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Citizen financial participation schemes as part of New Public Governance

citizen financial participation; co-production; New Public Governance (NPG); public debt

The increasing financial needs of some German municipalities in combination with a more restrictive loan policy and even a withdrawal from financing of municipalities by German banks has led to a development of partnerships between citizens and the public sector to guarantee the fulfilment of voluntary municipal tasks. This paper presents and discusses the underlying citizen financial participation schemes of these partnerships in the light of New Public Governance and identifies possible options for co-financing and co-production on the municipal level in Germany.

I. Introduction and research objectives

Citizen financial participation schemes could be applied as an institutional arrangement for the provision of public services and might form part of the broader New Public Governance (NPG) framework as described by Osborne (2010). Two broadly accepted elements of the NPG concept, citizen engagement and citizen as co-producer (Röber/Redlich 2012, p. 172), support the development of citizen financial participation schemes. In view of the definition of co-production used by Bovaird/Löffler, namely "The public sector and citizens making better use of each others' assets and resources to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency" (2012, p. 1121), new forms of co-providing and co-financing will need to emerge. The finance options discussed here focus on projects that often, but not always, include municipal voluntary tasks such as operation of sports facilities (swimming pools, sport centres etc.) and cultural facilities (museums, theatres etc.), as well as social facilities (child-care centres, nursing homes etc.). The academic literature already incorporates portrayals of this kind of institutionalised arrangement. Schwalb (2011), Lenk et al. (2009) and Freisburger (2000) observe cultural facilities. The pool sector is the focus of Thaler et al. (2013) and Theuvsen and Hansen (2013) examines the biogas sector in the field of renewable energy. Oppen et al. (2003) address partnerships in the field of social services. Furthermore, the tasks connected to the German energy turnaround (Energiewende) can also be viewed as part of this kind of public service provision. If the national state endorses "green energy" and supports the transformation of the German energy sector to a multi-faceted renewable energy sector, this could lead to substantial opportunities for community initiatives (Reiner et al. 2014, p. 509). All the above-mentioned examples have in common that they are mostly initialised and managed by civil society, but still combine actors from public, private and/or non-profit organisations (Degenhart/Wessel 2014). In some cases projects are also discussed under the terms “civic engagement” (Zimmer 2007), “citizen coproduction” (Bovaird 2007), “cross-sectoral partnerships” (Helmig/Boenigk 2012) or, on an institutional level, “local governance networks” (Reichard 2002) or as arrangements of “collaborative governance” (Straßheim 2013). The objective of this paper is to show and analyse citizen financial participation schemes for this kind of cooperation. Therefore, the following two research questions will be adressed:

- What impact do different kinds of citizen financial participation schemes have on the further development of these institutional arrangements in light of NPG in Germany?
- What is the common ground of these options?

This study´s underlying qualitative research design is based on several sources. In-depth, semi-structured interviews (face-to-face) with bank managers and treasurers of local authorities have been carried out and analysed. In addition, the outcome of an academic workshop on the topic “Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)” in January 2014 at Leuphana University of Lüneburg in connection with intensive desk research was used as a further source of data. The research about citizen financial participation schemes cannot be allocated to a single disciplinary context, but relates to a broad range of academic disciplines. Therefore, varied theories can be applied in this context. This approach follows the proposal of Reichard, who endorses a more interdisciplinary collaboration for effective Public Management research in the future (2014, pp. 266). As a result, this article is based on knowledge from a wide range of disciplinary areas and follows the idea that “multidisciplinary insights [...] are bringing new life to understand[ing] the future [...]” of citizen financial participation schemes (Greve/Hodge 2013, p. 220).

II. Current financial situation of municipalities and future consequences

To date, municipal debts in Germany consist of credit market debts, used to finance municipal investments, and cash credits, which were originally intended to ensure liquidity, but are currently also used to finance current expenditures. The current municipal credit market debts amount to some € 85.3 billion and a debit balance of approximately € 48.2 billion has been disclosed for cash credits (figure 1). Overall, we can say that there are regional differences in the debt status between the approximately 11,500 municipalities. A two-tier situation has actually evolved, consisting of financially strong and financially weak municipalities. Some municipalities master their tasks without borrowing, while others have extremely high debts (Rehm 2012 b, p. 192; Ernst and Young (EY) Kommunenstudie 2013).

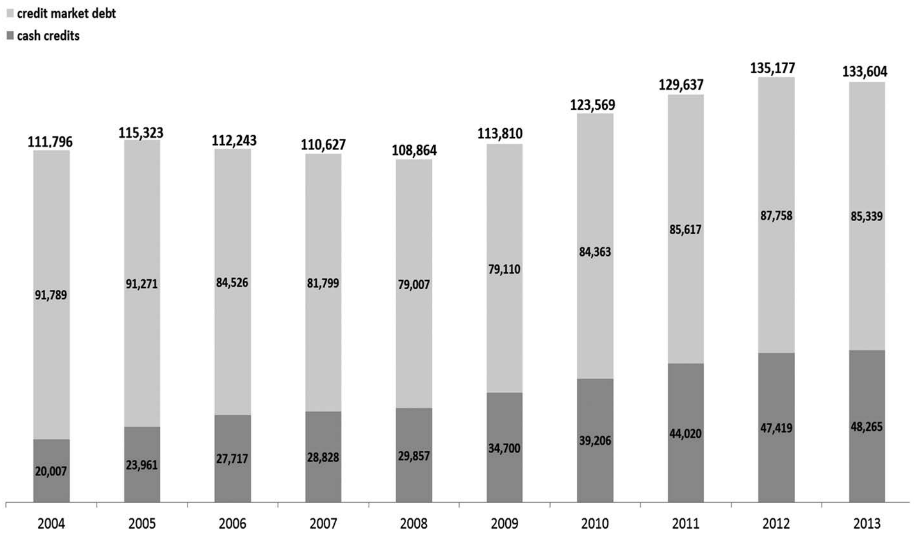

Figure 1: Public debt of German municipalities 2004-2013, in billions of euros (€)
Source: Federal Statistical Office (Destatis)

The development of credits for securing liquidity, as cash credits are also described, serves as an indicator for the scale of the municipal household crisis and forces urgent action on municipalities (Diemert 2013). Here, it is particularly significant that the development of cash credits has developed differently compared to credit market debt. Municipal cash credits have grown constantly over the past five years (more than 60% during the period from 2008 to 2013), while investment credits have been slightly reduced (Burth et al. 2013, p. 146). However, the existing risk of changes to the interest rates hidden behind the volume of the cash credits is more alarming for highly indebted municipalities. Currently, interest rates for cash credits are at very low levels, but in long-term they will rise, and municipalities will then be burdened with the increases in interest expenditure, which in turn will have to be financed (Burth et al. 2013, p. 139). Currently, some credit institutions are withdrawing completely from the municipality financing market (Bergmann 2013, p. 6). Other credit institutions now only grant credits to municipalities that can be allocated to the catchment area of their shareholders. Other banks exercise tight restrictions when granting credits (Rehm 2012 a, p. 16). This behaviour by the credit institutions is partially a reaction to the introduction of Basel III. This banking regulation, which focuses on equity requirements for municipal debts (leverage ratio) in banks, considerably tightens or extends the activity of individual credit institutions (Rehm 2012 b, pp. 197).

III. New Public Governance and citizen financing

The institutional dilemma of a structural budget deficit or debt situation and the provision of public tasks among municipalities indicate the acute need for municipalities to act. As a result, municipalities or citizens need to develop partnerships in order to be able to guarantee the fulfilment of (voluntary) public tasks. These new projects are to be based on the premises above and can be identified in the outcomes of the New Public Governance discourse. According to Bovaird "the driving force for public governance [is] the need to solve `wicked problems´ in society which it had become clear could not be tackled by public agencies acting alone and which, therefore, seemed to require public agencies to be prepared to work with a wide range of other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors" (Bovaird 2004, p. 208; Greiling 2014 a, pp. 40). Current research results from the field of local governance and local citizen participation/participatory governance support these presumptions (Schwalb 2007, p. 284; Vetter et al. 2013, p. 258). These results show a transformation of the relationship between the state and society, which becomes particularly apparent in the changed role and significance of the private economic and public utility sector, along with changed roles for state and non-state actors. Co-producers, if they are institutionally organised, act in most cases as nonprofit-organisations (NPO), which often have an innovation advantage for solving socially complex challenges (Greiling 2014 b, p. 235). This innovation potential is also seen by researchers in intersectorial PPP projects (Sack 2007, p. 270). This discussion of innovation leads us to the field of social entrepreneurship and interrelated research results of social business. More precisely, insights from the area of financing social enterprises must be applied to analyse citizen financial participation approaches. Investors in social businesses take both financial and social returns into consideration when deciding to invest, which is described as the "double bottom line approach" (Achleitner et al. 2011, p. 269). Thus, the citizen financial participation schemes identified and discussed here, have to fulfil the following criteria, which are partly based on the initial research results of Holstenkamp/Degenhart in the area of citizen financial participation (2014, pp. 188):

- provision of public task follows the principles of co-production,
- involvement of only local or regional based citizens with equity capital,
- co-production institution has to be open for all local or regional stakeholders,
- investment return expectations follow the double bottom line approach,
- high degree of institutionalised partnership with exclusion from individual financial liability.

Financing instruments where citizens merely become further creditors, as is normal for citizen credit models or citizen loans, fail one or more criteria and are not the subject of this paper. Equally, financing by donation does not meet all of the criteria even though it is part of supplement financing.

IV. Citizen financial participation schemes

Considering the above-mentioned criteria for citizen financial participation schemes and a growing number of institutional arrangements on the local level in Germany, the following four citizen financial participation schemes are identified:

1. Cooperative models

Elements of production and participation, and therefore having control over the production process, can be found in cooperative theory as part of the stakeholder approach (Pennerstorfer/ Badelt 2013, p. 110). Ben-Ner and van Hoomissen (1991) argue that the formation of a NPO is a reaction of demand-side stakeholders to market and government failures. People will find a NPO (cooperative) if there is no other option to receive services in an adequate and sufficient way. Through their own provision of services, these stakeholders become in a sense a controlling stakeholder (member) of the cooperative (Ben-Ner/van Hoomissen 1991). Due to its constitutional features, the legal form of the cooperative is well-suited to be a part in a municipal partnership (Engelhardt 2007, p. 466). Citizen participation via a cooperative not only achieves rational investor involvement, but also results in citizens' emotional involvement in the co-production and, consequently, in the fact that the purely value-maximising calculatory considerations of the capital market are no longer in the foreground (Schetter 2010, pp. 296). This can be explained by the identity principle of the cooperative form. The members of a cooperative function both, as capital investors and as users. The otherwise predominant conflict between owner and user interests occurs only mildly or not at all (Albrecht et al. 2013, p. 88).
The currently increasing attractiveness of the cooperative model can be substantiated by the intensive development of energy cooperatives in Germany. A considerable number of new energy cooperatives have been created since 2006. In the subsequent years, the number of cooperatives in Germany has grown exponentially. A total of 754 energy cooperatives were entered in the Register of Cooperatives as per 31 December 2012 (Degenhart/Holstenkamp 2013, p. 76; Walk/Schröder 2014; Klemisch 2014; Holstenkamp/Müller 2013). This positive development serves as an example to demonstrate that municipal tasks such as securing heat and electricity supply (such as local heat grids and energy villages) can be met by using cooperative principles. These cases show that the substitution or supplementing of public tasks is an option if the public provision of services is not adequate and stakeholders demand those services (Theurl 2013, pp. 88). The potential for the use of cooperatives to fulfil municipal tasks exists, even if these are (still) isolated solutions (Göler von Ravensburg 2013, pp. 99; George/Bonow 2010). However, Blome-Drees expects that due to external conditions, the establishment of cooperatives will increase moderately in the long-term (Blome-Drees 2012, pp. 377).

2. Municipal foundations and community foundations

Besides the "mechanisms that drive charitable giving" (altruism, awareness of need, values etc.) identified by Bekkers and Wiepking (2011), the exhaustion of reform potential from state and market in Germany is a driving characteristic of foundations. The hope of a better society in a welfare state as well as the vision of a purely market-based society were both unfulfilled, so that supporting a foundation is a reasonable option for citizens (Zimmer 2005, p. 20). For example, Anheier/Daly (2007) explain that the provision of public services by foundations addresses the role of "complementarity, substitution or preservation of traditions and cultures" (Anheier/Daly 2007, pp. 27-44). Based on this framework, two types of foundations could be used to finance municipal co-production projects in Germany: municipal foundations and community foundations. Municipal foundations are foundations which are managed and administrated by regional authorities. The assets of these foundations are provided by private donors (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen 2013). The second possible type is the community foundation. Such foundations are established by several individuals in a regionally restricted sphere (Heister 2010, p. 71). Both foundations play through their officers an active part in the decision making process of the cross-sectoral partnership. Based on increasing wealth in Germany and on the resulting increasing private assets, combined with larger numbers of childless inhabitants, we can assume a further positive development of municipal foundations and citizen foundations in the future. Accordingly, the number of foundations participating as part of a citizen financial scheme could increase (Haibach/Priller 2014).

3. GmbH & Co. KG models as citizen financial participation schemes

There is another route to providing equity capital. This has already been established for projects in the field of renewable energies (Kaler/Kneuper 2012, p. 792), but can also be extended to further areas of municipal task fulfilment: GmbH & Co. KG. A GmbH & Co. KG is a limited partnership, a type of legal entity that allows citizens, municipalities and/or trade investors to subscribe for shares of a limited partnership (KG), thus providing the company with capital. Whether the GmbH & Co. KG then starts operations of its own accord or provides its capital to the municipality can be decided on a case-to-case basis. Furthermore, this legal entity includes a large number of legal structures, which enable the respective interest situations of the participants, and the availability of local capital in the municipality all to be considered (Holstenkamp/Degenhart 2013, pp. 27). The citizens still retain the role of co-producer of public goods. One of the first local citizen financial participation schemes using this legal form was the BürgerBreitband-Netz GmbH & Co. KG. This partnership between citizens, companies and the municipality has built an ultra-fast broadband Internet network in the rural region around the city of Husum in the north of Germany (Einhaus 2013, p. 6). For similar projects in the future, it may be possible that the GmbH-part of a GmbH & Co. KG private company can qualify for public benefit status and thereby gain tax benefits. In Germany this legal form of public benefit private limited company is called a *“gGmbH” or “gemeinnützige GmbH”*.

4. Associations

The financing of public tasks through associations is another part of the current discussion, and the growing number of associations clearly shows the increasing popularity of this organisational form in the third sector (Krimmer/Priemer 2013, p. 30). *“Freundes- oder Förderkreise, Fördergesellschaften, Fördervereine, Unterstützerkreise, etc.”* are all voluntary associations, which are organisations based on the principle of voluntary membership. In Germany many of these organisations are registered (public benefit) associations and act as *“e. V. – eingetragener Verein”*. However, other legal forms are also available to them. Of the three main functions of an association in modern society – social integration, lobbying, service provision – service provision certainly plays a major role for the social sector. Frequently, the state and the associational sector build partnerships for public service provision (Freise/Hallmann 2014, p. 6). The research about registered public benefit associations *(Förderorganisationen)* is still at the beginning and it is unclear if a lack of public financing is the trigger of their popularity or if there are other factors of NPG that are growing this trend (Krimmer/Priemer 2013, pp. 32; Braun et al. 2013).

V. Discussion

Co-production and financial participation are the common grounds of the citizen financial participation schemes discussed in this paper. Pestoff has stressed that "co-production is a core aspect of New Public Governance and implies greater citizen participation and greater third sector provision of public services" (Perstoff 2011, p. 22). Thus, a central question of this research is if the nominated schemes meet Pestoff′s criteria. In fact, the argument has been that they do. More precisely, they meet the requirements in the following ways: establishing citizen financial participation schemes can lead to a more positive perception of institutionalised cooperative arrangements at municipal levels in Germany. In particular, the perceived benefits from cross-sectoral partnerships in the municipality (such as keeping infrastructure or offering innovative services) may result in a higher willingness on the part of citizens to financially participate in projects of this type (spill-over effect). The fact that the users and the private sponsors/investors for municipal projects are identical ensures that information asymmetries are avoided or at least not exploited, although the limitations identified by principle-agent theory and relational contract theory have to be considered. Also, the emerging trend of crowdfunding initiatives could back the growth of citizen financing on the local level (Hainzer/Stötzer/Ellmer 2014). Citizen financing and crowdfunding, a new, multi-faceted instrument to generate funds via the Internet, have several useful features in common. For instance, citizen financing and crowdfunding are understood using the same types of theories: lead user-, open innovation-, and network-theory as well as service marketing, are only a few of them. More concretely, the literature about donor behaviour, which suggests that people who contribute to charitable causes are motivated by self-esteem, public recognition and the satisfaction of expressing gratitude, helps to provide a broad understanding of crowdfunding and can also be identified in some aspects of citizen financial participation schemes (Ordanini et al. 2011, p. 447).

Three important aspects of citizen financial participation in a co-production environment are thus crucial. Firstly, for most projects joint accountability is unavoidable as the accountability lines between the public, private and third sector are necessarily blurred (Bovaird 2007, p. 856). If there are no common agreements between the parties about specific responsibilities and common trust, the danger will be that no partner feels accountable for the successful operation of the institutionalised partnership. Secondly, research results show that on the part of the public administrations, prejudices against the involvement of citizens exist (Greiling 2013, p. 61). For instance, municipal professionals might have fears about their status and their role as the sole providers of public services. In addition, professionals may have relatively negative assessments of citizen competences in these partnerships, leading to non-cooperative behaviour (Bovaird 2007, p. 857). Thirdly, the aspect of social inequality has to be emphasised. Although the citizen financial participation schemes analysed here have comparatively low requirements for financial participation, the initiators nevertheless have to ensure, that all citizens, not only high-income citizens, can participate, so that the schemes can truly be described as direct democratic financing options.

It must be observed that only partial coverage of the costs is typically achieved by the revenues generated when the voluntary tasks are fulfilled. For example, for public indoor and open air pools, the entrance earnings provide coverage of 20 to 40 % of the operating costs (Breuer/Hovemann 2006, pp. 16). This amount is even lower for the majority of cultural facilities (Lenk et al. 2009, pp. 56). This is the reason why traditional banks have concerns when financing these services on a stand-alone basis. Banks need a proven and reliable cash-flow in order to grant credit to secure their business model. Most projects discussed in this paper cannot predict their cash-flow, resulting in their status of not eligible for bank loans. Overall, the citizen financing schemes presented act under a high degree of risk and uncertainty. Citizens involved in these schemes should know about this situation. As discussed in the paper, citizens take both financial and social returns into consideration when they co-finance voluntary public tasks. Public services supported solely by paying customers are not socially possible due to the cost level described earlier, making it impossible for such operations to fully do without public contributions. The combination of alternative financing instruments and public subsidies presents an opportunity to found long-term and reliable cross-sectoral partnerships at the municipal level.

VI. Conclusions and directions for further research

The withdrawal or restriction of municipal credit allocation by some financial institutions has made it harder for heavily indebted municipalities to finance themselves using the traditional means of borrowing. In this regard, citizen financial participation schemes can play a supportive role, in particular through co-financing and co-production of municipal voluntary tasks. This paper has shown that several schemes exist which can provide different options and ways that citizens can financially participate in the provision of public tasks in the NPG. Based on their shared criteria, these citizen financial participation schemes are models for local citizen (co-)financed projects on the municipal level. Due to the explorative character of this paper, further research should take a more detailed examination of the schemes into account. For example, through a case study approach primary data could be generated. Theoretical investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of the schemes from the point of view of the participating citizens, the public administration public professionals and the elected municipal council members is especially needed. The results could be used in a SWOT analysis of the different schemes and could also be used to determine the success factors of the different forms of citizen financing. Furthermore, the risk environment of the citizen financial participation schemes should be part of further research. In this paper, the risk aspect was only briefly mentioned, but a more thorough analysis of the underlying risk factors of co-production and co-financing is re-

quired. For example, how can the public administration know that the co-producer is a reliable and trustworthy partner? Does the administration need a special risk management for all types of citizen participation and citizen accountability in the local area? Which legal form of citizen financial participation schemes provides long-term stability and keeps flexibility for providing public tasks?
Questions like these remain unanswered, but this paper has provided the first insights into citizen financing as part of New Public Governance.

Zusammenfassung

Frank Wessel; Finanzielle Bürgerbeteiligungsmodelle als ein Bestandteil der New Public Governance

Finanzielle Bürgerbeteiligung; kommunale Verschuldung; Koproduktion New Public Governance (NPG)

Der steigende finanzielle Bedarf von Teilen der deutschen Kommunen in Kombination mit einem teilweisen Rückzug von Banken aus dem Kommunalkreditgeschäft führt zu einer Entwicklung von sektorenübergreifenden Partnerschaften zwischen Bürgern und Kommunen im Bereich der freiwilligen Aufgabenerfüllung. Aus Sicht der New Public Governance werden finanzielle Bürgerbeteiligungsmodelle vorgestellt und diskutiert. Ferner werden mögliche freiwilligen Aufgaben der Kommunen identifiziert, in denen eine Kofinanzierung bzw. Koproduktion durch die Bürger in Deutschland möglich ist.

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