

Session Planning Cultures and Cultural Dimensions of the Energy Transition



CHAIR: Thomas Weith, Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS)

CO-CHAIR: Melanie Mbah, Institute for Applied Ecology (Öko-Institut)

Advancing Sustainable Development: Sustainability Science Summit 2025

German Committee Future Earth (Deutsches Komitee für Nachhaltigkeitsforschung in Future Earth)

21 February 2025 - Berlin, Germany

Agenda

1. Initial results on regional identities and requirements for participation in planning

Dr. Melanie Mbah / Ryan Kelly / Alexandra Lampke (Öko-Institut)

2. Participation processes and planning in practice: examples from the PlanTieFEn project

Prof. Dr. Thomas Weith / Sarah Friese / Jonas Marschall (ILS)

Initial results on regional identities and requirements for participation in planning

Dr. Melanie Mbah (Öko-Institut e.V.)
Ryan Kelly and Alexandra Lampke

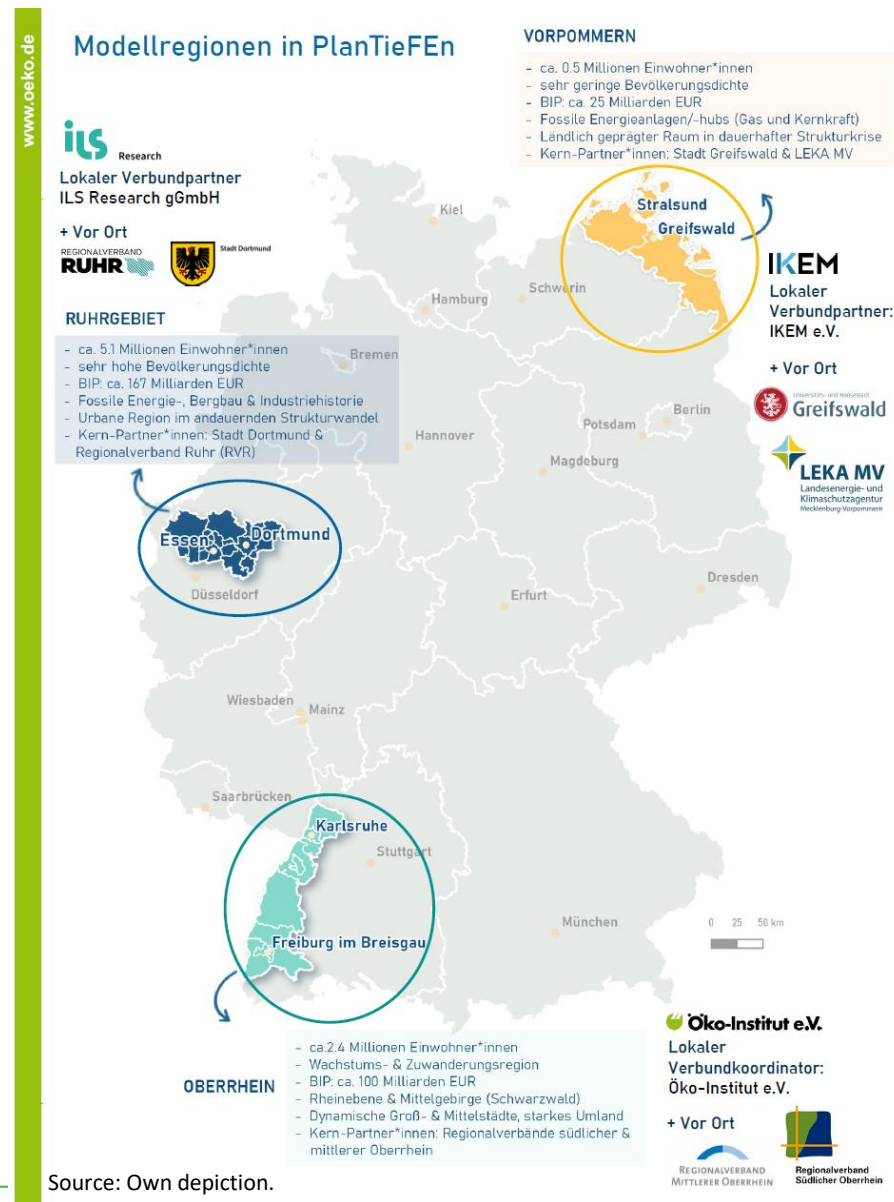
Some theoretical considerations

- Two basic approaches:
 - **place attachment** (Altman/Low 1992): collective and individual perceptions and values people attach to a place as well as the factors that influence it (Mbah/Kuppler 2024)
 - and **place identity** (Proshansky et al. 1983): spatial characteristics as part of individual identity
- Regional identity = **sense of belonging** to one region, distinguishing the region from other regions → **identification with the region** and **characteristics of the region** (Zimmerbauer 2008)
- Regional identities used since 1980/90s as **planning instrument** to optimize the development of a region (Weichhart 2009)
 - **Marketing instrument** to create an identification of and with the region (participation of key actors)
- Regional identities are formed by (cf. Kienast et al. 2018; Scannel/Gifford 2010; van Veelen/Hagget 2017):
 - Social relations
 - Individual meanings of places
 - Collective memories and narratives
 - Wishes and emotions
 - Perceptions of artefacts and landscape
 - ...

Methodological approach

Aim: identify (landscape-based) regional identities, cultural aspects and ways of incorporation in planning procedures for renewable energies

- **Transdisciplinary research design**
- **Three model regions** in Germany with smaller units for analysis and collaboration with practitioners in so-called focus regions
- **Methods used:**
 - desk research on regional characteristics
 - About 7 interviewees per region
 - Several workshops with practitioners in the regions planned – two already conducted:
 - (landscape based) identities (emo/action mapping), participation requirements and mapping of (im)possible sites for renewable energies
 - participation opportunities and innovative informal forms of participation
 - reflexion and best practices (forthcoming)
 - regional energy visions (forthcoming)



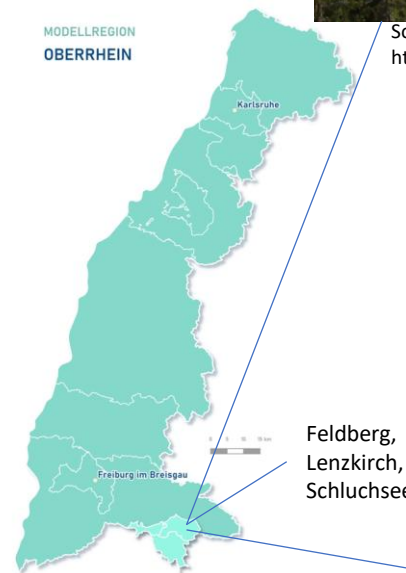
Some initial results on regional identities

Black forest

- Landscape: forested mountains, pastures and municipalities in the valleys
- Natural and cultural landscape important, especially as economic factor (agriculture/farming and tourism)
- Village communities and local associations important
- Traditional energy production/ressources: hydro power, timber industry
- Rather conservative and reserved mentality



Sources of images: Florian Jesse - Eigenes Werk, CC0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=19563246>



Source: Own depiction.



Some initial results on regional identities

Ruhr area

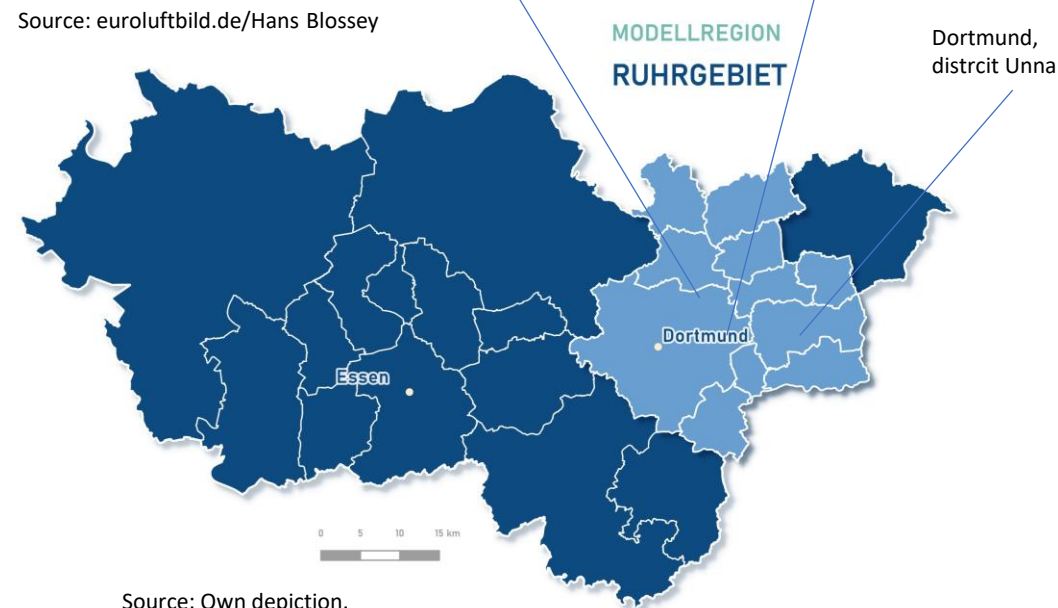
- Important till today: **early industrialization** and landscape (as well as socioeconomic) **transformations**
- Densely built environment, high population pressure
- Past: **Mining and steel industry** (welcome culture and support structures); today: communication, IT and logistics services
- **Distinction between mentalities** in cities (open) and rural areas (conservative)



Source: euroluftbild.de/Hans Blossey



Source: <https://pixabay.com/de/photos/dortmund-nachtlicht-b236-3356819/>

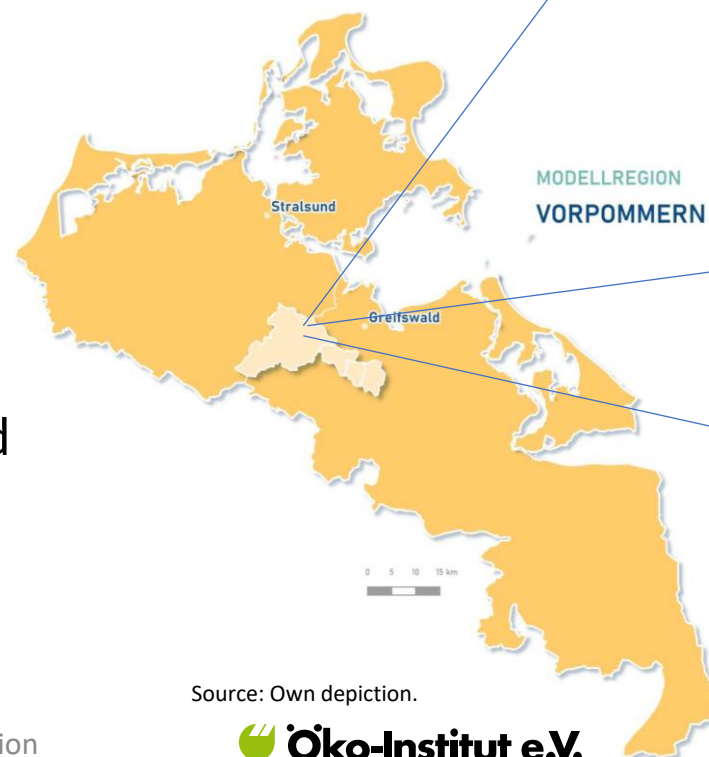


Source: Own depiction.

Some initial results on regional identities

Vorpommern – Greifswald

- Landscape: water (bodden, lakes, coast), mostly flat with pastures, agricultural land, moorland and woods
- Natural and cultural **landscape important as economic factor** (agriculture/farming, energy production and tourism)
- Past: prussian estate structures and agricultural production cooperatives; today: still **large landowners**
- Strong **structural transformation** experience and demographic change; **reserved mentality** (distrust in national politics)



Sources of images: Chron-Paul - Eigenes Werk, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24497656>

Greifswald, and surrounding rural municipalities

Source: Own depiction.

Some initial results on participation requirements

Black forest:

- Early and transparent information (communication)
- **Genuine participation** (opportunities to shape and participate with a focus on the common good)
- Stronger **regional cooperation** (jointly develop benefits between municipalities)
- Intergenerational justice
- Simplified legislation

Ruhr area:

- Acceleration of planning and implementation
- Development of a **positive narrative**: innovative and climate neutral
- Better regional collaboration (city and rural municipalities)
- **Fairness of interests, benefits and loads**
- Need for regulations (e.g. regarding PV and wind → design and distance)

Vorpommern – Greifswald:

- Financial assets and participation opportunities for inhabitants (not only big landowners and municipalities) → early communication and participation in design
- Realization of local benefits (in rural areas) for the common good
- **Transparency regarding usage of financial benefits** from renewable energies
- Need for **exchange/transfer of experiences** (best practice)

Conclusion: regions have different needs

- Regional identities in rural areas often refer to landscape characteristics and its value for income generation
- Past transformation experiences shape perceptions; mentalities in rural areas seem to be less open to innovations or transformation
- Past/historical experiences regarding energy production important
- Regional identities shape collaborations needs (existing networks → shape trust and formats)
- Participation forms need to be regionally adapted:
 - consideration of identities and mentalities
 - transparency, fairness of benefits and loads as well as negotiation of interests
- Interregional exchange and role models needed → best practice examples

Open questions: How can cultural dimensions be better integrated in (formal/informal) planning procedures? Which participation forms in which regions?

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Thank you for your attention!

Contact:
Dr. Melanie Mbah
m.mbah@oeko.de

For further information, please visit: www.plantiefen.de

Participation processes and planning in practice: examples from the PlanTieFEn project

Prof. Dr. Thomas Weith

Sarah Friese

Jonas Marschall

Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development gGmbH

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Agenda

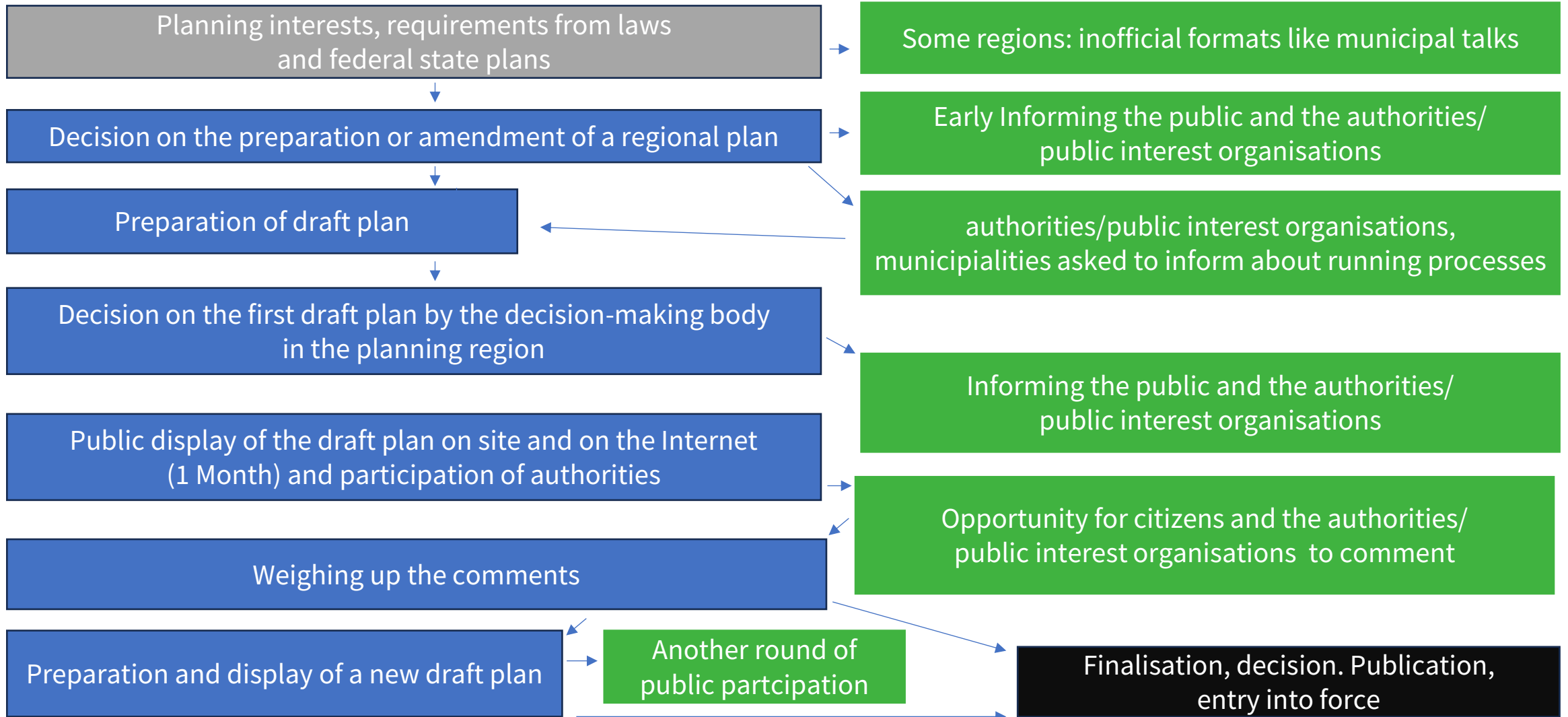
1. Participation and acceptance in planning culture
2. Participation in formal processes
3. Participation and acceptance in the planning practice of renewable energies
- Initial results from the interviews
4. Conclusion: Tension between formal and informal instruments

Participation and acceptance in planning culture

- Germany is culturally strongly **individualistic**, which means that **personal freedom is highly valued**, whereas state regulation is often viewed with scepticism.
- Individuals' **attitudes, perceptions and participation opportunities are key factors** for the acceptance of energy system transformation.
- Against this background, new or additional forms of participation have developed, so-called **informal forms of participation**, which are not prescribed by law but can be carried out **voluntarily**.
- Spatial planning culture research which deals with the ‘soft cultural aspects of spatial planning’ consider the **cultural dimension also as part of governance**.
- The term “soft” refers to the cultural factors that are relevant to spatial planning and are often **invisible or difficult to grasp**.

(Hartinger et al. 2021, Wiehe et al. 2021, Nanz/Fritsche 2012, Ernste 2012, Knieling/Othengrafen 2015)

Participation in formal processes (regional plans)



Participation in formal processes (regional plans)

- Problem: Actual public participation usually only takes place once a complex plan has already been drawn up
- The underlying planning concept is usually worked out in detail before public participation takes place
 - Participation primarily serves to legitimise the plan in terms of the rule of law and democracy
 - not used to develop an optimised planning concept

Participation in formal processes (financial “participation”)

- In many federal states there are now laws on financial participation in the expansion of wind turbines (e. g. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Brandenburg, Thuringia, Saxony)
- some laws also include photovoltaics
- in the other federal states, voluntary offers may be made to municipalities and residents
- Laws link the financial participation of municipalities and residents to the authorisation of the projects
- The specified forms of participation vary depending on the federal state
- The effectiveness of many measures, such as financial savings products, is controversial
- The effective use of funds to increase acceptance is also questionable in many communities

Participation and acceptance in the planning practice of renewable energies

- Interviews - Initial results

	State planning	Regional planning	Municipal planning	Public sector	Civil society	Economy
Participation ...	... is essential, but often insufficient: Formal procedures alone are not enough to ensure acceptance.	... is indispensable, but difficult: it serves to gather information, but often leads to conflicts.	... is crucial, but inefficient: citizens often only get involved when they are personally affected.	... is essential, but often ineffective: participation processes must be better moderated and more comprehensible.	... is only effective if it involves all groups through suitable formats such as digital, hybrid and low-threshold processes.	... is unavoidable, but can slow down processes, as waiting too long for approval prevents projects from being realised.
Acceptance ...	... grows when citizens are involved at an early stage, as this increases trust and the likelihood that they will accept decisions.	... cannot always be achieved : Planning means weighing things up - there are always losers who oppose decisions.	... depends on clear explanations: Decisions are more likely to be accepted if citizens understand the benefits.	... increases through financial participation : Citizens are more willing to support projects if they benefit directly from them.	... can suffer when democratic processes are blocked by individual actors , which delays projects and causes frustration.	... could increase if the distribution of economic benefits is optimised and the financial burden on affected citizens is reduced.

Conclusion: Tension between formal and informal instruments

- While formal participation processes are a necessary basis for planning decisions, they are often not sufficient to ensure acceptance.
- Strict legal procedures can ensure transparency and equal treatment, but they are often difficult to understand and inaccessible to citizens.
- Informal participation formats can enable broader social participation and help to reduce scepticism towards state regulation.
- Early and low-threshold formats in particular are crucial for building trust and promoting acceptance.
- Participation can slow down processes, especially when waiting for full approval.
- At the same time, insufficient participation often leads to resistance and conflict, which ultimately delays projects or causes them to fail.
- The fairer distribution of economic benefits (e.g. direct financial benefits for affected citizens) could defuse conflicts and speed up decision-making processes.
- **The challenge is to find a balance between formal and informal instruments so that there is planning certainty on the one hand and citizens are effectively involved on the other.**
- **Greater integration of ‘soft cultural aspects’ into planning processes could help to avoid democratic blockades and make processes more efficient.**

Thank you for your attention!

Prof. Dr. Thomas Weith

thomas.weith@ils-forschung.de

Research Institute for Regional
and Urban Development gGmbH

Sarah Friese

sarah.friese@ils-forschung.de

Research Institute for Regional
and Urban Development gGmbH

Jonas Marschall

Jonas.marschall@ils-forschung.de

Research Institute for Regional
and Urban Development gGmbH

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