

Addressing Mobilities Controversies through Public Participation?

Mixed Methods Results from Five German Case Studies

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*International Conference at the Center for Mobilities and Urban Studies
(C-MUS), Aalborg, Denmark, August 22, 2024.*

- A social-ecological mobility transition is needed (Rammler 2016)
- Public participation (specifically consultations!) of citizens should play an essential role in planning for this transition
 - Normative: democratic quality to be able to contribute to important decisions, while decision-power stays with elected representatives (Schwedes & Rammert 2020, Neunecker 2016, Young 2010)
 - Local knowledge is needed, but regularly public resistance to plans such as reducing car traffic etc. (Belz 2022, Andor et al. 2019)
 - Consultation is also used with the hope of increasing acceptance of decisions (Beckmann 2021)
- Role of consultations for mobility transition not yet fully understood by research

→ What role can consultations play for addressing mobilities controversies?

Approaches

- Database of mobility transition projects in German cities (>5.000 people)
- Detailed investigation of 5 mobility transition projects in 4 German cities (Hamburg, Marburg, Offenburg, Wuppertal)

Data

- 350 participation processes conducted in 90 cities since 2015 [[database](#)]
- Surveys of population (random samples) (N=1.365) and participants in consultations (N=255) [[surveys](#)]
- For two cases in Hamburg: Qualitative interviews (N=23), participatory observation and documentation of participation events, media analysis [[qualitative approach](#)]

→ As part of a 5+ year effort to investigate chances and challenges of involving citizens in political decisions in the context of sustainable mobility transitions

Objective of presentation

- Empirically-informed recommendations on how to use consultations for mobility planning
 - In total: 7 main recommendations and 20+ sub-recommendations
- Today: 2 recommendations that focus on addressing mobilities controversies:

1. It is not the role of a consultation to reach a consensus!
2. Consultation results must be complemented with other perspectives in order to come to a balanced decision!

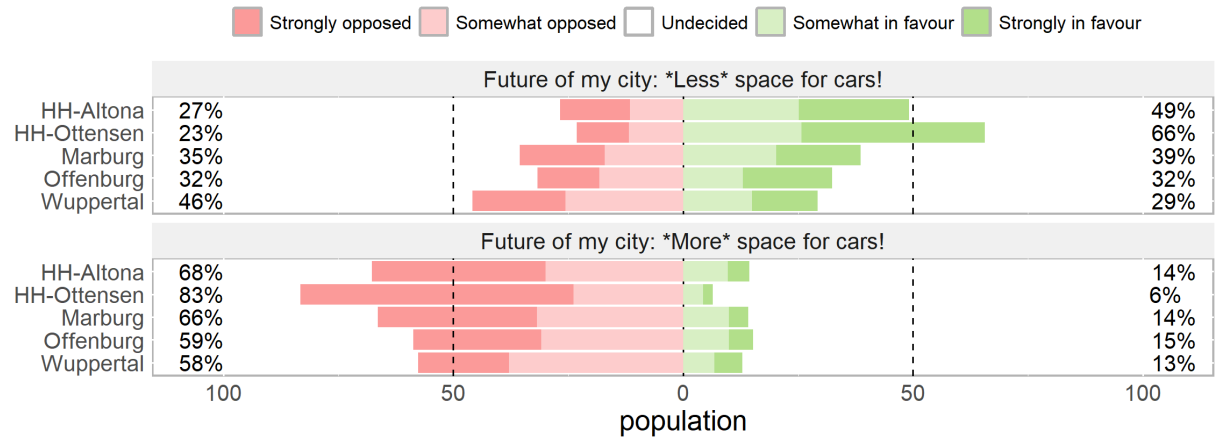
→ We like to hear your feedback on our recommendations!



It is not the role of a
consultation to reach
a consensus!

Role of Consultation is not Consensus

- Mobility transformation requires fundamental changes with a direct impact on people's lives. [theory]
- People are divided on if public space for cars should be reduced. [surveys]

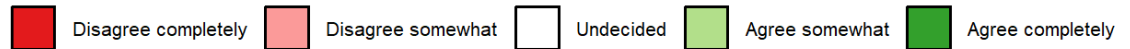
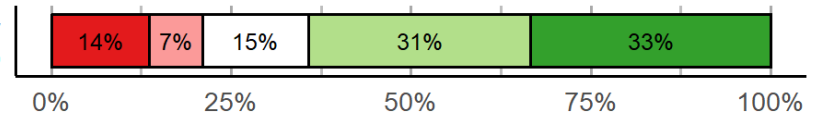


→ The mobility transition is inherently contested!

Role of Consultation is not Consensus

- There is always at least some resistance against transformation measures. More effective push-measures experience most resistance. [surveys]
- Contradictory demands are voiced in the consultations. [qualitative approach]
- A substantial proportion of consultation participants is dissatisfied with the measures that were ultimately adopted. [surveys]
 - Hamburg-Ottensen (only participants):

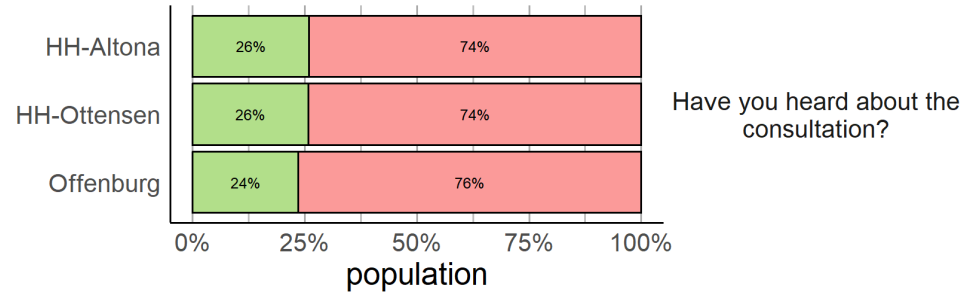
The adopted measures fully conform to my interests. (N=162)



→ Citizen participation can lead to a mutual understanding but the fundamental conflicts inherent in the mobility transition cannot be resolved through consultation alone.

Role of Consultation is not Consensus

- Regardless of the extent of information campaigns, a substantial proportion of the population will not have noticed their opportunity to participate. [\[survey\]](#)



- Even when participation is comprehensive from a scientific point of view, it is still perceived or presented as insufficient by opposing stakeholders [\[qualitative approach\]](#)
 - Hamburg-Ottensen: both political discourse and population criticized the lack of participation.
 - Marburg: opponents instigated a referendum demanding more participation

→ There will always be demands for more participation, regardless of the extent of participation opportunities.

Role of Consultation is not Consensus

It is not the role of a consultation to reach a consensus!

Consultations should not aim to resolve conflicts but to create a forum for exchange to convey information, make interests visible, collect local knowledge and generate ideas.

Conflicts should not be taken as a sign of failed or insufficient participation. Other ways of evaluating participation should be found.



Consultation results
must be complemented
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Complement results with other perspectives!

- Participant composition is not representative. Privileged groups are generally overrepresented and better able to voice their concerns. [theory, survey]
- Even specific recruitment can only compensate for this bias to a certain extent. [survey, qualitative approach]
- Perceived sentiment among the population in Ottensen more negative than the survey results. Media coverage contributed to this. [qualitative approach]

Endorsement of planning results
by survey respondents



- In Favor
- Opposed
- Neutral

Distribution of quotes in newspaper
articles regarding the project



- In Favor
- Opposed

→ Public participation provides a picture of existing interests and concerns, but not a representative impression of public opinion.

Complement results with other perspectives!

- Participants are socially selective, especially “marginalized perspectives” are often not represented, but relevant for the mobility transition. [theory, survey]
- there are always people taking part who reject a mobility transition. [survey, qualitative approach]
- Participants are often those directly affected by projects and can not necessarily be considered experts in planning or mobility. [theory, survey]

→ It cannot be assumed that all aspects important for the mobility transition are included in the results and/or that only supportive aspects are raised

Complement results with other perspectives!

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Complement results with other perspectives!

Consultation results must be complemented with other perspectives in order to come to a balanced decision!

Consultations should be supplemented by other forms of gathering input to better understand how their results relate to broader public opinion. Representative surveys are a suitable option to achieve this.

The aim should not be to implement as many of the proposals from the consultation as possible, but to weigh up the results with other stakeholder perspectives. Responsible for this task should be the elected bodies.

A fair mobility transition requires bold political decisions, even if not everyone supports them!

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Thank you!

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