



## Procedural Governance for a Learning Democracy: Outline of a Procedural-Meta-Theory for the Professionalization of Democracy Developers

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### **Abstract**

The more participatory procedures we have, the more there is a need to know when to use which tool for which case or goal. Therefore we developed a *Verfahrenstheorie* (i.e. a theory for matching cases with procedures), which is rooted in a comprehensive Procedurology (*Prozedurologie*, a philosophy for procedural co-creativity—*prozedurales Gestalten*). Out of this meta-theory, we generated the *Meta-Matching-Method* (MMM) to professionalize the art of procedural governance (i.e. the mastership of democratic, co-creative problem-solving). This article explains why there is a theoretical and practical need for such a meta-theoretical approach on professionalizing participatory politics and provides a short draft of the MMM. The goal of such a procedural governance approach is to empower democracy developers (*Demokratieentwickler*) to design and facilitate complex participatory processes for a learning democracy (*Lernende Demokratie*), which is needed so much to overcome the current crises of democracies worldwide.

### **In need of a theory of participatory tools:**

During the ASU Conference in December 2015, an assortment of excellent examples, tools and methods on how to improve participation were presented. All over the world and every day procedural innovations in the fields of politics, community-work, business, education and daily life

are emerging. Procedural Governance addresses questions of how to practically handle those political techniques in the most efficient and effective way and how to grasp the participatory potential intellectually. As the number of participatory tools and methods continues to increase, the need for dedicated “tool-politics” which can categorize those methods and make them accessible (in German: *Demokratiapolitik*) becomes a crucial policy-field. It is just like in an innovative manufacturing company in which one needs to work on the methods and processes together with employees and stakeholders to improve the productivity, quality and reputation of company and product.

In our times not only companies but also individuals, organizations, cities, communities and the state bodies must continuously reflect and learn how to act and collaborate in a better way. Procedural Governance - as the politics of such a learning society or Learning Democracy - centers on the procedural dimension. For example on , i.e. self-referential learning abouton the very methods through which a body of governance forms and tries to dominate the regulatory processes.

This necessity for a deeper and procedural understanding of governance becomes even more relevant due to said boom of participation methods that connect e.g. the people’s opinions with the legislative process. Nevertheless those innovative tools have not reached the established groups of political and economic power, and the world of science sufficiently. Although there is a trend in demanding more participation, it lacks of good and sustainable implementations in practice. Furthermore there neither is a theoretically founded understanding of when and how to include citizens in legislative processes or administrative decisions, nor a practically rooted research and education movement in the political or administrative sciences. In sum, the professionalization of civic participation is missing sophisticated training, established quality-norms, and a unified expert-community.

More recently, there seems to be a race about carving out criteria for quality participatory procedures and processes.

- What should be the basis for those qualitative and professionalizing initiatives? Out of which scientific discourses will it be derived?
- Which theoretical foundation can help to not only talk about public-participation-methods (*Taxonomie*) in a differentiating way, but also to find the ideal tool for every situation (*Praxeologie*)?

The article at hand offers first approaches to these questions. This article aims to demonstrate the need for more participatory methods from a political science point of view, while also sketching a practical Meta-Matching-Method developed out of a new political theory of procedures (*Verfahrenstheorie*) whose core segments are Taxonomy and Praxeology.

## Trends toward more participation within political science approaches

Ever since the 1970s, established, modern politics seem to be in a continuous crisis: they do no longer work as accustomed. The rapidly increasing complexity of problems and the many changes we are facing, like digitalization, contribute to the failure of the established political toolsets. The gap between the demands of the people and the possibilities of politics in a welfare state to satisfy those is widening.

Due to the ever-expanding industrialization, the risks for the environment ascend. Additionally, as a result of increasing individualization, the expectations and general sensitivity towards politics also rise. However, the abilities of the existing structures of politics and administration to handle those complex problems remain underdeveloped.

This political crisis appears on three levels:

- **Crisis of ruling** (*Steuerungskrise*): National, government-driven politics reach their limit in times of globalization, pluralization and digitalization.
- **Crisis of sustainability** (*Nachhaltigkeitskrise*): Policies do not fulfill the expectations of inter-generational equity and sustainable development.
- **Crisis of self-determination** (*Selbstbestimmungskrise*): Politics as universal self-determination of all the people is not yet sufficiently realized.

Behind these three levels lie three social-scientific discourse areas and three expectations on politics:

### *Functional failure: Government debate*

The maintenance of the status quo and existing system is central to this understanding of politics. This perception of governance is thus one of making and applying collectively binding decisions. However, the conventional methods that were used for decades no longer work sufficiently. Therefore, one began looking for methods of multi-stakeholder-cooperation and of cross-sectoral-collaboration to regain effective governance. This is not done out of conviction, but rather out of

necessity, and for structural and functional reasons. The opening for more participation and inclusion is thus still done with mistrust in the political capabilities of ordinary people.

### *Normative failure: Sustainability debate*

This reformative discourse extends beyond the technical and instrumental view of politics as governing because it is characterized by a normative, substantial demand for equity: How do we ensure justice and the *good* for next-generations? Politics do not only have to govern for the “here and now”, but have to remain sustainable in an ecological, social and economical sense. Participation is seen as an important premise so that political decisions can become consistent with the next generations. The inclusion of the affected people is a claim particularly in large-infrastructure and wide-ranging decision and planning processes.

### *Emphatic failure: Civic Society debate*

Why does participation - functional as well as normative - need to justify itself? What if participation - in terms of individual self-determination - becomes an ethical end in itself and a fundamental right for everyone? In this case the claim for more participation would be self-evident regardless of its effectiveness and sustainable responsibility. The conception of the human as a *Zoon Politikon* - always striving towards a good life through politics - demands participation as a condition for good life. An emphatic and categorical argument underlies this classic western understanding of humanity and politics. Therefore, participative methods are good in themselves and legitimation is only gained through democratic procedures.

To sum it up, these three very different discourses agree on the point that effective, sustainable and legitimized politics can hardly succeed through centralistic, top-down, bureaucratic procedures. Rather, they demand a decentralized, participative, subsidiary style of politics where non-governmental, self-organized players play a decisive role. Today, politicians and decision-makers need participatory procedures to handle the complex problems and crises they are facing, and legitimize their actions.

Those different logics of expectation towards politics can be assigned to three ideal lines of argument:

**Table 1. Lines of argument of the political science explanation**

	<b>Functional</b>	<b>Normative</b>	<b>Emphatic</b>
<b>Normative degree of argumentation</b>	Functional, pragmatic: Participation is not seen as necessary as long as governing functions	Substantial, normative: certain expectations for values must be fulfilled	Categorical: emancipatory conception of man: self-determination as civil-right
<b>The right to...</b>	Stability and predictability, law and order	Sustainability (social and inter-generational) and social justice	Self-realization and public appreciation
<b>Image of state / Government</b>	Negative: Government ought to repel chaos and threats	Positive: government ought to meet and implement values	Emphatic: state has to guarantee room for self-realization
<b>Logic of participation</b>	Nolens-volens: because they have to use it	Limited motivation: because it works better like that	Absolute motivation: because it is a self-standing value
<b>Legitimation through:</b>	Effectiveness (efficiency is secondary)	Intergenerational Justice	Political Freedom

## Booming development-fields of participatory procedures

There are both theoretical and practical reasons behind the need for a political theory of participative procedures precisely because there are so many methods and different schools of origin and application. Hence the question of how to classify and how to make them accessible arises.

Since the ecological and anti-nuclear movement in the 1970s and 1980s, the repertoire of participation-methods rapidly increased. Since then, individual and collective self-determination

demands have affected all subject areas and all social and marginal groups. No method is too bizarre or too innovative not to be tried out in the political field.

To this point, these forms of civil co-determination and bright procedural thinking did not reach the structures and heads of the actual political-administrative system—the inner circle of power. There, participatory methods are mostly used out of necessity and carried out half-heartedly rather than consistently, and have thus been an exception rather than the rule. The participatory practice has not yet developed to a “weather-proofed” level.

How can we make procedural governance a daily and professional, stable and sustainable practice? We should not simply *dare* more democracy, as claimed by German chancellor Willy Brandt in 1969. Nearly 50 years afterwards, we should be able and courageous enough to simply *do* more democracy.

### A boom of procedures without a science of procedures

The more procedures there are, the more questions arise about how to differ and classify this multitude of methods or about which procedure should be used in which case.

Where do they come from? They do not fall from the sky. They derive from certain milieus and trends with their own backgrounds and contexts .

In considering the “birth years” of these procedures, it is remarkable that it is a very new phenomenon with most methods not being older than 25 years. Further investigations about since when they are used extensively shows the novelty of those procedures even clearer. There was an increasing boom in the professionalized areas of mediation, moderation and consulting since the 1990s. However, those milieus rarely share their experiences and ideas with each other. Although it might have been reasonable to begin developing and establishing specific and professionalized niches, the time and need to approach common meta-topics has come.

Although there are a lot of milieus of origin, there are four dominating areas:

- **Business – organizational and personal development**  
Main field of application: companies and administrative bodies
- **Politics – civil participation and community building**  
Main field of application: municipalities and NGOs
- **Education – pedagogics of adults and large groups**  
Main field of application: adult education and group dynamics

- **Informatics – agile software development and project management**

Main field of application: collaborative projects in software and product development

A large number of cooperative procedures are further developed and used in social and integration work, church and community development, youth participation, corporate development and in family and group therapy.

The driving forces for this boom of procedures are often normative ones, acting out of deep emancipatory and humanitarian intentions. Those milieus share the understanding of participation not being a means to an end, but as having a purpose in itself with the aim of never taking decisions or create a process over the heads of the people affected.

However, the decision-makers in politics, economics and society as well as scientists and teachers in academic contexts to a large extent still are unaware of those social-technical developments and inventions. There is no common logic, order or theory yet known to organize and categorize the countless methods, tools and approaches that emerged from these distinct contexts.

## Towards a theory of procedures and procedurology

On one hand countless methods have already emerged from a variety of societal milieus, on the other hand the need, wish and openness to pursue political aims in a more participatory manner, has also increased significantly. The reflexive policy area of procedural governance is gaining relevance. For that, a systematic participation-tool-theory (*Verfahrenstheorie*) is needed. The theory must address how to speak properly and differentiate the methods and tools of governance by helping to order and select the proper ones (*Taxonomie*). Additionally, the theory provides practical guidance regarding the design and usage of particular tools for specific cases (*Praxeologie*). This leads to a new academic discipline of action-oriented research in teaching the competences and conditions needed to connect the abundance of innovative participatory procedures and governance designs with the ever-increasing demands of professional facilitation in participatory processes.

A fundamental philosophy of procedures—a *Prozedurologie*—exists behind this more pragmatical approach of a *Verfahrenstheorie*. This grand-theory based on a procedural *conditio humana* (*prozedurale Anthropologie*) opens insightful possibilities for returning to central questions of the humanities and social sciences, such as procedural ethics, aesthetics and dialectics. For example, it leads to a proceduralization of classical dialectics by going beyond the three-step thinking of thesis, antithesis and synthesis towards a fourth step of transforming from “thinking” into “acting” through a

procedural *Prothesis*. This widening of current abstract science of knowledge to a political science of wisdom (*prothetische Wissenschaft*) focuses on the academic duty not only to understand what could be done (synthesis), but also in developing practical crutches (like a prosthesis for a handicapped) for actually implementing what has been realized in the synthesis. When it comes to doing what one wants and should do, we are individually “crippled”. In most cases we cannot bridge the gap between knowing what we want on one side and actually achieving what we want on the other side as a single person. We thus need procedural innovations to act as crutches in helping us to put into effect what is needed and wanted together with other people. This pragmatism self-understanding of science leads into a radical *Procedural Turn* of social and cultural sciences.

How can this procedural view be turned practical again—especially for those who must design, facilitate and host participatory processes in political and organizational life? Considering this a specific micro-theory was derived from the *general theory of procedures* (*Verfahrenstheorie & Prozedurologie*) to match specific cases with best-suited process-designs. The so-called *Meta-Matching-Method* (MMM) was developed by the author in a research project on “Procedural Approaches to Conflict Resolution” at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Bielefeld in 2002 and 2003. It is grounded in solid analytical and synthetic work, elaborated research and practice of procedures. It has since been presented several times on conferences and workshops, and was implemented in practice in many cases.

### **Meta-Matching-Method (MMM)**

Every facilitator or change agent in organizational development and political processes is familiar with the challenge regarding the arguing and convincing which design to select. Do the owners of the project and the relevant actors support the method? How can we establish shared assumptions among the participants about the case and the chosen method?

As cases differ, the most suitable methods for each project also differ. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the case *and* the method in each new assignment. Imagine MMM as a tool that not only helps to profile the demands of the case *and* the capacity of the methods, but also produces support for the chosen method and a shared understanding among participants.

The Meta-Matching-Method was developed for the use in organizational development and change-management as well as community organizing, participatory planning and multi-stakeholder

governance-processes. Based on these approaches of systemic interaction and intervention, the holistic approach of MMM encloses the past, the present and the future of a project.

MMM is a deliberative and systematic approach to profile the case and the method, which should be adapted specifically for the case. In consequence, it is an efficient and effective tool for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the case in combination with an overview of the methods' capacities. At the end of the profiling process, the facilitator is able to decide whether or not to use which method in a certain case and how to adjust it. Therefore, MMM is a helpful tool for every facilitator to choose among and adjust the chosen methods for co-active problem-solving processes.

The profiling process is deliberative; MMM integrates the owners and other key actors of the project in the designing stage of the process—a stage normally undertaken by the facilitator himself. They do not experience the service of the facilitator as a top-down decision, but rather feel as though they are taken seriously and are involved. As the owners, other key-actors and the facilitator complement one another, MMM guarantees an extremely deep understanding of the matter and establishes shared assumptions about the case and the problem.

The method to adapt becomes transparent: After profiling the case, all the participants also profile the chosen method. As such, they gain a common understanding not only of the problem to solve but also of the procedure that was decided for use. The common profiling process fosters the support of the method and eases the job of the facilitator. MMM produces support and understanding of the method among owners and actors.

In many designing and evaluation processes with MMM, this meta-tool has proven to save a lot of resources for all sides involved. In regard to professional moderation, it is a question of hours to profile both the case and the methods, and to match them. More importantly in order to save resources is the fact that it guarantees an analysis of all-important factors interacting with a case, which is a prerequisite for lasting, sustainable results. Additionally, MMM is a tool used to ensure the adaptation of the best method for a certain case, which consequently produces the most dramatic results.

Since 2003 MMM has been used in many different change-, transformation, and development processes for public and political institutions (like communities, parties, parliaments), NGOs, profit and non-profit businesses, universities and research-projects and even churches and dioceses. The interaction of facilitator, owners and actors during the profiling process is the best way to respect

cultural diversity, as MMM makes it explicit and offers room to establish shared assumptions among the participants.

In the application process of MMM every stage has clear objectives combined with differentiated procedures. A rough outline of the four steps is the following:

1. Mapping
2. Profiling
3. Matching
4. Re-Designing

**1. Mapping:** To get started smoothly in this stage the participants draw a “mindmap” of the case. The goal is to look behind the phenomena and appearance and finding out what’s the real problem underlying the case and what are the (real) agenda and relations of the actors. It is a first approach to the topic following the rule of “quick and dirty”, which means that aspects of the case are expressed, but are not further deepened or systematized. We must consider that the actors may have different backgrounds, competing assumptions and may not know each other. If the different issues of the project are already discussed deeply at this stage, the actors will distance themselves from each other with nearly no chance to bring them back together at a later stage. On the contrary, the mapping-process brings them together and establishes a first, but still weak collective awareness and solidarity.

**2. Profiling:** After this more narrative approach, the participants translate their insights and priorities into a more systematic and gradual profile of complexity of the case. With the following categories all relevant complexity-dimensions of a processes can be measured:

- Familiarity with the topic
- Willingness of the actors
- Openness to methods
- Time pressure
- Resource availability
- Degree of obligation to implement the results

Following the mapping-process, the participants go further into detail at this stage. Their view of the real challenges intensifies during the profiling as they deliberatively analyze and systematize it.

**3. Matching:** Now the requirement-profile of the case is being compared with the performance profile of the current, given or usual process-designs. If this doesn't match, the specific requirement-criteria out of the profiling will guide to find or design the most suitable one. The participants discuss together whether or not the method is suitable for the case, and compare the considered methods with each other. Together, they decide for the best method to use in the case.

**4. Re-Designing:** After the discussion about the best-fitting method, the chosen procedure is re-designed to adapt to the individual and situative conditions of the implementation. A chosen method will rarely fit perfectly. Mostly, it is necessary to discuss and decide on adjustments of the method before and while it begins. Now the participants of MMM are much more likely not only to engage properly but also to help to improve the process in the process, because they understand the case and the chosen method much better.

This is only a brief sketch of a much more sophisticated and well-tested meta-procedure for professional process designing and facilitation. It leaves us with a last question: What is this procedural theory based approach good?

### **Procedural Governance as basis of a Learning Democracy**

The self understanding of politics especially in democracies needs to be understood as a learning process. Why? Because now is the time! A time in which catastrophes and crises make the consequences of human actions and the complexity of relationships clear to us; In which our democracies are under huge internal and external pressure. A time in which the people are getting increasingly separated from political institutions, politicians and parties and don't trust politics anymore to handle those problems properly. Because of this struggle that politics and societies are facing it is time to put the self-understanding of being a Learning Democracy on the political agenda, to make it part of our awareness and our programs and to make it a leading theme in the media and in conversations. Fatalism, mistrust, and fear, lead to extremism and a turning away from democracy and freedom; all of this is gaining ground and we have to counter it with reasoned confidence: the certainty that we can do much, much better! We can do better because in a learning democracy we will be able to adjust our social coexistence to new requirements and expectations through professional implemented procedural governance.

The vision is politics that learn faster than the problems emerge. This can only be reached, if collective learning becomes a self-evident practice. Meaning that we constantly improve our politics,

i.e. our coproduction of common good, by participation of every person and institution with their respective strengths and concerns. This is possible if we start an initiative for a comprehensive innovation of our political-democratic system. The tools and knowledge can be found in the described approach. Concrete ideas for a Learning Democracy can also be found in successful learning organizations; hidden champions in our economies and civil-societies all around the world. Here, employees, managers, suppliers, and customers constantly think together about better ways to get better results. This shared learning is been facilitated by experts in the field of development of organizations, personnel and production. If we are able to develop innovative companies, through good procedures and smart leadership, which at the same time are appreciated as the best places to work – why not politics too? Why do we not develop our democracy, our common-good-coproduction, in the same obvious way?

For this to happen we need procedural governance experts: Democracy Developers! They will need a public mandate and legal framework. They will not only focus on improving the cooperation between parliaments and citizens, but also in and between public administrations and parties, businesses and unions, NGOs and media, education, religion and culture. To build up such a comprehensive learning infrastructure and culture in our democracies we will need thousands of well trained and coached Democracy Developers.

For this we are setting up a first Academy for a Learning Democracy (*Akademie Lernende Demokratie*) which will be itself a learning academy, testing new formats of practice-learning. We will for example have Democracy-Development-Labs (*Demokratieentwicklungslabor*) in which we will develop and test prototypes of political innovations and at the same time train the needed change-agents, facilitators and process-responsibles on how to implement these tools. This School for Democracy Developers will transcend party affiliations and will be solely committed to a free and democratic constitution.

With a Learning Democracy coming to live, we stand at the beginning of a miracle of co-productivity: if we manage to connect the potential of billions of people and millions of organizations in our countries and world-wide we can make our democracies fit and resilient for the 21st century: We can do much, much better – we can do it together! Therefore we need the described meta-procedural-theory for responsible Procedural Governance.

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