years of age who typically participate in public matters.

> „Not only the elderly, I think. The young don't attend, either. Some folks are pretty indifferent." (Focus group member)

„It's those aged between 40-60 who are willing to pitch in with just anything that concerns the village. The younger ones not so much, I'd think."(Focus group member)

Even though the opportunity to voice one's opinion at public hearings and communication was brought up in several interviews, the view common to all conversations (interviews and the focus group) was that the majority of people do not contribute at public hearings, nor do they voice their opinions. Most believed the reason to be that people do not like to speak publicly, in front of 50 people, not even in such a small village. All of them did, however, emphasize the informing function of public hearings, as the source of information about the village's current affairs and the municipality's official means (along with the meetings of the body of representatives) of providing citizens with information.
The focus group session confirmed the above. According to them, the most important function of public hearings was the provision of official information, followed by communication between the body of representatives and the citizens. Here they primarily emphasized that one can pose questions to the body of representatives, without which information provision might be incomplete.

„Yes, but information provision is only complete if there's communication. 'Cause how can you inform people if you happen to forget about something. If they ask you, and you respond." (Focus group member)

„If they don't ask, then it's just informing. If, say, noone asks a single question." (Focus group member)

„In my opinion, information provision is comprehensive, we hear everyone out, everyone can tell their opinion. Everyone get answers to their questions."(Focus group member)

„Yes, information provision."(Focus group member)

It was also mentioned in the focus group conversation that the very same issues keep cropping up at Pári's public hearings. They keep recurring, again and again. The unresolved issues which have been in the forefront of the public's attention for years: the condition of roads and sidewalks, sewage, forestry building. I experienced the occurrence of these topics myself during the participant observation.

What participants identified as the greatest fault or deficiency of public hearings was the lack of interest. They, as well, concluded that people do not voice their opinions at the public hearings. The most important findings from the focus group session are listed in Table 6.

Table 6: Characteristics of the public hearing according to the focus group members

Advantages	Drawbacks
• official information • can communicate (rep. meeting is passive) • can ask questions • receive answers • confirmation • clarifies the news circulating the village • clarifies doubts, gossips • start time allows those of normal working age to attend	• recurring issues, „I know what it'll be about". Because of the questions asked, some topics keep returning, e.g. sewage, roads. These are unresolved issues. • the elderly do not attend. Either because it is too late or they are not interested • people do not voice their opinions • lack of interest • young people do not attend
most important ones	
• information • communication	• lack of interest

They rely on face-to-face contact to counterbalance the deficiencies of the public hearing. As one of the focus group members phrased it:

> „I don't usually wait for a rep meeting, if I have a question or something, then we just get round to it, 'cause I'm forgetful and forget about it." (Focus group member)

Concerning the organization of public hearings, the general view is that the way the assembly is announced and its subject matter largely determine the turnout rate.

> „'Cause even if we hang out 148 placards, we won't have any more attendants, 'cause everyone in the village has read those six anyways, if you ask me.
>
> Do they read it?(…)

> I don't think so.
>
> I think they do, 'cause it's there at each bus stop. If, say, half the village reads it, that's already quite OK. (…)
>
> If the topics are like, like very important, then people are invited individually.(…)
>
> And are there more people present if everyone has it delivered to their own postbox, or if it's just placarded. Do you see a difference there?
>
> They showed somewhat more interest, I believe. (…) There were more people there then than at that other public hearing.
>
> It's just that you can never know afterwards whether it was because of the individual invitations or the gravity of the matter that more people attended." (Focus group member)

The average turnout is 50 persons (about 10% of the voting age population), whereas the meeting held after the referendum was, according to the reports, attended by about 100 people (20%).

One of the research questions was how power dynamics manifested themselves at the public hearings. It is the analysis of the minutes that may provide the answer. A basic characteristic of public hearing minutes is that they are not word-for-word transcripts, but summaries in the words of those taking the minutes. The address of the mayor is usually put down in detail, but there are only concise summaries of people's opinions, often even without the names of those speaking. For instance:

> „Then a short argument unfolds between the participants of the public hearing concerning the location, the wastes and how they got to know that a waste collection site would be set up in the village." (Minutes of the public hearing held by the Body of Representatives of Pári on 12 April 2012 (Thursday) at 5:30 p.m., page 3)

Which in my opinion reflects that the debate itself and what is said there are not considered an important source of information by the leaders of the village and, consequently, their impact on the actions of the body of representatives can be through impressions at best.

What I saw during the participant observation was, however, that the mayor strived to answer each and every question, and to remedy any problems that could be remedied on the spot. Sometimes, he only answered that they had already applied for

funding for that and were awaiting decision. After the public hearing, he noted: ”that sidewalk, we should calculate what it would cost, in any case”. That is, the most intensely discussed topic of the public hearing, the construction of sidewalks, made it to the meeting of the body of representatives. Thus I think that the public hearing did (in this very case) have a significant impact on the decision, or on what issue they should decide on.

Several times during the public hearing, the mayor asked someone to „Write this down please, we’ll look into it tomorrow” in response to some specific wish. To resolve concrete wishes and problems, he also promised on several occasions to have a public worker with the necessary tools come by and remedy the problem the next day. In my interpretation, this was another sign that the locals’ opinions voiced at the public hearings do indeed affect everyday operations, even though their influence on long-term decisions remains doubtful.

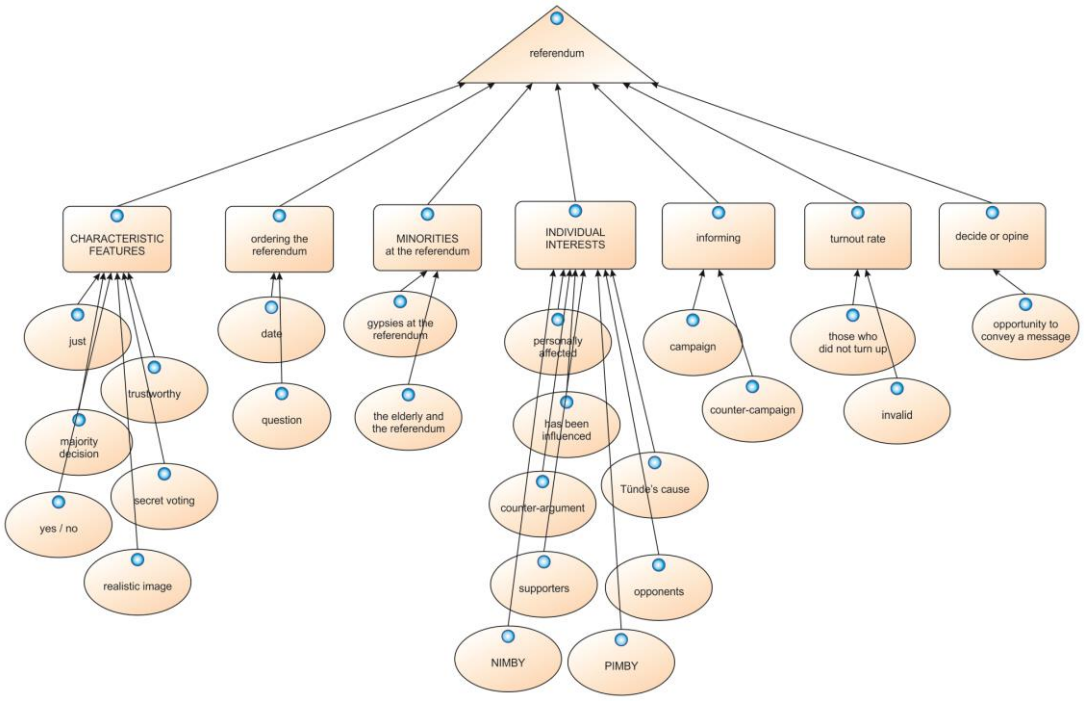
6.3.2 Evaluation of the Referendum

Unlike the public hearing, opinions about the referendum were far more diverse, some of them ever were in full contradiction with each other. Views on the referendum can be grouped around the following topics:

- How do minorities take part in the referendum (minorities in the referendum)?
- What is the referendum a means for: making a decision or voicing one’s opinion?
- What did interviewees mention as its characteristic features (in their own words)?
- What did they think about the resulting turnout?
- What was the Municipality’s campaign (counter-campaign) like?
- Reflection of individual interests as related to the referendum
- Reasons for and details on the ordering of the referendum

Figure Figure 15 below, prepared using the NVivo software, shows our system of referendum-related codes.

Figure 15: System of referendum-related codes



Below follows a detailed description of each item in the figure.

6.3.2.1 Characteristics of the Referendum

Interviewees typically used the following expressions with respect to the referendum:

- trustworthy
- official
- secret voting
- reflects the majority opinion
- fair
- provides a realistic image
- generates conflict.

These were the characteristics features that our interviewees highlighted. As one of them concisely put it:

> „…sure, yes, it was an official thing, and everyone could express their opinion whoever wanted to. We didn't see the papers, what they actually voted for." (Municipal employee)

These two sentences contain the most important point the interviewee wanted to make: an official and secret way of expressing your opinion, which is also fair at the same time (everyone can participate). This list of characteristic features also reflects the problem we are already familiar with from the literature: the conciseness of „yes" and „no" answers (Fiorino, 1990 és Rowe−Frewer, 2000). Some participants also underlined the advantages of conciseness.

According to this view, one of the reasons why the referendum was necessary was that it was a means of deciding between two mutually exclusive alternatives. By that, the interviewees implied that they felt the choice was between the two extremes – i.e. the absolute refusal of the initiators (NO) and the Municipality's YES –, that is, that the issue of the waste collection sites was reduced to a polar (yes/no) question.

> „if my memory serves me right, this was the direct consequence of him *(mayor)* thinking, or the body of reps thinking that if it's so very ambiguous whether we set it up or not, let a referendum decide that, which can provide clear guidance what the final step, or the next step, ought to be" (Local minority self-government representative)

> „I don't think it's good, it was a necessary bad, I'd rather say, 'cause maybe it was must, 'cause we couldn't have persuaded them in no way. If we didn't do it, we couldn't have had them give up their stance otherwise." (Other member of the body of representatives)

It is obvious that the referendum is by no means suitable for seeking or reaching a compromise. Whoever could not decide between the two extremes did possibly not even attend, either. There were a few, nonetheless, who referred to more refined ways of problem resolution.

> „there were some who couldn't decide whether they should vote yes or no. 'Cause there's a good side and a bad side, too, it would be nice, but then again it would be very bad for some. (…) I think there were people who thought there were pros as well as cons, so they rather let the others decide." (Municipal employee)

> „That's what I was about to say, I also know that many who voted no said, after having heard the compromise, that this way, it's yes. This was, again, a solution that hadn't come up earlier, thus you could only choose between full implementation or absolute refusal.

> You could vote yes or no.

> Yes, yes and no other idea really cropped up, if I'm not mistaken." (Local minority self-government representative)

6.3.2.2 Ordering of the Referendum

As regards the reason why the village opted for a referendum on the matter of the waste collection sites, opinions diverged.

> „Well, honestly, I was just flabbergasted, and I'd never've thought this is such a big thing that we should make a referendum out of it." (Married couple attending public hearings)

> „That seemed an interesting question to me, too, why we have to make such a big fuss about it, like a referendum. Why isn't the signature collection enough, why don't we have another public hearing, maybe with some more people present." (One initiator)

These thoughts suggest that **respondents, even those directly affected, did not consider the matter itself of the waste collection sites important or large enough a problem to justify a referendum.**
Nevertheless, several interviewees pointed out the advantages of the official nature of a referendum, as well.

> „I believe it's good, this way it was ensured that everyone can give voice to their opinion. If it wasn't for the referendum, we'd have soft-pedalled the issue, I didn't think the referendum was useless." (One initiator)

Similarly, a general view concerning the evaluation of the decision was that the official procedure of the referendum greatly determined its impact on the decision (see Chapter6.6).

6.3.2.3 Underprivileged Groups in the Referendum

Another important aspect of the referendum was the participation of underprivileged groups. Most interviewees reported that both the Gypsy minority and the elderly participated in the referendum. (For more details, see the chapter titled *Underprivileged Groups in the Interviews.*) An important charachteristic of referenda is, according to the respondents, fairness, which ensures that both the elderly (electoral visitor voting) and the minorities can participate. That is, they emphasized that „everyone can participate".

6.3.2.4 Individual Interests

The individual interests category became an umbrella term in the characterization of the referendum that reflected that the referendum had become a personal matter for the initiators. With regard to the referendum, this was the category with the broadest appearance, considering both the number of codes and that of references. The presence of individual interests turned out to be the richest topic within the characterization of the referendum (see Table Figure 15: System of : System of referendum-related codes).

The most important characteristic feature of the referendum mentioned in all but a few interviews was that the initiative had been the personal matter of a handful of locals. Interviewees concurred almost completely on that point, even the main initiator referred to the story as their own personal matter. This was best reflected in the use of the following phrases:

- stood up for them
  - they failed
- they bled to death
  - victors
  - adversary

These expressions do not only reflect the personal nature of the initiative, but practically portray it as a battle against the collection site:

> „I started off just like the victors do", „we crushed'em" (Main initiator)
>
> „took it to be a minor combat mission" (Municipal employee)
>
> „they have to win this battle" (Mayor)

There was no doubt about the personal interest of the initiators, after all most of them had some relative living in the direct vicinity of the designated locations. Several interviewees opined, however, that the initiative was not driven by public interest, but by the individual interests of a few residents only, and they misused the democratic institution of the referendum for their purposes.

> „The point when it became even more fishy in my eyes was when they refused this one, as well. It was then that I started thinking, was it really the waste collection site they had a problem with, or did someone come to the idea that let's halt this by all

means, get rid of it, and then whatever the case, whether it's a good idea or not, let's try to thwart it by all possible means. And for that, they used the locals, who are quite easy to talk into lots of things (…)" (One member of the body of representatives)

„What actually made people get the picture was that this wasn't really the opinion of the village, that we have to order a referendum now, and that it's the village that doesn't want it, but of those few residents who live there, in front of whose place it would've been built." (Other member of the body of representatives)

The vital argument of the opposers was that the idea itself (the setting-up of the waste collection sites) was good, but the choice of location was poor (**NIMBY**). I also examined this one separately, under the code 'I do not agree'. Even some of the supporters said that they did not agree with one of the locations. Given the personal interest of the initiators (have a relative living in the vicinity of the waste collection site), the question emerges whether this is not a case of the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome. By that I mean that the opposers basically agree that the facility's existence is justified, but they would like its location to be farther from their neighborhood (Petts, 1994).

„No one liked it, everyone thought it was a great idea, 'cause the village needs such a place, but not above the memorial and not at the end of Nagy Street" (Other initiator)

„'Cause there was no opposition to its being built, the question only was the where, where it should be built." (One initiator)

The above were however confuted by the main initiator's following statement:

„I think (…) this waste issue isn't such a huge problem in Pári, like, the village isn't being swallowed up in a swamp of trash. Sure, if it was such a pressing thing, I won't meet up with Zoli, but am happy instead, like, jeez this really is, then I won't protest. I won't say, either, just put it in my yard, but I won't protest, but I don't see this as such a huge worldly issue, one could surely find another solution." (Main initiator)

Even though she/he underlined multiple times during the interview that she/he considered the facility a good idea and illegal dumping an important problem, she/he still did not believe the matter of wastes to be important enough to justify the

existence of the facility. Therefore I dismissed the NIMBY concept, even though several interviews supported it. This sentence of the main initiator, however, overrode the others' opinions, because it was her/his personal motivation that set the initiative into motion.

Not only NIMBY, but, interestingly enough, PIMBY (put in my backyard) also appeared in the interview of one of the supporters.

> „I said I'd be glad to trade it. They could set up the waste collection site here, I'd be more than willing to tolerate it, if I had a plot, I'd even give it to them." (Married couple attending public hearings)

Another important factor related to the appearance of individual interests was, as related by several interviewees, that people had been persuaded or „influenced" by the initiators. Once again, respondents' choice of words is also rather telling: „agitate", „campaign", „propaganda", „influenced", „blew it up".

> „By the way, one's opinion is very easily influenced, depending on whom you talk to, what sort of view they present and how they present it." (Main initiator)

> „what I first thought was, and I told'em, how badly people can be worked, how much they can be influenced in the end. Irrespective of whether it's good or bad, they could come up with arguments, maybe true, maybe not, but they could come up with arguments that they could use to influence the population." (One member of the body of representatives)

> „So, I don't know, it's this part that I had a lot of bad feelings about, I guess I felt, how could this informing thing have been done in a way so as to not obviously want to persuade them, and to not tell the bad side, but also the good side and that which could work or could be good?" (Local minority self-government representative)

6.3.2.5 Informing

Some of the interviewees meant that the information was not unbiased, even though that was what the initiators allegedly strived for.

> „Their propaganda was very good, 'cause, sure enough, they could fool, so to speak, or persuade, quite a lot of people, 'cause that's not what they said, that it'd be a waste collection site, a landfill, they said. Well, sure I think that's not one and the same thing, 'cause it's not the household waste that'd be taken there. (…) It wasn't

> the truth they told, they didn't tell them the way it will be, the way it will be done." (Married couple attending public hearings)

> „That's true, but those who didn't attend the public hearing received information from somewhere else and received it from just the one side." (Local minority self-government representative)

The other element of the opposers campaign, besides personal visits, was the flyer they distributed in the couple of days preceding the ballot. With respect to its contents, even the main initiator related that they played „the emotional line" in the campaign.

> „We started talking, what we could do, and how we could do it, I told my sister who lives right next door to it to please write a letter that takes the whole thing to the emotional plane. Write down what you feel, and what you'd like and let's circulate it. We've run out of logical arguments, we've done all we could, now let's play the emotional line!" (Main initiator)

In that, they admitted their personal interest themselves.

Notwithstanding the above, many admitted that those collecting the signatures had spearheaded the information effort, and it was them that those who did not frequent public hearings acquired information on the waste collection sites from. Which also points out the deficiencies of the official information provision effort (see counter-campaign).

> „How I got to know was that T. and the others went door-to-door, visited everyone. There'd been talk about this for a while, those who frequent the reps meetings surely knew about it, it's just that I'm not one of them." (Municipal employee)

> „And people started to ask around, what's this about, do you know something about it, what've you heard?" (One initiator)

> „And how, do you think, the others knew?

> The others, from T., as we went along. Noone knew nothing here. I think there weren't too many at that public hearing, either," (Other initiator)

In particular, it was the elderly who our interviewees thought were easy to influence in the course of the signature collection (see Chapter6.2). As certain forms of informing did not reach them, their being poorly informed made them easy „prey" for manipulation ('the elderly have been influenced' code). Their participation in the referendum, however, was particularly high, also implied by the high number of applications for electoral visitor voting.

> „There were some 25 to 30 electoral visits, no election so far has had so many." (Mayor)

Most respondents admitted to the information received having been unbalanced, after all, those collecting the signatures went door-to-door in person, whereas all the **counter-campaign** of the Municipality comprised were two public hearings, a flyer and an article published in a local newspaper.

> „'cause I think hats off to T. and the others, 'cause they put in a lotta effort and they did all they could, left no stone unturned. The other side wasn't all that serious about this thing, that this will be the outcome, I think. (…) but if the other side had made some effort and thought that this might as well turn out like this, then they could've won over, they were rather halfhearted about it, that it won't turn out like this anyways." (Member of the Swabian community)

The Municipality did not engage in a true "counter-campaign". The campaign of those collecting the signatures, at the same time, was based on personal calls (also see the section on individual interests).

6.3.2.6 Turnout Rate

Voter turnout at the referendum was almost 50%, only 3 more votes would have been needed for it to be valid. Which created a rather peculiar situation, for the outcome was not binding for the body of representatives, and yet the turnout was very close to the 50% validity threshold. The evaluation of the turnout rate was, just as it could be expected, quite contradictory.

Everyone acknowledged that the relatively high turnout was the result of the initiators' effort and nothing else. They believed personal calls to have been a very efficient means of involving people and motivating them to participate in the ballot.

> „I think it mattered a lot that, long before it, and also before the ballot, for several weeks they had been calling in on a lot of people, whoever they could. Either in

person or through the flyer we received beforehand." (Local minority self-government representative)

„'cause I think hats off to T. and the others, 'cause they put in a lotta effort and they did all they could, left no stone unturned. The other side wasn't all that serious about this thing, that this will be the outcome, I think." (Member of the Swabian community)

„I think if they had left the decision to the people completely, no personal encouragement, no etc., then there would've been even less voters, I think." (Local minority self-government representative)

The near 50% turnout rate was generally considered high.

„…but I think the villagers really outdid themselves then" (Other initiator)

„A lot, I was surprised. I think it's a lot." (Other member of the body of representatives)

However one of the interviewees, clearly more appreciative of participation, still insisted that the turnout had been low:

„I was very disappointed, 'cause only a few people turned up, I think this isn't enough. This, if anything, is really a problem that directly affects us, (…) that would've really been all about our concern." (Local minority self-government representative)

Explanations for people's absence varied widely. One of them was lack of interest and another that some could not decide what to vote. The representatives and the mayor clearly believed that it was the supporters who remained absent. The following quotations serve to illustrate what interviewees thought about those not having cast a vote:

„I think they didn't care" (Other initiator)

„OK, so we got to know that 60% is for it, and that they didn't vote 'cause they don't care. Still, the fact is that more than 40% were against it." (Mayor)

„Those strongly opposed to it, they did cast a vote, those who didn't attend, to them it was completely indifferent whether it would or wouldn't be built." (One member of the body of representatives)

„Those people who didn't attend, part of them, I think, are completely independent and just don't give a hoot what happens, and there's a part who thought OK, why not build it, but is that ground for my leaving the house?" (Member of the Swabian community)

„Yes, they got angry with her/him, 'caue she/he said that she/he wouldn't vote on nonsense." (Married couple attending public hearings)

„They aren't interested, it's not in their neighborhood, so they think, I don't care, I've been quite well-off without it, I will do without it in the future, even if they will, and also, I think there were some who were affected by it in one way or another and didn't dare react, or there were some who couldn't decide whether they should vote yes or no. 'Cause there's a good side and a bad side, too, it would be nice, but then again it would be very bad for some." (Municipal employee)

Some did not participate exactly in order to render the referendum invalid.

„Why did you not cast a vote?

So that it's not valid.

That was the goal, intentionally?

Intentionally." (Married couple attending public hearings)

Some labeled this behavior the „counter-campaign" of the mayor's supporters.

6.3.2.7 Decide or opine?

The question whether participants consider the referendum as a true decision-making opportunity (decision-making or voicing of opinions) is a particularly ambiguous one. Respondents' comments suggest that people see referenda as a way of expressing their opinions rather than an actual decision. Even though several interviewees mentioned the word 'decision', when asked specifically, their responses could be interpreted as 'voicing of opinions'. In the majority of the conversations, the expression „could voice their opinions" was used. Thus there was a case of ambiguity here.

„that's exactly why this's become a vote, 'cause so that we give a, so to say, proper closure to this debate. Let's not do what I want, nor what they want, let the people

decide here instead. They could voice their opinion through the referendum, I think." (One initiator)

„Do you feel this referendum is a real opportunity for you to make a decision?

It's like an opportunity to convey a message, I'd rather say." (Local minority self-government representative)

„Who do you think should decide on matters that directly affect us?

In my opinion, well, us. To me, this is an absolutely appropriate forum, I don't like it when they just tell us from above (…), when I have the opportunity and if I can really do it, I like to voice my opinion." (Local minority self-government representative)

„on the other hand I think it's not so bad that they tried to kinda inflict it upon the village to make their opinions be heard." (Member of the Swabian community)

„That's how the idea of the referendum arose, that's the only way to make the decision, if we vote, everyone can voice their opinion and then the decision, it will be made, either this way or that way, how it ever turns out." (Other member of the body of representatives)

An attempt was made to clarify this matter at the focus group session, as well, in my opinion, however, the distinction between making the decision and voicing their opinion is not perfectly clear to people. The decision-making opportunity itself seems to be less important to them, than the opportunity to express their opinions.
The most important findings from the focus group session are summarized in the table below.

Table 7: Characteristics of the referendum according to the focus group members

Advantages	Drawbacks
• reflects the will of the people (democracy??????) • bring together the community • shakes up pulic life • voters feel they are important • can voice their opinion secretly • can voice it individually	• divides the village • reflects the opinions of the groups • creates conflict • does not reflect the majority view • outcome is the result of personal persuasion • the opinions of those who do not attend are not represented • only the opinions of those who attend are represented
most important ones	
• voicing of opinions • shakes up public life	• creates conflict

A very interesting experience from the focus group session was that what participants recalled as the most important characteristic of the referendum was the impact it had had on the life of the community. On the one hand, they emphasized the negative side, i.e. that it created **conflict** and opposition between the groups. The positive side was underlined, as well, in that it **brought together the community and shook up public life**. They really had a hard time gathering the advantageous characteristics of the referendum, at first, they did not even find any. Their statements, as well, implied the voicing of opinions instead of decision-making.

These findings, however, coincide with experience from my previous research (Kiss, 2005). Considering earlier waste-related referenda, the most important benefit from the referenda and the ensuing conflicts was, as well, the revival of community life. One of the interviewees also put this into words:

> „Now if I wanna draw a lesson here, then it's that I think it's good that people can be shaken up, this is good." (Other member of the body of representatives)

6.4 Other Tools

The participatory tool considered to be the most important one in the village is face-to-face contact, and accordingly, it was mentioned in all but a few interviews. In-person meetings with the mayor or the representatives had a very important role with regard to both information provision and consultation. This was also mentioned with reference to the expression of opinions not having been comprehensive at the public hearing, so that those who did not want to contribute there would meet the leaders of the village in person in order to acquire information and voice their opinions.

> „You rather went to meet the mayor in person?
>
> Yes, I went. Maybe I was the first one and enquired, how's things now? We really have brought off something? I do have the gumption to walk up to them face-to-face, but at a plenum, that's not my thing."(Member of the Swabian community)

Moreover, face-to-face contacts also complement public hearings in their function to provide information, as public hearings are only held a few times each year, and the villagers also seek answers in person to any current issues that emerge between two such occasions.

> „I often pay a visit to the mayor, when I've got the time, and then I ask him, what's going on, what's to be expected. (…) Yes, if something comes to my mind, I usually ask him how or what the situation is, whether he can tell us something, or me." (Married couple attending public hearings)
>
> „Well, not necessarily at the public hearing, I think, but much more in street or, like, in-person encounters. I think most people aren't very keen on speaking in front of others, I don't know why, in such a small community they just aren't. It might work out very well, but it doesn't." (Local minority self-government representative)

However, it is obviously impossible to have face-to-face contact with the entire population. Depending on their relative power in the community, certain groups might be systematically excluded from these forms of expression, as well. Considering the underprivileged groups under this aspect, face-to-face contact with the mayor works well for the elderly, particularly for those attending day care, as they themselves also told me (see the chapter on underprivileged groups).

> „He quite often talks to the older locals, (…) often goes to Életház and has a chat with them, (…) and he'll listen to what they say." (One initiator)

The Gypsies, on the other hand, do not engage in face-to-face contacts, either.

> „'cause they aren't on such good terms with the mayor." (One initiator)

Thus face-to-face contact does not fulfil the criterion of fairness, as it is not open to just anyone who wishes to participate in it.

Given that several interviewees brought up the faults and deficiencies of both the public hearing and the referendum, the question arose which other – maybe even new or previously unused – participatory tools they would find desirable to be employed. During the interviews, I encountered several innovative concepts concerning the use of participatory tools, and the leaders of the village seemed open to their potential implementation. How receptive the wider community is of these, however, remains to be seen. They mentioned the following tools:

- opinion survey
- voting at the public hearing
- „covert ballot" (unofficial referendum)
- „letter of opinion", which could be dropped into a box either at the pub or the grocer's.

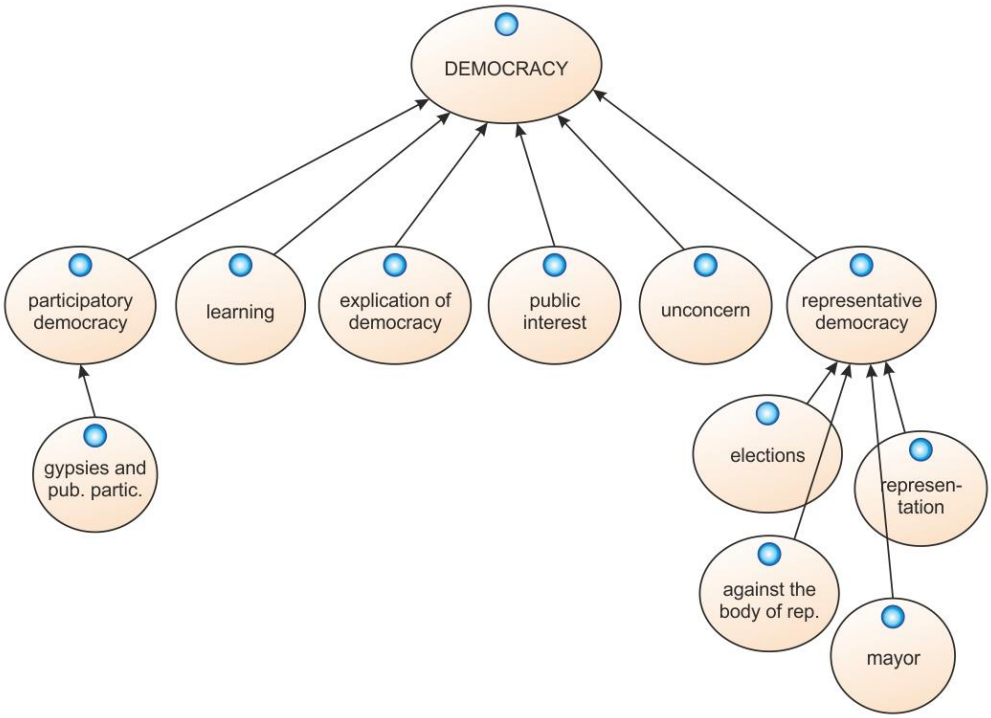
An opinion survey was actually conducted in the village in connection with another decision, which however will not be analyzed here, as it had no bearing upon the case of the waste collection sites. The response rate was, by the way, extremely low.

6.5 Democracy

The words „democracy" or „democratic" were used by two interviewees only: the mayor and the town clerk. This came as a surprise, contradicting my expectations as a researcher. I was worried, namely, that when asked about the referendum, people would come up with democracy and participation in decision-making right away, in order to conform to my expectations. In fact, quite the contrary was the case: the word democracy has hardly ever been uttered. Even though in connection to the decision it was mentioned that 'we have to decide', if we take a closer look at the interviews, we see that the real demand beyond what was said was that for expressing one's opinion.

Views on democracy did, nevertheless, appear in each and every interview, they just were not referred to as such. Figure Figure 16 below shows the democracy-related topics that appeared in the interviews.

Figure 16: System of codes related to the topic of democracy



As regards democracy, interviewees expressed, on the one hand, that people are **unconcerned** about the affairs of both the village and the entire country.

> „Az érdektelenség, bennünket közvetlenül érintő témában szerintem abszolút szomorú hozzáállás.” (Local minority self-government representative)

> „Utána jön az érdektelenség, láthatod, hogy elmész, és éppen az van ott, aki éppen érdekelt, akinek van valami szerepe és semmi több.” (Member of the Swabian community)

On the other hand, they also concluded that people only get involved in these affairs, if

> "they have been charged up" (Main initiator) or

> "there’s someone to be the heart and soul of the team" (Mayor)

That is, participation only works if someone has a personal interest in the matter, or if processes are controlled by an opinion leader. Thus personal interest is a factor here, just like it was the case with the referendum.

„I'm not interested, when I will be interested is if I'm totally personally, directly affected by it, and then I'll be absolutely outraged, but until then, no, I'm not all that interested." (Main initiator)

One of them said about her/his interest in local public affairs in general.

„what I usually say is that this's a dictatorial democracy. There always needs to be someone whose mentality makes them the heart and soul of the team. If this heart is a strong one, then it works, and it works way better than I thought." (Mayor)

„I think if they had left the decision to the people completely, no personal encouragement, no etc., then there would've been even less voters, I think." (Local minority self-government representative)

These accounts reveal that the reason the participation process could begin and turned out to be successful was that the processes were controlled by an opinion leader, who had the necessary personal interest and motivated the people through personal encouragement. This was also pointed out in connection with the referendum, as well. Similarly, what they emphasized about democracy in general was that **people do not want to participate and make decisions voluntarily, on their own initiative, only if they receive personal encouragement, which then again requires a person or a group with an individual interest and motivation**. That is, the population is only willing to drop its general unconcern if they have a personal interest in the matter, or if someone whom they listen to encourages them, out of personal interest, to do so.

Several respondents talked about the relationship between individual interests and public interest, as well. Public interest was also mentioned as related to representation and the learning process. The public interest with respect to the case of the waste collection sites was, as pointed out by many, to stop illegal dumping. Whereas the individual interests called for avoiding the waste collection sites. A number of interviewees saw these two interests to be in opposition.

„I'm convinced that it's in people's best interest, too, that illegal dump sites are done away with. I think it must be disturbing for everyone to see the trash on the roadside, and the heaps of trash everywhere. I'm sure it would be good for them, too, if there was a place they could put it and then the municipality would, at the municipality's cost, using the municipality's truck, have hauled it away, and they wouldn't have that problem any more, either." (Town clerk)

„It's just impossible not to step on anybody's toes, there'll always be, there's always been and there is always someone whose interests get violated or who thinks they're getting violated." (Married couple attending public hearings)

„Sure, I get it that it's not a pleasant sight, but there are others, too, there's not just me. After all, that's our common thing, and that's an empty lot. That there'll we be such a, at least it'll be fenced." (Married couple attending public hearings)

„I don't know whether it's an individual's or the community's interests that ought to be considered. (…) 'Cause if we make a waste collection site in the middle of the village, right next to Mrs. M. or not, well, the only ones interested in that are the person who lives next door and their family. All the others, just like I don't see the illegal dump, they aren't interested." (Main initiator)

The representation of individual interests was also raised in connection with political representation, as to whom the body of representatives should represent in such a case, when the interest of the public and that of the individual are in conflict.

„But we told'em that it's not like that, because first and foremost, we represent the village and they only come second. It's the majority that counts for us." (Mayor)

The **learning** process of democracy was mentioned by many, and several relevant similes were brought up. One of them was that of the mayor involving Moses, which he recited several times during our conversation.

„I have a very good example, I heard it from one of my instructors. Do you know how long it took Moses to lead the Jews out of Egypt? Do you know the distance between Egypt and Israel? 1500 km, they walk 20 km each they and arrive in two years' time. They wandered the desert for 40 years. They had to change, those people emerged from slavery needed a change of generation, they had to learn how they'll be able to live in their new home. And it's the exact same thing that the people of Pári don't know, in my opinion." (Mayor)

Our interviewees associated the learning process of democracy with Pári's independence, that is, its separation from the neighboring town. As they put it: they had to learn it.

„So it's been 6 years since we separated, and that needs to be learnt, I guess. The village needs to learn it, everyone, the elderly, the youth, that they had gotten used to the fact that nothing was done here for some twenty or thirty years, we're left to our

> own devices, everyone does it how ever they want, no one cares about us. And that needs to be learnt, by the elderly, by the young, that something's being done here. But if they do something, then in exchange for that we should, as well, come up with something, not just expect someone else to do it for us like we've done till now, 'cause now we really are our own masters." (Married couple attending public hearings)

There was another example for the learning process, as well, mentioned by several interviewees, namely the open burning regulation. This is also linked to waste-related learning, where the operation of the waste collection sites is expected to set in motion the learning process. The open burning regulation, which several respondentes referred to, symbolizes the enforcement of public interest. The interest of the public is, namely, that there should not be open fires in the village all the time. Apart from that, it is each resident's individual interest to burn whatever they usually burn. The regulation restricted open burning, which put limits on the individual's freedom in order to defend public interest. The acceptance of the regulation, as well, was the result of a prolonged learning process, by the end of which they came to understand that it indeed served the interest of the public.

> „There was this open burning regulation, for example. We passed a decree, which at first said that it was allowed to burn once every month, on a Tuesday. That also was a thing that people were baffled by, it was perfectly usual in a small village that when some trash piled up, I take it out to the yard and set it on fire. We looked like an indian village, there's smoke all the time, the Germans came, guests, or foreigners and they're just watching that there's smoke everywhere, you couldn't hang your laundry out to dry, 'cause it sure caught the smoke from the neighbor's, and then your shirts smelled of smoke. Then, too, they first got worked up, like, you can't burn your stuff, how's that. Then our own experience told us that one single day a month is not enough, so OK, let it be each Tuesday. Of course, people again grumbled how we could come up with such a stupid thing, to prohibit burning in a village? We really got our share of scolding, and then after half a year, things just perfectly settled. Now I'm not saying it doesn't happen now and again, sometimes we have to give some warning or a fine, but since then, everyone does their burning on Tuesday. Okay, they don't interpret it as in it's allowed on Tuesday, but that on Tuesday, it's compulsory. ((laughter)) But at least there's no smoke otherwise. So you see, this is a difficult thing. Am I the one to tell a man seventy-something years of age, who's been burning stuff every single day for the last sixty years that he can't

> light a fire tomorrow, only on Tuesday. In the end, they came to terms with it, and that's how it's gonna be with these attacks against the waste collection site, too." (One member of the body of representatives)

This example captures both the problems of representation and the learning process of democracy.

The comparison of representative and **participatory democracy** also appeared several times. A number of interviews reflected the opinion that in matters directly affecting the population, it should not be the body of representatives (four to five people) who decide, but the residents should also have their say in the decision.

> „Maybe those four representatives and the mayor, those five representatives represent an entire township, it's not sure they can think of everything when making the decision." (Town clerk)

Yet even in these quotations, participation only appears on the level of voicing one's opinions. The contradiction between decision-making and the expression of opinion is still present, just as it was in the case of the referendum (see Chapter6.3.2).

> „'Cause then I thought, finally it's not those four who're telling their side, 'cause it's quite different against four people, and the two groups are fighting, so to say, but those who „are not directly concerned", but actually they are the ones whom it truly concerns, then they, too, can tell, at least through their votes, what they think about the whole thing. That people don't necessarily use this opportunity, that's a different question." (Local minority self-government representative)

> „I think it shouldn't be four people voting on everyone's lives. It's far more just this way, that everyone could voice their opinion. The thing is, it'll be built, it'll be there, it isn't something we just knock down the day after tomorrow. Therefore I think it's good if the people know about it and can tell their opinion and what they want." (Municipal employee)

With regard to participation in decision-making, people repeated in more general terms what had already been said about the participation of the Gypsy minority with respect to the public hearings: that they do not participate in the affairs of the village.

> „You have to go and give voice to your opinion, and the Gypsy is the kind that, OK, I'll go and soandso…and then it isn't a must. Yes, that's what they're like with other

affairs of the village, too, they don't really participate in any decision-making." (One initiator)

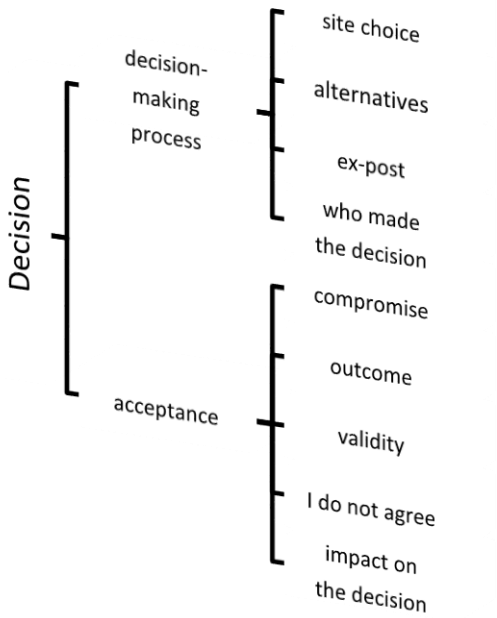
6.6 Evaluation of the Decision

Concerning the population's evaluation of the decision, I sought to answer the following two research questions:

1. In retrospect, are the members of the community satisfied with the results of the decisions?
2. How did the outcome of the referendum influence the decision?

Beside these questions, several other topics also appeared in the unfolding theory. Figure Figure 17 shows the system of decision-related codes. It was the category related to the decision-making process and the category describing the acceptance that emerged from the interview transcripts.

Figure 17: System of the codes related to the evaluation of the decision



The topics brought up in connection with the decision-making process were the site selection process, the alternatives at hand, how those were weighed against each other, how the decision itself was made and who the final decision was made by. With regard to the timing of the decision, „posteriority" was brought up, which is actually a topic also mentioned in the literature of environmental decisions. The concept of compromise appeared in the evaluation of the decision, which some

interviewees used to characterize the decision, yet the opinions covered by this code were loaded with contradictions. Contradictory were, as well, the acceptance of the decision as related to the compromise and the evaluation of the referendum's outcome, which naturally also determined what the respondents thought about the impact the outcome of the referendum had on the decision.

The evaluation of the decision-making process included the location choice criteria, which most found to have been logical and reasonable.

> „I asked him, he has very reasonable grounds, by the way. These two plots of the municipality lie within the village. It's also very good, what he said, 'cause actually these illegal dump sites, so, those who take their trash outside the village, they pass in front of these two places, and if we put it there to be near to them, they'll obviously not take it outside the village and he's absolutely right." (Main initiator)

Participants were, however, rather divided about the existence and the evaluation of alternatives. The alternatives proposed by those collecting the signatures (location outside the village) were considered by the representatives, but they did not fit the original concept (easy accessibility) and ownership was unclear, as well, therefore they dismissed them. On the other hand, the initiators did not find the municipality's proposals acceptable in any form. The alternatives were not publicly discussed on any forum, even though the mayor and the main initiator had several one-to-one negotiations. This is how the two-sided conflict that led to the referendum emerged. Given that no other alternative was included among the options, people could only vote against or for the realization – according to the original plans – of the facilities. This is how the situation we know so well from the literature arose: involvement into the decision took place at the end of the decision-making process only, when there was no real choice, no real alternatives any more. People generally have to decide over plans that have already been finalized (Lányi, 2001; Bela et al., 2003; Kiss, 2005).

It was reflected in the interviews, as well, that participants considered the referendum an ex-post opportunity and thought that the decision had already been made.

> „this cropped up back then, too, why didn't they start anything. When decided all this six years ago, or how many, when they first got started. 'Cause there was talk about this and most probably, it was up for discussion back then, as well. I don't

> understand why it's there and then, relatively late to begin with, that they figured this, 'cause it could've been changed, so that they don't include it in the lay-out plan, or otherwise." (Member of the Swabian community)

> „I think it would've been worth talking about this earlier, back when the then reps made the decision. What I found strange was how on earth hadn't the village known about this then, 'cause we hadn't actually, 'cause it hadn't been made public then." (One initiator)

It was clear that the residents did not know about the plan to set up the facilities, that is, the contents of the lay-out plan in general were unknown to them. Accordingly, only one solution seemed to take shape.

> „…we had already made a decision, to build it, not to build it, where to build it, and thought that we should build it, it could only be changed if there actually is some legal decision, a referendum, for instance, that says don't build, then we won't. If that's what the village wants, then we won't." (One member of the body of representatives)

That is, no decision could be made about the alternatives, only over the absolute refusal. One of the main factors in the characterization of the decision-making process was thus posteriority, which also limited the scope of the population's involvement.

It was not the referendum, however, that made the final decision, for it turned out to be invalid. This is also related to the impact that the outcome of the referendum had on the decision. The 'who decided' question appeared in the following opinions.

> „…they *(representatives)* are the ones who, taking into account the referendum, what the outcome was, made that decision" (Main initiator)

> „As a matter of fact, they couldn't decide the matter through the ballot, or rather they did, 'cause not even with the ballot could they achieve that it wouldn't be built." (Other member of the body of representatives)

> „The village could decide, partly, 'cause partly it was the mayor who decided, but there was a chance." (Municipal employee)

Thus the final decision was made, according to some, by the body of representatives or, according to others, by the mayor. The outcome of the referendum was a decision

in the regard that they could not attain a refusal, but some respondents acknowledged that the people had a part in the decision, that is, the outcome of the referendum did have an impact on the decision. These two topics are closely related.

Looking at what effect respondents attribute to the outcome of the referendum with respect to the final decision of the body of representatives, we can see that their views varied particularly widely.

> „I think this is something extra for the body of reps to make the decision they ought to make. (…) This is an extra reinforcement so that it's indeed the interests of the population that be represented." (Town clerk)

Those who felt that the referendum had no impact on the decision did not accept the final decision, either: they did not even regard it as a compromise.

> „'Cause they said they'd consider how the village'd vote. Well, I personally think they haven't taken into account how the village voted, what the opinion of the majority was. That's what I think, at any rate, 'cause they *(the body of representatives)* voted that it be built. In my opinion, they didn't consider it. (…) Lots of people were bitter that they hadn't considered the opinion of the village." (Other initiator)

There was, nevertheless, only one interviewee who held such a negative opinion. And in this very case, I had doubts about the interviewee's awareness of the actual events. What transpired during the conversation was the she/he was not fully clear about the final decision, and some of her/his statements contradicted each other. In my opinion, it is even possible – though that is just speculation – that she/he was not aware of the final decision, and thus was not in a position to evaluate the impact of the referendum.

The number of those who felt that the outcome of the referendum did influence the decision was, on the contrary, far higher. They also exhibited a certain degree of acceptance.

> „he did ask for the opinions, did change his own position, didn't leave it out of account." (Main initiator)

> „Well, I still think I'm not happy about the decision, neither are those living next door, but I accepted the decision, 'cause that's what the result was." (Main initiator)

„The mayor takes into account people's opinion, by all means. (…) Yes, he takes it into account that most of the votes said let's build it, but not here. I am sure that he'll take this into account." (One initiator)

It was apparent that most respondents perceived the referendum to have had some sort of impact on the decision. They did, however, disagree about the strength of this effect and whether the decision had been a compromise solution. The expression 'compromise' appeared in several interviews; a number of respondents characterized the decision as a „compromise", „half-way solution", „compromise solution", „common path" or the „common denominator". They were the ones who felt that the outcome of the referendum had indeed had an impact on the decision.

„…and that's how the half-way solution came about, so that it's good for them as well as for the municipality. (…) I think the mayor made the decision with the high turnout of the referendum in mind. Those 223 no's, who attended, one's gotta do something about them, it would be very unjust otherwise. Sorry, it failed, I don't care what you voted for, I think he's trying to find a half-way solution this way, that, like, we do have to build it, it's not good for you, but we gotta do something." (Municipal employee)

„I think people came to terms with it, or rather they have no other choice but to accept it, even if they don't like it." (Municipal employee)

„I was quite happy that they settled for a compromise solution (…) But I did like this idea, that it's not like I heavy-handedly make the other side accept my unchanged will, but they managed to figure out something that might even turn out well eventually." (Local minority self-government representative)

„…I also know that many who voted no said, after having heard the compromise, that this way, it's yes. This was, again, a solution that hadn't come up earlier, thus you could only choose between full implementation or absolute refusal." (Local minority self-government representative)

„…made that decision, took into account their opinion, and theirs, as well, and then they tried a common path." (One initiator)

„In fact, none of them had their way, one could say it will be built, but it still won't. It will be built, but we won't use that one. It's kind of a half-truth, it swung this way a bit, that way a bit, at least that's how it all played out back then." (Other member of the body of representatives)

„I think, for the majority of the people, it's a compromise, it's just them *(main initiator)* for whom it's not." (Member of the Swabian community)

Apparently, interviewees considered the compromise solution to also have been accepted by the community. Even though it might be questioned whether it is possible to reach a true compromise at all if one of the actors (the population) is not even offered a chance to give their opinion on the final decision. The referendum, namely, was about not building the collection sites. Whereas the decision-makers finally determined to have one of them built by all means. The formulation of this „half-way solution" was not a necessary consequence of the referendum. It was left to the discretion of the body of representatives. Still it seems that the decision has come to be accepted by the local residents. There was only one comment to the contrary:

„We'll see, we'll take the next step if it's necessary, we don't leave it at that, we won't leave it at that." (One initiator)

I had the impression, however, that this interviewee did not possess accurate information about the final decision, either, as they repeatedly referred to the construction as if the case had been still in progress and had not been decided about yet.

Some of the respondents did nevertheless question the decision's being a compromise and acceptance. The interviewee also found its impact on the decision to have been weak.

„If you make this offer to me and I don't accept it, and I still keep going after it, and still keep bringing in this authority and that authority, then have they reached a compromise at all?! (…) This whatever the price is, I'll only pursue my own cause and I don't wish to make any sort of compromise…" (Member of the Swabian community)

„I don't really understand, either, sorry, but if I ask for your opinion, why doesn't it matter more? Why does it not matter more?!" (Member of the Swabian community)

From the decision-makers' perspective, the referendum as a tool ensured that people's opinions would be reflected in the decision. Other forms of expressing one's opinion (signature collection, public hearing, face-to-face contact) did not have an impact on the decision. They believed the reasons for that to have been the bias of

these participatory mechanisms, with influence originating from the appearance of individual interests, and, in the case of the public hearing, the small number of those having contributed to the discussion. Individual interests and influence were, however, mentioned in interviewees' evaluations of the referendum, as well.

„*So it was the fact that it lead to a referendum, and what the outcome was, that was what made the body of representatives modify its plans?*

Probably yes.

The signature collection, that did not influence you yet?

Not that much, I'd say that…It's not such a great idea, we should think it over, obviously it cropped up several times, we talked with him several times. We do talk about such things, the solution was not ready before the referendum, how it should be. I found it good that it's ready there and it's not in use.

You did not feel the collection of signatures to have constituted a strong enough pressure to have actually been an expression of people's opinion. Was it already their opinion that it expressed?

Not really. Mostly because you knew that things hadn't been going like they should have. I think that's the reason why it had no influence on us.

And why did the outcome of the referendum have a different influence?

'Cause those who attended, a large percentage of them voted against them. That sort of makes you think. Yes, obviously, it was those who they contacted who actually went to vote, but that didn't bother me, 'cause they made the effort to attend and, well, they voted as they voted. It was a minimal percentage for and a large percentage against it." (Other member of the body of representatives)

„Afterwards all peace and tranquility, 'cause I really have to say everyone was 100 percent satisfied with this solution. (…) 99 percent of the population, I have to say, have resigned themselves to this solution, 'cause they feel that garbage is indeed a problem, that something needs to be done about it." (Mayor)

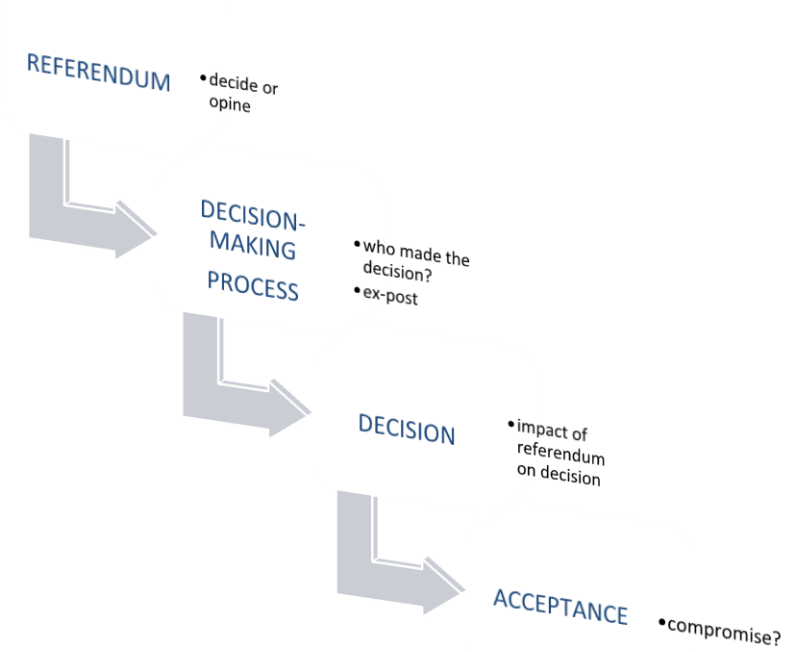
6.6.1.1 Summary

One of the views was, as we have seen, that the referendum does have an influence on the decision, but it only shapes it, without the will of the population being directly

“enforced”. The same was reflected in respondents’ evaluating the referendum as a way to voice their opinions, rather than a real decision-making opportunity. This view was shared by both the population and the decision-makers.

It is apparent that there is a very close relationship between the four factors; namely, who participants believe to have made the decision, what sort of influence (on the decision) they ascribe to the referendum’s outcome, to what extent they believe it is a compromise and the degree to which they accept the decision. This system of relationships is illustrated by Figure Figure 18.

Figure 18: Connections between the referendum and the decision in participants’ views



Thus our findings show that the local residents were not, according to their own judgment, granted real decision authority through the referendum.

- On the one hand, the residents themselves, as well, consider the referendum to be merely a way to express their opinion, and they did not seem to imply that they would like to actually make the decision instead of simply influencing it by voicing their opinion.
- The decision-makers attach importance to the views of the population, yet it takes an official participatory mechanism with consequences regulated by law to make them change their decision.

- The case was about judging in retrospect a decision that had already been made, with complete refusal or acceptance having been the only choices available, excluding any potential alternative solutions. There was no appropriate forum for discussing the alternatives.
- Despite the referendum having been invalid, the majority of the participants admitted that it did still have an impact on the decision. The concept of compromise was also mentioned with respect to the decision, but there was no agreement on that, even though the result indeed was a „half-way" solution between the two poles that had been represented in the referendum.
- Given that the outcome of the referendum did have an impact on the decision, the acceptance of the decision was acknowledged by both the population and the decision-makers.

Even though the referendum did not equip participants with real decision authority, it did prove out to be useful in influencing the decision, as it was acknowledged by all parties that it did have an impact on the decision. Still, several respondents opined that the referendum had been superfluous, and a waste of time and money. Who meant that it was superfluous were those who perceived it not to have had any impact on the decision at all (Other initiator), and who thought the case had not been worth ordering a referendum for, because resistance had solely been based on individual interests to begin with (Married couple attending public hearings).

> „…people went there for nothing, I think, for the village, this referendum was just a waste of money, yet again." (Other initiator)

> „It was a silly thing to do. Yes. They did a fine job mobilizing so many people, yet it would've been better if the villagers had joined forces for something that makes more sense." (Married couple attending public hearings)

It has become apparent, however, that from the decision-makers' perspective the referendum was necessary in order to exert substantial influence on their decision. The other mechanisms (collection of signatures, public hearings, face-to-face contact) for giving one's opinion were not suitable for that. These only have a negligible effect on decisions.

An interesting aspect is that neither the mayor, nor the main initiator considered the referendum important, and they shared similar views on its bureaucratic procedure and costs making its use superfluous. Whereas they would both prefer to rely on the

outcome of an unofficial vote that would be conducted at a public hearing or in some other officially announced way.

> „The next time I would do it like – if it's a matter where it's not important that all those appropriate official formalities – then we would do the referendum, a quasi-referendum ourselves. Mostly something like an opinion poll, come here, there's the slips, take one, put an 'X' somewhere and there's the box, put it in so that we see what your opinion is, there's no costs to that." (Mayor)

> „I didn't want there to be a referendum. I think that at the level of a village, this could be solved without ordering a referendum, if we did a, so to say, covert ballot, send a slip to the people that thisandthis, ballot, come attend, and then we get to know." (Main initiator)

In light of our findings, however, I would have serious doubts concerning voter turnout and whether such ballots would have the same influence on decision-makers as official referenda have.

6.7 Phrasing of the Question

The literature (Szántó, 2008c) suggests that through the phrasing of the referendum question and the date set for the referendum, both the turnout rate and the votes themselves can be greatly influenced.

As regards the waste collection sites, several interviewees mentioned that they did not agree with one of the locations, even though they basically thought that setting up the facilities was a good idea. Even among the senior officials there were some who admitted that they did not consider one of the locations to have been a smart choice. These opinions could not, however, be reflected in the outcome of the referendum, for the referendum question was:

„Do you agree that a temporary waste disposal site should be set up in the interior zone of Pári?"

The phrasing of the question is worth taking a closer look at. There appears to be some conceptual unclarity, as while the referendum question asks about a „temporary

waste disposal site", the lay-out plan mentions a „household waste collection site". Waste disposal site is a very misleading expression, for the site would only serve the temporary storage, and not the final disposal of waste.

The lay-out plan contains two waste collection sites, one of them in Kis Street, the other in Nagy Street. It was the one in Kis (Újváros) Street that most respondents labeled „conflictual" in their accounts of the story. Which should have justified it to pose two separate referendum questions, one for each of the two waste collection sites. The way it was done, people's opinions on the two sites got "blended". Whereas the interviews evinced that the difference in people's opinion between the two sites was remarkable.

> „When the girls came over, I told them that, actually, if I take those two disposal sites, however bad it sounds, it's just the one I have a problem with. It's right in the very middle of the village, well, not the very middle, but still in a central area, or how should I put it." (Local minority self-government representative)

Yet the referendum question did not differentiate between the two sites, and therefore the outcome of the referendum gave no indication for the decision-makers as to the level of support to be expected for their later decision. At the same time, the phrasing of the question also implies that the initiators of the signature collection and the referendum do not wish to accept the existence of these facilities at all.

In my opinion, it is an important lesson to be learned that if there had been two separate questions about the two waste collection sites, several conflicts and misunderstandings could have been avoided. The issues of compromise and acceptance would also be easier to clarify, if the debate had been about two separate questions. There would have been true alternatives then, even within the framework that was already given. Instead, this was yet another case of voting in retrospect about something that has already been decided.

7. Conclusions

Our review of the literature has shown that fairness and competence are the two most important criteria in the evaluation of participatory mechanisms (Webler, 1995). Competence, that is the acquisition of the knowledge required for making a decision and the ability to actually make it, was not detectable in the case study we analyzed. The participants of the participatory process made no mention of competence being necessary for making a decision. What is more, our interviewees did not even brush upon the topic during our conversations. There was one single respondent who voiced any sort of opinion on competence (Municipal employee). And the only view this single opinion reflected was that the respondent did not even believe that the question raised was relevant.

An important finding of our research project is, thus, that contrary to what was suggested by the literature, the participants in our case study did not even mention competence as a potential evaluation criterion of participatory processes.

On the other hand **fairness**, the other meta-criterion in Webler's (1995) theory, is indeed an important element in our case. Fairness considerations influenced the appearance of the underprivileged groups in the participatory processes, which our analysis found to have been a key matter. As regards the participation of underprivileged groups, the various participatory mechanisms exhibit substantially differing features. It is clear that in the referendum, participation was equally possible for both underprivileged groups relevant to our case (elderly and Gypsies). These groups seemed (even though the opinions are certainly biased) to not have attended the public hearings, even though my participant observation partially disproved that notion in the case of the Roma. Whereas face-to-face contact, the mechanism participants consider to be the most efficient and very important, is not at all fair, as the Roma are completely excluded from participation. Thus with respect to the referendum, fairness – i.e. that „everyone can participate" – proved out to be an important expectation, an important evaluation criterion.

Power dynamics at the public hearing were similar to what was reported in literature. The arguments voiced during the debate and the opinion of the population are not integrated into the decision-making process, there is no real forum for that. This is also evinced by the minutes of the public hearings. Some of the phrases used, like „education" or „dictatorial democracy", also confirm the prevalence of this paternalistic attitude.

The most pronounced characteristic of the present case is, as far as the referendum is concerned, the personal interest of the initiators. The presence of individual interests in the participatory process was decisive to the evaluation of the referendum. In the participants' view, the most important aspect was the personal nature of the initiative.

From amongst waste-related problems, it was infrastructural deficiencies and behavioral problems that respondents called our attention to. It was interesting that in the participants' eyes, the planned facilities constituted almost the only potential solution to their waste-related problems, the only valid alternative mentioned was fines. Yet both of these potential solutions have to face strong resistance, as it is also indicated by the referendum.
What I personally find far more important is to engage society in a discussion of these problems. Citizens' being uninformed and infrastructural deficiencies together foreshadow the escalation of the problems as well as the related social conflicts (Petts, 2001).

One of the most important lessons to be learned from the analysis is, in my opinion, that participants tend to rank participatory tools lower than the literature does (see Chapter 3.4.3 and 3.4.4). Based on previous experience from Hungary and drawing upon Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation, the public hearing and the referendum were assigned the rungs of consultation and delegated power, respectively. The analysis of our case study suggests, however, that it is rather the informing function (public hearing) and the 'voicing of opinions' function (referendum) that participants emphasize.

With regard to the present case, it was not really an opportunity for making a decision that participants were looking for, but rather one for expressing their opinions. That is, they targeted the rungs of consultation and communication on Arnstein's ladder. Which makes me pose the question what the real reason was for them not wanting to make the decision. Even though several participants talked about this, it was still the expression of opinions that had the more important role. I believe we have not yet learnt enough about democracy to climb that particular ladder. We do not really consider it important to have true decision authority in the matters that affect us. Perhaps we are not yet on the level of democracy where we would also attach importance to making competent, well-informed decisions on environmental matters. And we still keep making our decisions in retrospect, based on partial information, and only in matters that rank last among waste management priorities.

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Minutes of the public hearing held by the Body of Representatives of Pári on 20 March 2012 (Tuesday) at 5:30 p.m.

Minutes of the public hearing held by the Body of Representatives of Pári on 12 April 2012 (Thursday) at 5:30 p.m.

Minutes of the meeting of the Body of Representatives of Pári held on 12 April 2012.

Invitation: Body of Representatives of Pári, 12 April 2012 (Thursday), public hearing

Structural Plan of Pári, Local Building Regulation and Lay-out Plans

Appendix 1

Waste collection sites, Pári, March 2013

Appendix 2

Grape harvest festival, 29 September 2012

Appendix 3

Interview guide

I am Gabriella Kiss from the Department of Environmental Economics at Corvinus University of Budapest. My doctoral thesis will be about waste-related referenda and public hearings. The referendum conducted in Pári this March is of particular interest to me. It would be a valuable contribution to my doctoral research if you could please tell me about your opinion and your experiences related to the referendum. I would like to talk with you about how this referendum was conducted, what your views are on these events and what opinion you have come to have about the referendum. I have already talked with …….., who mentioned that you might be willing to meet me. Do you give me your permission to record the conversation and to use it – anonymously, of course – in writing my thesis?

Please tell me your name and what you do for a living.

The story

1. A **referendum** was held in Pári on 25 March 2012. Could you tell me, how exactly it happened?
    a. When did you first hear about the plan to set up waste disposal sites in the village?
    b. What sort of information did you have on the disposal sites?
    c. What opportunities did the locals have to inform themselves about the facilities?
    d. What kind of campaign did the opposers engage in? What did they say to people?
    e. Where did the idea to hold a referendum come from?
2. What exactly was the specific facility that the referendum was about?
    a. Where would these disposal sites be located?
    b. What purpose would these disposal sites serve? What would be collected there?
    c. Why did some of the people oppose the plans?
    d. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of the facility for you specifically?
3. **What do you think are the most important waste-related problems in the village?**
4. **In your opinion, what do people think about the waste-related problems, e.g. illegal dumping, and their impacts?**
5. What other potential solutions could you suggest to the problem?

The referendum

6. What is your evaluation of this referendum?
    a. Why did you think it was important that a referendum be held on the matter?
    b. What do you think was the role of the referendum in making this decisions?
    c. How did you feel about the referendum's having turned out invalid in the end?
    d. How did you feel about the residents' having the opportunity to decide on the disposal sites?

7. Do you think the referendum is a proper means for citizens to make a decision? Why?
    a. What would you say, does it constitute a true decision opportunity for the participants? Why?
8. **Why do you think the referendum yielded the outcome it did?**
9. **How satisfied are you with the decision-making process, how the entire decision was made? Why?**
10. **Who do you think should make decisions of this type and how should they go about it?**
    a. **Who should participate? What is fair? Who has competence?**

The public hearing

11. I was told that the issue of the waste disposal sites was raised at several public hearings, as well. What were these **public hearings** like?
    a. How many were present?
    b. Did the participants contribute? Who?
    c. What was the atmosphere like at these public hearings?
12. Do you usually attend public hearings? Do you usually contribute on such occasions?
13. What do you think about public hearings? (How would you evaluate the public hearings held in your village?)
    a. To what extent are public hearings suitable for the residents to voice their opinions? Why? What could be done differently?
    b. Who are allowed to attend? Anyone can contribute?
    c. *What are the typical occasions for a public hearing in your village? What does usually happen there?*
    d. *What do you think the role of public hearings is in the relationship between the municipality and the citizens?*
14. **How satisfied are you with what happened at the public hearings? Why? What could be done differently?**

The decision

15. What do you think about the body of representatives' final decision concerning the waste disposal sites?
    a. Who, in your opinion, played a role in making this decision and what was the role they played?
    b. How, in your opinion, did the outcome of the referendum and the public hearings influence this decision?
16. **How satisfied are you with the final decision**? Why?/Why not? What decision would you have been satisfied with? Why?

Conclusion

17. If you could start it again, would you still initiate the ordering of a referendum? What would you do differently?
18. What do you think is the lesson you learned from this story?
    a. To what extent have you become better informed in waste-related matters?
    b. To what extent have the locals, in general, become better informed in waste-related matters?
    c. What, in your opinion, were the benefits from the entire process?

Appendix 4

Public hearing, 20 March 2013

Appendix 5

Focus Group Agenda

Venue: Pári Élet-ház
Date and time: 15 March 2013, 6 p.m.
Moderator: G. Kiss
Planned duration: 60 minutes
Number of invitees: 7 persons

Welcome (5 minutes)

Dear Participants!
Thank you all for attending this discussion despite the dreadful weather out there. Unfortunately, yesterday's public hearing had to be cancelled courtesy of the weather, but hopefully we will soon be able to make up for that.
The reason I am here now and why I have already contacted every one of you before is that my doctoral thesis deals with referenda and public hearings that were held in connection with some waste-related matter. This is how I got to Pári, for it is the only town that held a referendum on an environmental – and what is more, waste-related – matter last year.
I have already had separate conversations with all of you about the waste disposal sites, and many of you already voiced their opinion about the public hearings and the referendum on that occasion. These opinions were, naturally, quite varied, which is why I am particularly happy that we have met again today so that we, together, will have the opportunity to formulate your opinions on the referendum and the public hearings.
The discussion will be recorded, audio and video, for the sole purpose of me being able to later recall what has been said, but it will not be made public, it only serves to ensure the success of my research project. Such group discussions are usually moderated by more than one person; this time, the camera and the audio recorder will be my only assistants.
The purpose of the discussion is that everyone's opinion is reflected in the final outcome, therefore I would like to ask you to hear each other out, to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.
We have gathered here today to continue, as a team, the thinking process we started when I met each one of you separately, about the public hearings you have from time to time in the village and last year's referendum. Everyone's opinion is important to me, and I would really like if we, together, could formulate some thoughts that all those present attach importance to, even if their basic ways of thinking differ.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Yesterday, after 4 hours of driving and struggling with the elements, I arrived in Pári to attend the public hearing. And as I got there, it turned out that it had been cancelled. Why did the people not come? Or why did you not come?
If that does not seem to work: I saw that the waste disposal site is ready. When will it be opened? Can you tell me any details about that?

Conversation about the public hearings (15+5 minutes)

Based on our personal conversations, the picture I got from the public hearings was that, though the exact numbers are different each time, but ideally, about 40 to 50 people attend. There are only a very few who regularly contribute, and some of you told me that a lot of people do not like to speak in front of the public, and thus they do not contribute at public hearings. Then again, it is public hearings that the majority gather information from about what is going on in the village, what the municipality's plans are or what it has realized. But it seems to me that this is an important forum of the village. Accordingly, I would like us to talk a bit about what you believe public hearings are suitable for and what they are not.

1. First, I would like to ask you to choose a clerk who will helps us gather the opinions.
   Let us first gather the advantages, in keywords; that is, what public hearings are good for and why. And in another column, what is not good about them, what you do not like about them, what does not work out well. Anyone can come up with anything, just a word or a feeling, what they think about public hearings. But let's have everyone come up with at least two.
   Let us discuss why it is so.
2. Let us now select the three most important items from the list that all of you agree with. Why is it these three that are the most important?

Conversation about the referendum (15+5 minutes)

The other question I would like us to have a similar discussion about is what the referendum was suitable for and what it was not. You told me quite a wide variety of things during our personal conversations.

3. Just as before, again I would like us to gather what the referendum itself is like and what it is good for, and what it is not good for, and why it is not good.
   Let us have someone else as the clerk now. Who will it be this time? Please, collect all the good and advantageous things that a referendum has in its favor in one column, and list the cons in another column. Each one of you, please come up with at least two. Please explain why you think so.

4. Once again, let us select the three most important items that all of you agree with. Why is it these three that you consider the most important?

Adjournment, acknowledgments (5 minutes)

I have really found this discussion of ours exciting. Its most important result is, I believe, that we could summarize the opinions and we could also continue our previous conversations.
Of course, each one of you will receive a summary of what has been said here today, and about the earlier results, as well. Could you please provide your address or email address for this purpose?
Thank you again for coming today!

Appendix 6

Map of Pári. Source: Structural Plan of Pári, Local Building Regulation and Lay-out Plans