

Political participation of senior representatives in elderly care policies in East and West Germany – a four cases comparison

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Introduction

Political participation on the part of civil-society organisations is again becoming an increasingly important topic in research and politics (e.g. Backhaus-Maul et al. 2003; Gensicke 2003; Zimmer et al. 2007): Citizen participation is also welcomed in Germany as a future-oriented style of municipal politics (cf. e.g. Schellong, Langenberg 2005; Stock, Stock 2005).

Concepts such as ‘civil community’ or ‘civil society’, the ‘activating state’ or ‘local governance’ (Bovaird et al. 2002; Heinze, Strünck 2001; Stock 2005; Zimmer et al. 2007) serve to describe the changes in institutional arrangements and the extension of actor groups participating in policy-making. Here the question arises, from a normative, democracy theory, or also analytic perspective: Which social groups should participate, or actually do participate in the development of policy?

One group of the population that in this respect is relatively seldom noticed is the fastest-growing one – senior citizens. Even so, it should be mentioned that ‘senior citizens’ form a very differentiated group, and the concept is employed by no means uniformly. The political participation of the elderly would appear to be a central issue of an ageing society (Naegele, Walker 2002) simply because they represent, with their growth as an electoral factor or also cost-factor, a ‘central target group of politics’ (Künemund 2001: 77) and wield a growing ‘latent political power’ (Naegele 1999).

As expression of the growing political consciousness of the ‘older’ generations, in recent decades increasingly senior-citizen representations on all political levels have been constituted, first in the Federal Republic of Germany in its previous form, then after reunification also in the ‘new’ federal states (Eifert 2006). There have been however to date hardly any empirical studies examining especially the political participation of organised senior-citizen representations at the municipal level (Eifert 2006), and, to my knowledge, none going beyond the regional perspective to attempt an East-West comparison. But such an interrogation is thoroughly warranted, also because, after nearly 20 years of German unity, apparently no longer any ‘developmental deficit’ exists [regionally] in the prevalence of senior-citizen groups. Still more, this development in East Germany has been even much faster than it was in the ‘old’ *Bundesländer*, so that by the middle of the 1990s a similar coverage of senior-citizen groups was attained as in the West-German region, where senior-citizen representations have been spreading since the mid-1980s (Mayer 1997).

My paper intends to contribute to filling this deficit by asking what differences exist in the political participation of senior-citizen representations in municipal elderly-care policy-making in a comparison between West-German and East-German cities, and how these differences are to be explained. By ‘senior-citizen representatives’ is understood here organised but not party-affiliated political interest-representations of older people on the municipal level (Pitschas 07.01.2001; Eifert 2006; Roth 1997). These include for example senior-citizen advisors, consultants, commissioners and committees (*Seniorenbeiräte, -räte, -beauftragte, -ausschüsse*)¹ The basis of the paper is the data and results of an empirical study comparing the care policies of four medium-large cities, the DFG project ‘The local restructuring of elderly-care – cultural principles, actors and basis for action (*Die lokale Restrukturierung der Altenpflege – kulturelle Grundlagen, Akteure und*

¹ Other forms/names are for ex.: ‘elder council’, ‘elder advisors’, ‘city elder circle’ (*Altenrat, Altenbeirat, Stadialtenring*).

Handlungsbedingungen).² With ‘political participation of senior-citizen representatives’ is understood actions undertaken by volunteer senior-citizen representatives within the framework of an unpaid mandate with the goal of constructively influencing decisions of the elected representatives in their city or local administration (cf. for ex. Kaase 1997).

The widely-held thesis of weakness in German civil society (cf. for ex. Probst 2003) might suggest the conclusion that senior-citizen representations in the East have hardly attained the level of political participation familiar in West-German examples. I test here this thesis using the above-mentioned study. It emerges that, on the contrary, the political participation of senior-citizen representations in the two East-German cases is significantly greater than in the West-German ones. This finding is explained by the way local political culture and civil society function in eastern Germany.

In the next section I show how the political participation of senior-citizen representatives is represented in the German-language literature, and move on after that to introduce my theoretical approach to the comparison. The fourth part of the paper describes the methodological basis of the study, where after I give the results of the comparison. In the sixth part I attempt to explain the results before the backdrop provided by the preceding discussion of the differences West- and East-German civil society. In a final section my results are briefly recapitulated.

How has the political participation of organised senior-citizen representations been analysed in the German literature?

‘Senior-citizen representations’ in the form of advisors, consultants, circles, committees, etc. are civil-society groups representing the interests of senior-citizens in Germany on all political levels (Eifert 2006). Their beginnings date from the mid-1980s and developed at first rather slowly. But since the mid-1990s they have achieved nearly total ‘coverage’ in all federal states and municipalities (Mayer 1997).

Senior-citizen representations see themselves as politically non-partisan, confessionally neutral and organisationally unbound, with the task of representing the (generally defined) life situation of senior citizens vis-à-vis public administration, politics, social-welfare charitable organisations and other relevant actors. Their goal is to enable older people to have a political stake, to combine and coordinate their interests (Eifert 2006: 267), and thus do justice to the need for representation of this stage of life (Pitschas 07.01.2001).

At the municipal level they (senior-citizen interest representations) are mostly voluntary institutions, i.e. the municipality can but is not required to institute them or guarantee their right to participate. According to Eifert, there are two basic recognisable ways how they to come to be: constitution ‘from above’ through the local administration, or ‘from below’ through groups of interested citizens or civil-society organisations (Eifert 2006: 265). Their organisational structure is, corresponding to the low level of their formalised legal basis, diverse. In NRW (North Rhine-Westphalia) the number of members was an average of 11-15 persons, and the most effective representations had directing boards with a maximum of seven persons (Eifert 2006: 265).

Barbara Eifert (Eifert 2006: 268–269) names in her article on senior-citizen representations in NRW four central tasks that can apply to all municipal senior-citizen representations: a voice

² The Project has been conducted since 2006 under the direction of Prof. Dr. Birgit Pfau-Effinger in collaboration with Melanie Eichler and the Author at the University of Hamburg.

in planning in municipalities (e.g. city planning); relaying information and concerns to politics, administration and political actors in senior-citizen affairs (advisors to politicians); being a source of information and advice for older persons (information provision, referrals to more knowledgeable sources); as well as public relations work relating to older people and age issues.

According to Ulrich von Alemann (von Alemann 1997) the political participation of senior-citizen representations takes place in a 'extra-legislative space'. With that is meant briefly, that the forces in civil society should have (differently configured) participatory possibilities, but no decision-making powers that [could] run counter to those of democratically elected representatives. This political space is differentiated, according to Pitschas (1997: 130), into three arenas or legal spheres of participation: in public discourse, in municipal parliaments through advisory boards of 'knowledgeable citizens', and in [municipal] administrations.

This paper follows a narrower interpretation of the political process as policy formulation and its implementation in the two arenas (1-) city (or local) council, and (2-) local administration (Eifert 2006: 273).³

Author's approach to the comparison

In order to be able to measure the [senior-citizen representations'] contribution to policy-making in these two arenas, I take up Pitschas' point (1997) and differentiate *two dimensions of participation*:

1. the institutional participatory rights, and
2. that of the senior-citizen representatives' kind of actual involvement in the processes of municipal policy-making.

Institutionalised participatory rights are accompanied by formal regulations for the senior-citizen representatives in the two arenas of a municipality. Institutionalised rights are an important determiner of the degree of participation, in the first place because they can be claimed by their beneficiaries (Eifert 2006). Their extent can be considered small when the senior-citizen representatives have no more participatory rights than any other citizen and therefore may not act as *an // a formally organised 'interest representation'. The extent of rights is considered greater if – as in Schleswig Holstein – the senior-citizen representatives have the right to speak and initiate proposals in all committees of a city's parliamentary body (Vanselow 1997). In the administrative arena there is a correspondingly high degree of participatory rights if the representatives are guaranteed participation and access to information in all senior-citizen-related matters, while a low degree of rights would be the case if these requirements did not differ from those of the 'normal' citizen.

The second dimension of participation describes the actual involvement of the senior-citizen representatives into political decision-making processes in both arenas and thus takes into account the fact that, while institutionalised participatory rights represent the central way of access into the arena, it is however just *one* way. Besides, it remains an open question how the practices are carried out. An interest representation can for example participate to a great degree in local policy-making even when it has rather low-degree formal participation rights, as shown for example by the results of early 'urban politics research' (for an overview see e.g.

³ The political discourse in public through the media, which can also be considered a separate arena in the policy-process, as does for example Pitschas Pitschas 1997, shall be left here out of consideration, for one thing, because at the municipal level in Germany above all the first two play the central role Backhaus-Maul 1998, S. 699; Priestley et al. April 2010 and for another, because the participation mechanisms in the public discourses differ much from those in the two others, so that a combination seems to make little sense.

(Mollenkopf 2010; Stone 2005). Participation can however also be low at the same time as the participatory rights are great. In the former case a close personal relationship between senior-citizen representatives and important political and administrative players is conceivable that would make possible such rather 'informal' participation. In the latter case it is for example conceivable that an generous institutional regulation has already existed for some time but has been little or no longer used by the senior-citizen representatives, and current political actors have little interest in senior-citizen representatives and even seek to hinder their participation. In short, between institutionalised participatory rights and processual participation can exist a gap – or coverage – for various reasons. The institutional participatory rights are thus a central indicator, which however must be confirmed by the actual participation in the policy processes. The participation in the municipal decision-making processes can thus be seen as greater if the senior-citizen representatives take part in the senior-citizen-related debates in the city's parliamentary body and in the senior-citizen-related administrative measures in order to prepare or execute these decisions. It is less if the senior-citizen representatives do not take part recognisably in the debates mentioned, and are not included the administrative measures.

methodological procedere

In the above-mentioned DFG project the municipal care policies of four middle-sized German cities of 75 to 100 thousand inhabitants were compared. Two of the cities lie in the West (W 1, W 2) and two in East (O 1, O 2) of Germany; the geographical symmetry does not extend to their social composition: As university towns, W 1 and O 1 are characterised by a relatively large academic middle class, while W 2 and O 2 are by tradition predominantly industrial, i.e. locations of production and services.

We conducted in total 38 interviews with relevant actors in local politics and civil society. Furthermore we analysed the institutional regulations binding on the senior-citizen representatives, as well as parliamentary social-welfare committee minutes from 1995-2007 in order to understand the development of senior-citizen-relevant issues and the participation of the senior-citizen representatives in the related policy-debates. However, the minutes of the social-welfare committees differ in their quality as data, in as far as they are more detailed in the two East-German cases and allowed more precise reconstruction of the discussions than the minutes from the two West-German cities, and this made the comparison somewhat more difficult. Assessment of the data by content analysis was carried out with the help of the Maxqda application.

Results: How does the participation in the cases of the senior-citizen representations differ in the two regions?

The perhaps surprising finding of the study is however, that the two East-German cases achieve an equally high or even higher degree of institutionalised political participation rights than do the West-German cases, and they are also more strongly involved in the processes of policy-making in both of the arenas mentioned. By contrast the senior-citizen representatives in both West-German cities achieve only a low degree of political participation. This is so above all because they are not involved in the local political processes, and less because of their institutional participatory rights. These findings shall be discussed in detail in what follows.

The case studies

As ‘pre-parliamentarian’ actors, none of the senior-citizen representatives in any of the study cities have any voting rights in the political arena. They differ however quite clearly in how they are integrated institutionally and organisationally into policy-processes in the two arenas.

Senior-citizen Advisory Board – city W 1

The basic tasks, rights and the composition of the Advisory Board are set forth in the statute of the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board. Among its tasks are:

- Representing the interests of the city’s senior citizens
- Advising the City Council and administration ‘in all questions relating to aid for senior citizens’, and
- cooperation in planning and carrying out programmes and measures aiding senior citizens (§ 1 Statute Senior-Citizen Advisory Board W 1).

The Senior-Citizen Advisory Board consists of 24 voting representatives elected by City Council for the term of the municipal legislation period. Of the 24 members, half are made up of ‘informed citizens’, chosen for their part ‘by the charitable organisation(s), association(s), and groups active in aid for and social work with the elderly’. In addition, four Advisory Board members are sent by the sponsors of the autonomous elderly-aid charities upon the suggestion of the umbrella association of charitable organisations. Of the remaining eight internally voting members, two are from the top level of the city administration⁴ and six are members of City Council. The Director of the Social Welfare Department takes part, without a vote, in the sessions of the Advisory Board (§ 2 Statute Senior-Citizen Advisory Board W 1). The Board Chairperson is elected from among the Board members by them (§ 6 Statute Senior-Citizen Advisory Board W 1). The Advisory Board is supposed to meet in case of need, but at least twice yearly. To my knowledge it meets in the rule four times per year.

Institutional participatory rights

In order to be able to fulfill the above tasks, the Advisory Board ‘is to be heard in fundamental questions of aid to the elderly and other measures that concern especially the interests of older people (§ 1 Statute Senior-Citizen Advisory Board W 1); this is supposed to occur through the ‘knowledgeable citizens’ who ‘in special cases’ are called on to advise [City Council standing] committees on decisions (§ 23 Abs. 4 Par. 4 rules of procedure of the City Council W 1 *Geschäftsordnung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung der Stadt W 1*). Since the city’s Social Welfare Dept. head as well as the City Council members who are Advisory Board members, are supposed to participate in central decision-making processes, the Advisory Board is moreover, at least formally, well represented not only in political, but also in the administrative structures. Of course their contribution – because of their office-holding duties and partisan political loyalties – cannot be considered civil-society engagement and is here therefore not reckoned as part of the activity of the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board.

Involvement in the local policy-making

From the minutes of the Social Welfare Committee meetings it emerges that, if the names of the civil-society representatives – the ‘knowledgeable citizens’ – are sought, these are seen to have hardly ever taken the floor in the debates. Since this could also be due to the somewhat incomplete documentation of the meetings, it seems to me more meaningful – for the assessment of the Board’s involvement in the political process – to look at what role the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board played in the most important senior-citizen policy measures

⁴ The Social-Welfare Department head and a further member of the city’s top political administrators.

during the study period, and indeed what role in the statements of the interviewees themselves.

The two most important senior-citizen policy measures taken during the study period – the creation and operation of the BeKo⁵, and the renewal of elderly aid planning – were largely elaborated in especially created directive committees, and not in the City Council's standing Social-Welfare Committee. In these directive committees, namely the 'directing group BeKo' and the 'directing group elderly-aid planning', were at the moment of the study two actor groups represented: representatives from politics and administration in the city and district,⁶ as well as representatives of the autonomous sponsors of social-aid charities – i.e. no members of the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board. But since in any case the City Social-Welfare Department head by virtue of office is a member of the Senior-Citizen Board, at least this person formally took part in all essential decisions. In the interview with this official however, his membership in the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board was not mentioned. The 'well-informed citizens' who make up half of the Advisory Board are on the other hand not involved in these committees, but are periodically informed within the Board. It seems therefore that a clear involvement of the Senior-Citizen Board cannot be found in this case.

The Director of the BeKo itself, whose activity gave her a good overview on the senior-citizen landscape, assessed the work of the Advisory Board as being not very active:

'Senior-Citizen Board? Well, I'd have to check, I can't say right off what's going on there at the moment – anyway nothing world-shaking ...' (W-1-E-2b par. 305-310).

The least positive take on the work of the Advisory Board had the long-time District Deputy for Social Welfare and one of the leading initiators of local elderly-aid planning:

'Senior-Citizen Board? In general it's a self-admiration society ... on the board sit mostly none of the people it's really there for (W 1 A-1 par.: 78).

Summary

On the institutional level, the Senior-Citizen Board is closely connected to (or expressed less delicately, dominated by) the public figures of politics and administration on the one hand, and on the other, the sponsors of the established social-welfare charities. The (apparent) advantage is, that if the Social-Welfare Department head sits simultaneously on the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board, this person is present as all decisions are taken. On the other hand it appears that the senior-citizen board as such is not perceived by the political structures and processes, or even by the very same Social-Welfare Department head. That the actual civil-society representatives on the senior-citizen board are largely invisible is perhaps also due in part to the not particularly abundant minutes taken at the Social Welfare Committee meetings. Altogether, although the Senior-Citizen Board because of its institutional nature has formally significant rights to participation, it apparently does not exercise them, because in the deciding, narrowly corporatist-organised committees is not really represented by anybody, or actively present.⁷

Senior-Citizen Advisory Board – city W 2

There are two institutional bodies of senior-citizen interest representation in the city – the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board and the Senior-Citizen Delegate Assembly. Their tasks and

⁵ 'BeKo' – the Advice and Coordination Centre – is operated by the city, the district and the autonomous social-welfare charities of the city. It has two central tasks: a) advising citizens on the elderly aid and care services on offer, as well as b) the monitoring and control of the market in such offers.

⁶ For the city, for example the Social-Welfare dept. administrator and several administrative specialists.

⁷ For a more detailed description of this local corporatistic arrangement in this city see Coleman et al. April 2010.

rights are set out in the bylaws of the Advisory Board. There is no mention of citizens' representations in city statutes. The Senior-Citizen Board has the task of representing the interests of senior citizens vis-à-vis the politically elected representatives and city administration. The Delegate Assembly has the task of choosing the Senior-Citizen Board, and of serving as a link between the Senior-Citizen Board and the senior citizen 'rank and file' residing in the city's neighbourhoods, including those in municipal residences for the elderly. Both bodies – Senior-Citizen Board and Delegate Assembly – were set up in 1982 by decision of City Council.

The Senior-Citizen Board is supposed to 'look after the special interests of older citizens with respect to City Council, Administration and the public' (preamble of the standing orders of the Senior-Citizen Board W 1; *Präambel der Geschäftsordnung des Seniorenbeirates W 2*). Here three particular tasks are foreseen:

- To 'attend to the special concerns of older residents of the city and to advise competently in such matters the City Council, Administrative Committee and the Council Committees'.
- It should, through 'proposals, encouragement, questions, recommendations and position-taking, ensure the perception of the interests of older residents', and
- for the city's senior citizens, 'who seek advice and help, provide assistance discreetly and without cost', and, by 'their own initiative' establish contact with them (*ibid.* § 1).

The Senior-Citizen Board meets publicly according to need, but at least once per month. This has long taken place, by turns, at the local senior-citizen centres and care-homes, which on such occasions are simultaneously inspected. Each session is supposed to be prepared in conjunction with the city Social-Welfare Department.

Institutional participatory rights

The Senior-Citizen Board sends a member to the Social Committee of the City Council, who there has the right to speak. His or her positions and recommendations are supposed to be communicated, in a way foreseen by the Council's statutes, by the administration to the Committees (see §§ 9 and 13 GO SB W1). That is, there is an organisational, though weak, link from the senior-citizen representatives to an administrative component of the city administration.

Involvement in the local policy-making

In reality, on the basis of Social Committee minutes from between 1995 and 2007 no intensive participation of the Senior-Citizen Board in the debates can be determined, even as senior-citizen issues were repeatedly discussed there. However it should be also said that the minutes of the Social- and Health Committees of city W 2, as the committee is officially called, in comparison to the practice in the other cities studied, are the least documented and unfortunately rarely permit discussions to be reconstructed. But also the political and administrative actors we questioned characterised the political activities of the Senior-Citizen Board as more passive than otherwise. Also, representatives of the administration could not tell us of regularly planned meetings with representatives of the Board. If at all, then these appear rather to take place informally, by way of familiar short-cuts. Overall characterised the Director of Elderly-Aid in the Social-Welfare Dept. the work of the Senior-Citizen Board as scarcely effective:

'Now, on the other hand, the senior-citizen boards in other cities work, well, maybe more effectively than ours. Ours works more behind the scenes. They do a lot by telephone. The phone numbers are all in the [local newspaper] as advice hotlines, but that's for particular problems, but they don't do enough, in my opinion, to bring their work out into the public' (W 1 E-1: par. 305).

The long-time Chairwoman of the [City Council's] Social-Welfare Committee declares that her city's senior-citizen representation appears rather passive in the political arena:

'... one of them [*i.e.*, senior-citizen representatives] is on the Social-Welfare Committee, but without a voice, as advisor. So they ought to get in more on the political level, exert more influence. About a third of [W 2] population is after all over 60. So ... they have to try to explain their standpoint to politicians and administrators, and get something done, too. ...in the last ten years it's been just a bit too little. As a senior-citizen rep you can't just sit there in [a] ...committee meeting and say nothing' (W 1 A-1 par. 316).

This seems however not always to have been so. Rather, before 1995, there were already senior-citizen representatives who were more engaged in the local political discussion, which the Chairwoman above explained with a reference to the personal engagement of a particular Chairperson (W 2 A-2).

Beyond participating in sessions of the Social-Welfare Committee, the Senior-Citizen Board is involved in the approximately quarterly 'Care Conferences' held by the city. These conferences were established after the introduction of 'care insurance' in Germany, in order to compensate for the reduction in municipal control and to have all the actors meet at one table. In the statements of the persons interviewed, the Senior-Citizen Board however is also there more passive than otherwise. On the other hand the Board is apparently very active when it comes to advising individual senior citizens.

Summary

The institutional participatory rights remain behind the tasks that were set. If the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board was commissioned by the City to advise City Council, administrative and City Council Committees, then it would be understandable to admit it not only to the Social-Welfare and Health Committees as advising member, but also to the other committees named in the tasks. This institutional 'mis-match' is however not compensated by the actual activity of the Senior-Citizen Board; also it seems that during the study period the Board never sought more involvement. Instead, it fulfilled rather sparsely its political advisory and interest-representation tasks between 1997 and 2007, appearing not particularly prominently either in the Social-Welfare or in other political or administrative committees. It played neither in the city's parliamentary nor administrative arena (except for running an advice centre) an active role.

Senior-Citizen Advisory Board – city O 1

The city's Senior-Citizen Advisory Board was – as many East-German senior-citizen boards in the early 1990s – constituted in 1993. The municipal legal foundations were laid for the Senior-Citizen Board in city O 1 in the 'City Statute for the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board'. According to this Statute⁸ the Senior-Citizen Board has the following tasks:

- To answer the City Council's call to be the 'representation of the interests of people in the retirement-age phase of life', and to 'extend the possibilities for active life on the part of older residents'.
- The above task is decidedly meant to be 'activating', for the Senior-Citizen Board shall not only 'supportively advise City Council and administration, but also all other sponsors of senior-citizen work and care', as well as

⁸ The current version is from 2006.

- influence the senior citizens themselves, ‘awakening and intensifying their interest in solutions to municipal tasks on a broad basis’.
- The Senior-Citizen Board is to devote itself concretely to ‘questions of the further development of various opportunities for elderly people, as well as to the preparation for old age, but also take positions on local political themes, with reference to the concerns of older citizens. The activities of the Senior-Citizen Board are to deal with problems as well as raise general consciousness of the positive possibilities for the post-occupational phase of life.’ (§ 1 par. 1 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1).

To the Senior-Citizen Board belong, for one municipal election term, 16 voting and four non-voting but advising members. Voting members should be made up of: seven senior citizens from ‘residential homes and communal living; pre-retirees and early retirees; as well as: socially experienced senior citizens from associations and interest-groups’; further, five senior citizens suggested by the umbrella organisations of social-welfare charities; three suggested by currently represented political parties; as well as one member from a medical or care profession (§ 2 par. 1 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1). The four advising members come exclusively from the city administration: the Director of the Social-Welfare Dept., the Elderly-Aid Specialist in the Social-Welfare Dept., the Director of the Senior-Citizen Office, as well as the Director of Residential Space Advising.⁹ Except for the members from the political parties and the stipulated advising members, the Mayor has the right to propose members and the City Council, consequently, the right of veto (§ 3 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1). The Chairperson is elected by simple majority within the Senior-Citizen Board itself (§ 4 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1).

For ongoing issues the Senior-Citizen Board forms a Working Committee as well as three Working Groups.¹⁰ To the Working Committee must belong at least the Chairperson and the Directors of the Working Groups. Its meetings, which must take place at least quarterly, are public. For organisational support the Board has access to the specialist for elderly-aid advice and planning of the city’s Social-Welfare Dept. (§ 8 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1). The Board is supposed to meet at least quarterly, but to my knowledge the Board’s Working Committee meets monthly as a rule.

Institutional participatory rights

The necessary cooperation between politics, administration and the Senior-Citizen Board is regulated by the city statute as follows: The Mayor or City Administration is to ‘direct to the Working Committee of the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board ... all relevant matters’ (see below). Conversely, the Senior-Citizen Board can ‘on its own initiative make suggestions, communicate ideas, positions or opinions that, upon request, are to be dealt with in the competent Committees’ (§ 1 Abs. 2 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1). It receives automatically all the ‘elderly-aid-relevant proposals to be dealt with by City Council and its Committees in public session’ (§ 1 Abs. 3 Satz. 1 O 1). Suggestions and ideas that the Senior-Citizen Board itself puts forth, must be dealt with by the Administration within one month or by the relevant committee in the next session (§ 1 Abs. 4 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1). The Chairman reports yearly to City Council on the activities of the Senior-Citizen Board (§ 1 Abs. 5 statute Senior-Citizen Board O 1).

⁹ The Senior-Citizen Office and Residential Space Advising are municipal advice and support services.

¹⁰ These are: Social Welfare/Health/Care; Public Order/Security/City Development and Culture/Education/Sports.

Involvement in the local policy-making

The Board is apparently rather well integrated into local political processes. In the Social-Welfare Committee meeting minutes we accessed, there is practically no senior-citizen relevant topic on which members of the Senior-Citizen Board had not taken the floor, also when this did not necessarily lead to votes ending in their favour. Summarising, the Senior-Citizen Board is involved in many of the city's political discussions, from building issues to cultural developments and sports, all the way to traffic planning. (minutes social welfare committee O 1; O-1-A-6).¹¹ Senior-Citizen Board and city administration also foster regular (at least monthly) and close cooperation, under the influence of a charismatic elderly-aid planner whose position is a central interface of local senior-citizen politics (Coleman et al. 2010). The Senior-Citizen Board participated intensively in setting up a Senior-Citizen Advice Centre and local social-welfare report preparation and planning, thus going far beyond purely senior-relevant matters.

Well, we also have a very well-functioning senior-citizen board. I have to say that, while it's a difficult task, because it's always such a balancing act between politics and professional knowledge, but when you for example have a problem, you can right away just alert the senior-citizen board, and they get involved fast' (O-E-2 Abs. 126).

The Senior-Citizen Board functions however not only politically as a pre-parliamentary interest group, it also takes charge of other tasks for the city as described in the statute and thus puts implementation resources to its disposition (Holtkamp, Bogumil 2007, S. 243). It organises for example, in cooperation with the Social-Welfare Dept., besides the usual advising activity, also a regularly observed Senior-Citizen Week, which functions as an informative occasion and a kind of contact-establishing (networking) event for citizens, providers and the sphere of politics/administration. The Senior-Citizen Board also organises a quarterly exchange among elderly-home boards (O-1-A-6), which functions as information source for the city administration and particularly the above-mentioned elderly-aid planner with whom there is, in all these activities, a close agreement markedly exceeding anything seen the two West-German cities.

Summary

The far-reaching participatory rights of the city's Senior-Citizen Advisory Board are the result of a long accommodation process with the City Council, the success of which however also depended on the support of central local actors in politics and administration. Its strong processual participation was attained certainly not least through its labour-dividing organisational structure and the constant close contact with politics and administration. Through a combination of a certain autonomy and readiness to furnish implementation resources also in (common) interest with the city, it attained an overall high degree of participation in both arenas. This is however clearly two-way participation and surpasses a purely pre-parliamentary steering function and interest-representation.

Senior-Citizen Commissioner and Advisory Board – city O 2

In this city there are for historical reasons two institutionalised interest representations for senior citizens. On the one hand there is the city's Senior-Citizen Commissioner, and on the

¹¹ However these results, as stated above, must be seen as relative to the quality of the Social-Welfare Committee minutes which in both East-German cities were much more detailed than in the two West-German cases.

other, the Senior-Citizen Advisory Board, but they are institutionally and organisationally closely connected (minutes social welfare committee O 2; O 2 A-4).

City O 2 is the only one of our four city cases in which any regulations concerning the Senior-Citizen representation (specifically, the position of Senior-Citizen Commissioner) are set down in the city's principle statute.¹² (For the Senior-Citizen Board a separate statute was confirmed by City Council.)

The full-time position of Senior-Citizen and Disability Commissioner was created in 1992 (minutes social welfare committee O-2). In 2000 the joint position was dissolved and made into a volunteer position. Its duties are:

- The 'trusting cooperation with the City Administration in matters of particular concern to senior citizens of the city [O 2]'.
- The support of senior-citizen integration through suitable measures and close contact with municipal administration; as well as being the initial contact point for the city's seniors, offering them advice services or referrals to city authorities.
- A yearly report of activities to the Social-Welfare Committee (§ 15 par 2 Main Statute O 2).

The Senior-Citizen Commissioner is, upon nomination by the Senior-Citizen Board and/or political parties, named by City Council; individual citizens may also apply.

The Senior-Citizen Board as the second senior-citizen representation in O 2 was, in contrast to many other senior-citizen boards in Germany, not constituted by the city administration (cf. three constitution variants (Eifert 2006). Rather, it emerged in 1993 on the initiative of a group of interested citizens, local charity organisations and church bodies. Its constitution reflects the local elderly-aid/-care landscape, and therefore can and must – as the senior-citizen representations in cities W 1, and O 1 – also cover a wider range of interests than does a representation of only those people most directly concerned. The Senior-Citizen Board is directed by a five-member Speaker-Council elected every two years and headed by a Chairperson who initially worked to have the body recognised as the senior-citizen board of the city and, if at all possible, with participation and voting rights in the sessions of the Social-Welfare Committee. In 1998 the Senior-Citizen Board was recognised by the city, but was not accorded any seat on the Social-Welfare Committee, which was occupied up to then by a Senior-Citizen Representative. The Social-Welfare Committee also decided to delegate a Committee member to the Senior-Citizen Board, which is however apparently not always carried through (minutes Social Welfare Committee O 2). The Senior-Citizen Commissioner is also, since the constitution of the Senior-Citizen Board in 1993, automatically a member of it and thus represents an important institutional connection between the Social-Welfare Committee and the Senior-Citizen Board (O 2 A 4).

Institutional participatory rights

The Senior-Citizen Commissioner is an advising member of the Committee for Social Welfare, Education and Culture, with rights to take the floor and initiate proposals (§ 14 par. 4 Main Statute O 2).

Involvement in the local policy-making

¹² In total there are four City Commissioners stipulated, one in each paragraph: Equality Commissioner, Foreigner Commissioner, Disability Commissioner and Senior-Citizen Commissioner.

Organisationally the position of the Senior-Citizen Commissioner, somewhat comparable to an administrative officer's position, is within the Social-Welfare Department. In political practice the closely cooperating senior-citizen representatives, through the framework of these institutional conditions, have very direct access to the central political and administrative decision-makers and processes. This is reflected also in the Social-Welfare Committee session minutes, in which the Senior-Citizen Committee often takes the floor, and not only on senior-relevant issues. The senior-citizen representatives were apparently from the beginning involved in practically all senior-related measures taken by the city, from the reorganisation of the city care-home, to elderly aid planning and urban construction measures. The perhaps most notable example of the participation in policy-formation, besides the active participation in the Social-Welfare Committee meetings, is the local elderly-aid planning of 2001 and 2007 under the direction of the Social-Welfare Department, in which the local senior-citizen interest representatives were actively involved throughout the total decision making process.

So there is simply, you could say, permanent contact, with the Senior-Citizen Board, with the Senior-Citizen Commissioner and the Disability Commissioner, so that whenever any problem issues come up where we see we need to act, then it happens through a preliminary discussion and then a proposal, which we then submit, but always together, that is, not by starting first with the Social-Welfare Department' (O 2- E – 1 par. 182).

The city has however also had (as in the other East-German city) recourse to resources of the senior-citizen interest-representatives, and delegated tasks to them, such as advising citizens, the organisation of the Senior-Citizen Week or the preparation of the Senior-Citizen Guide. In the latter case the Social-Welfare Dept. provided essentially only the necessary materials.

Summary

The senior-citizen representatives have, overall, a quite high degree of institutional participatory rights in both arenas, which are also anchored – differently from the other cases – not in an Advisory Board statute that is relatively easily changed, but rather in the city's principle statute. The processual involvement is, in the arena of the City Council as in the administrative arena, intensively overseen by the Senior-Citizen Commissioner. Together with participatory rights, the comparatively great degree of activity permits both senior-citizen representations to achieve an overall high degree of participation in the interest of senior citizens. This is also reflected in the measures supported by the city. The chances of success appear greatest when the senior-citizen representatives can make the goals they seek extend beyond their own clientele and thus win the support of other interest groups – as the example shows of the regular discussions surrounding the financing of eight informal meeting-places for the city's young and old. Still, these senior-citizen representatives are also the furthest from an ideal of civil-society interest representation. The Senior-Citizen Commissioner, because she, more than the Senior-Citizen Boards in the other cases, also must take into account the interests of the city, and the Senior-Citizen Board, since it is composed – the most out of all the cities – of organisation representatives and not actually seniors. Also, the Senior-Citizen Board itself has no institutionalised voice of its own and with that, is dependent on cooperation with the Senior-Citizen Commissioner, which has thus far been possible; also, the Senior-Citizen Board has always been able to impose its own candidate for the post of Senior-Citizen Commissioner.

Comparison of the political participation in the two dimensions

The highest degree of participation rights in both political arenas has without doubt the Senior-Citizen Board of city O 1, which has the right to speak and make proposals on all points relevant to senior-citizen questions in all Committees of the City Council, and must be

informed about all senior-citizen-related topics. Especially remarkable is the duty of the Committees to deal with the questions from the Senior-Citizen Board in the next session and the right to a reaction from the Administration to its questions or applications within a deadline. It is also entitled to all senior-citizen-relevant information held by the administration.

As nearly its equal is to be seen the Board in W 1, which must be consulted in all measures and planning on senior-citizen questions, but in the political arena has only the right to speak but not to make proposals. Its participatory rights are also somewhat weaker in as far as the Administration has no obligation to react to the Board's proposals and communication. Here the Senior-Citizen Board vis-à-vis Administration has only the right to lodge applications, questions, positions, etc., but doesn't have a right to participation in administrative procedures or to being automatically informed about Senior-related concerns. Similar are the participatory rights in the second East-German city O 2, which, differently from O 1, are limited to the Social-Welfare, Culture- and Education Committees. The 'trusting cooperation' between the Senior-Citizen Commissioner and Administration (which moreover is limited to matters which 'particularly affect' senior-citizens) appears however greater than in city W 1. The least institutional participatory rights has the Senior-Citizen Board in W 2. It has only the right to be heard in the Social-Welfare Committee, but no right to make proposals and furthermore an only very vaguely formulated access to administrative processes. Both West-German Senior-Citizen Boards have therefore lesser possibilities to take the initiative themselves.

In the actual involvement in the policy-making there is a clear East-West divide. In neither of the West-German cities is there a recognisable participation in political debates on the basis of the Social-Welfare Committee session minutes, or according to the experts and actors we questioned. Also in administrative processes, the two West-German senior-citizen representations are involved only to a minor degree: In W 1, because it is not represented in the crucial committees. In W 2 its administrative participation is weak because, there are few senior-citizen-relevant planning and implementation measures, but where senior-citizen-relevant political topics are discussed, such as at the Care Conference, it is represented but not active. In contrast to that, the Social-Welfare Committee session minutes, as well as the interviews with relevant political and administrative actors show that the senior-citizen representatives in both East-German cities intensively engage themselves in the political debates and in nearly all senior-relevant processes taking place in the local administration. This is because, for one thing, they have good access to them through their institutional participatory rights, but for another, they more actively attend to them than do the senior-citizen representatives in the West-German cases.

Summary

The East-German senior-citizen representatives attain overall a higher degree of political participation, for they have equally great or even greater institutional participatory rights than the West-German cases, and are actually more involved in the political processes in both the arenas. In contrast to that, civil-society representatives in city W 1 could apparently not transform their actually far-reaching institutional participation rights in both arenas into a participation in political processes, since they are not integrated into the corporatist arrangement between the social-welfare charities and the local political and administrative actors. The senior-citizen representatives in W 2 for their part have at the outset only scant participation rights, but themselves do not take an interest in them fully.

How can the differing degrees of participation be explained?

One of the first questions that could come up in the discussion of the results, would be, whether the differences are accidental or not. The answer must here quite clearly be: Of course the differences in the degree of political participation among the cities can be random. We chose of course the cases for the study not on their suitability for the investigation of the civil-society participation of senior-citizen representatives. Rather, we sought cities that in most contextual conditions were similar - in their ability to undertake action and in the socio-structural urgency of the elderly-care problem, and, above all, different in terms of their regional identity (see Pfau-Effinger et al. 2008). That is, the probability that the differences found were accidental, may for that reason also be higher than in studies with a randomised selection of cases. But that is here not the decisive point, as for one thing, the question remains, how are these nevertheless existing differences in the cases to be explained, and for another, how can, from the explanation to be developed, generalising conclusions be drawn that will be accessible to further testing.

Explanatory factors discussed in the literature

In the following section some central explanatory reasons from the literature for the different political participation of senior-citizen representatives are reviewed and especially also discussed with a view to East-West issues. Overall four different, and differently complex, explanatory factors can be recognised in the available literature. The first is institutional regulation on the federal-state level (*auf Landesebene*), the second is the legitimation over which the senior-citizen representations dispose. The third is the behaviour of the local public actors, and the fourth, differences between the civil societies of East and West.

One could assume that institutional regulation, in the sense of federal-state regulations, plays a role in the explanation of regional differences, since there are no uniform federal regulations. However most authors complain of the lacking development of cooperative rights on the federal-state level (e.g. Eifert 2006; Naegele 1999). Only for Schleswig-Holstein is there in the state's regulation of local government (*Landesgemeindeordnung*) an obligation to give municipal advisory boards the right to be heard (Vanselow 1997). Thus for an explanation there are probably rather no regional differences to be suspected.

A further point named as an explanation for political participation, is the degree of legitimation of each senior-citizen representation (Eifert 2006; Naegele 1999). As an indicator is named here, in general, the way in which the senior-citizen representations are composed.¹³ The available literature offers however no indication of clear East-West differences in the way senior-citizen representations are formed.

The public actors must however not only accept the senior-citizen representatives as legitimate, but also have their own interest in the promotion of civil engagement, for the success of civil-society engagement depends on the preparedness of politics and administration to cooperate (e.g. Eifert 2006: 265–266; Keupp: 21). Here three arguments for the behaviour of public actors can be discerned:

Bogumil and Holtkamp (2001) see the promotion of civil engagement often as a consequence of the 'naked necessity' of the municipalities. 'Poorer' municipalities, or such with a greater urgency to their problems, should therefore more strongly promote civil engagement.

¹³ Barbara Eifert differentiates three types, with a declining degree of legitimation: the 'rank-and-file' election by all seniors, election by delegates, and other procedures (Eifert 2006: 266).

Eifert sees three factors that in public actors awaken interest in supporting the civil-society engagement of senior-citizen representatives (Eifert 2006: 274–275): a general positive valuation and promotion of civil engagement, an openness towards ‘forms of complementary political participation’, and, a consciousness of the problems of demographic transformation and the active furtherance of this consciousness by the municipalities themselves.

The third argument comes from ‘transformation research’ and regards the local political culture and the division of tasks between civil society and State. Pollach et al. (Pollach et al. 2000: 243) shows that East-German municipal politicians draw the boundaries between State and civil society differently than is done in western Germany. The (central) State is held to be more paternalistic and the relationship between civil society, individuals, Market and State are more shifted in its favour. Its task is held to be to smooth out the objectionable aspects of the market and stand by the interests of individuals against it. But at the same time the power of the State encounters its limits in the freedom of the individual. Furthermore in the East there is a marked consensual orientation and common-good orientation running across all parties (ibid.). This is perhaps also linked to the experience of the early transformation phase, in which the state actors in the restructuring of the social infrastructure were the principle actors (cf. Holtmann 2009). That gave the municipal public actors, and above all the administrations, a central position that (in that form) in the West-German municipalities did not exist. In contrast to that, in the ‘old’ *Länder*, the trend towards the ‘competitive democracy’ (Holtmann 2009: 209; Bogumil, Holtkamp 2006: 32ff) and corporatist exclusion has long since been identified (Roth 2001: 20). Roth derives from this the overall hypothesis, that an ‘on commonality oriented political partial culture ... may be in a better position to mobilise civil action ...towards the common-good’ (ibid.).

A last and doubtless central point is the degree of the civil-society engagement of the senior citizens themselves. As ‘civil society’ can be generally understood, a voluntarily organised, more or less intermediate sphere between citizenry and State (e.g. Weßels 2003: 173. In the literature on the civil-society differences between East and West Germany, two viewpoints dominate: a) The East-German civil society is weaker because, in its ‘subjective modernisation’, it straggles behind West-Germany; and b) it is simply different because, in consequence of the socialist period and the following ‘incomplete’ transformation, other modernisation models have evolved.

The standpoint of an East-German civil-society weakness, up to the point of being a ‘civil-society no-man’s-land’, (thus Probst 2003), is advocated in parts of transformation research, and bases itself on a lack of modernisation during Socialism’s reign. In central aspects of its ‘subjective modernisation’, East-German society is held to evidence deficits thought to have hindered the development of a civil society (e.g. Hradil 1992, here from Probst 2003). Furthermore, the ‘top-down institutionalisation’ of Reunification is thought to have caused civil engagement – based on bottom-up processes – to have to assert itself as a late-comer (Backhaus-Maul et al. 2003: 15f; Angerhausen et al. 1998) similarly (Zimmer, Priller 2007: 70–71). The representatives of this current diagnose from this that civil engagement in East Germany has an ‘institutional weakness’, seen to be ‘of significant strategic disadvantage in respect to administrations, enterprises, organisations as well as parties’ (Backhaus-Maul et al. 2003: 16).

The advocates of the ‘otherness’ of East-German civil society by contrast argue that there is ‘a considerable historical heritage’ in East-German civil-society engagement, upon which new and characteristic elements (Roth 2001: 18), all the way to an independent East-German identity have emerged (Wiesenthal 1996). Historical heritage is here not only the ‘paternalistic state’, but also the church-inspired peace- and environmental movement, the ‘peaceful revolution’ and the ‘round tables’: in no way a civil-society no-man’s-land. Still

furthermore, a weaker socio-cultural milieu can definitely be considered advantageous to modernisation since, for example, social-welfare charities there are less hindered by a traditionalist ‘member-logic’. Generally, East-German society is seen to be more strongly egalitarian and common-good oriented (ibid.), which however is not necessarily an obstacle to civil engagement (Holtmann 2009: 4). It also exhibits less separation from the (local) state, which in West-German civil society is a significant developmental feature.

The extensive quantitative research in this field shows a differentiated picture, so that Roth even speaks of an ‘empirical chaos’ (Roth 2001: 17), thought to be due to imprecise ideas and differing measurement concepts. However: The larger part of the research indeed identifies a weaker civil society. Nevertheless, Gensicke for example maintains that still, in East Germany a ‘basically engagement-friendly attitude’ exists, which in recent years has contributed to a very dynamic development of civil society (Gensicke 2009: 17). Braun and Bischoff (1998: 121) determine in their study on senior-citizen centres in Germany, that there are clear differences in the ‘engagement-orientations’ of senior-citizens. Thus, although cultural engagement in both parts of Germany is the most prominent, in terms of engagement in politics, volunteering and interest-representation, which concerns us here, the East-German seniors were engaged about five percent more often than their West-German counterparts, who for their part were considerably more engaged in the direction of civil society itself, such as in elderly social-work and in residential care, hospitals, etc.

Test of the explanatory factors against author’s empirical material

For what concerns the various federal-state legal frameworks, there are across the cases no differences. In none of the corresponding local or district governmental codes (*Gemeindeordnungen oder Kreisordnungen*), i.e. in Hesse (W 1), Lower Saxony (W 2), Thuringia (O 1) or Saxony-Anhalt (O 2), were senior-citizen representatives accorded any participatory rights (cf. also Priestley et al. 2010).¹⁴

Also the degree of legitimation, in the sense of the procedure of choosing the Senior-Citizen Board members, seems to have no effect on the explanation for the degree of political participation, since the city W 2 with its two-step procedure comes closest to the ‘rank-and-file’-type election. Still, it is apparent here that the frequency in the most recent elections, despite the intensive efforts of the municipal administration, hardly surpassed the 10% mark (W-2-E-1). On the other hand the city’s Senior-Citizen Commissioner received in this regard surely the lowest legitimation values, but – together with the senior-citizen representation – an overall quite high degree of participation.

The ‘thesis of problem urgency’ of Holtmann and Bogumil can thus not be confirmed here, since the two East-German municipalities have higher revenues than both the West-German ones, and thus ‘necessity’ visibly did not apply (Pfau-Effinger et al. 2008). Rather, both East-German cities finance extensively their own senior-citizen institutions (Coleman et al. 2010). Even if one interpreted municipal necessity as substantive problem urgency in the sense of an ageing population, the thesis cannot be affirmed for our cases. In our sample, one of each of the pairs of cities in each region shows a greater problem urgency that means it is expected to get a greater elderly population than the other. But the East-German city with the lesser problem urgency (O1) promotes its senior-citizen representations the most, and the city with the greatest ageing urgency in West Germany (W 2) shows the least political participation out of all four cases.

¹⁴ This is at least in the single *Bundesländer* the case, as Vanselow (1997) shows for Schleswig-Holstein.

We did not find the supportive conditions named by Eifert for political participation in all the cases. Some problem-consciousness of the demographic transformation facing their city was indeed apparent in all municipal actors with whom we spoke. Also civil engagement was – in general – held to be important. But in their valuation of political participation the cities diverged. In city W 1 the Director of the ‘BeKo’ and the Director of the Social-Welfare Dept. judged that in the city the political interest in the coordination of efforts with senior-citizen representatives was ‘not very high’ (W-1-E-2b; W-1-A-9), and the one-time District Deputy for Social-Welfare¹⁵ from city W 1 called the Senior-Citizen Board a ‘gossip circle’ (W 1 A-1). In W 2 the public actors instead fall into two camps: While the administration representatives and the Chairperson of the Social-Welfare Committee would welcome a politically active Senior-Citizen Board (W-2-E-1; W-2-A-1; W-2-A-2), portions of the political majorities attempt rather to limit the opportunities for the cooperation of civil-society representatives in the City Council Committees (W-2-E-2), which however during the period of our study did not happen, at least formally. Overall thus in both West-German cases the representatives of administration favoured a stronger political participation of the senior-citizen representatives, but the relevant political representatives by contrast, rather did not. Against this background, the relevant public actors in O 1, for example the elderly-aid planner or the Mayor and one-time Social-Welfare Dept. head, see the senior-citizen representatives as important negotiation partners in both directions – from the seniors to the politicians, and vice-versa (O-1-E-2; O-1-A-2). A quite similar picture is seen in O 2, where the political as well as administrative actors work closely with senior-citizen representatives and Senior-Citizen Board (O-2-E-2, O-2-A-7), though here the main stress lies somewhat more (than in O 1) in the relations with administration.

The above briefly-addressed consensual and interventionist orientations of East-German municipal politicians are confirmed also in our investigation. Whether this in fact leads to a greater involvement of civil-society actors is not quite clear. The overall greater institutional participatory rights, not only of the senior-citizen representatives in both cities, but also of other civic society representatives in both cities speak in my opinion rather for than against it.

The thesis of the weak East-German civil society cannot, as is clear from the results, be confirmed for our cases. Moreover, the Senior-Citizen Board in city O 2 was directly constituted from civil society and not – which is according to Eifert the rule – from administration. This appears all the more remarkable, as the senior-citizen representatives were, to be sure, socialised in the GDR. Though, the Senior-Citizen Commissioner in O 2 was involved in church-sponsored elderly-aid, and the Chairman of the Senior-Citizen Board in O 1 was in his occupational life a music critic and, after the political turnabout, a member of the FDP (Free Democrats), which in neither case is sounds like a typical GDR-socialisation.

The close cooperation with the political and above all administrative actors becomes also clear in the fact that both senior-citizen representations take on a range of tasks for the municipalities and thus provide implementation resources. This means that the civil-society actors not only express their wishes, but also take active responsibility for their implementation, and thus help save municipal resources. This happens (Bogumil and Holtkamp 2001) in the rule too seldomly. That this – at least in O 1 – is already institutionally foreseen, in my opinion does not speak against this interpretation, because the Statute of the Senior-Citizen Board could hardly have been issued against the accordance of the seniors representatives which they furthermore also accept and carry out. Furthermore there was in both East-German cities, also on the part of the civil-society actors, a stronger advocacy of state intervention, as was also stressed for example in the above-mentioned study by Pollach

¹⁵ The position corresponds to that of a Social-Welfare Dept. head and is thus a political one, and in this case was held by the SPD (Social-Democrats).

et al., and in (Olk et al. 2009: 137). With that the senior-citizen representatives naturally run the risk of being instrumentalised by state actors. A too-obvious instrumentalisation would however certainly lead to a sinking of citizen support and engagement, which would hardly be in the interest of the public-sphere actors.

Discussion

The observed greater political participation on the part of the East-German senior-citizen representatives in our cases can be understood as the expression of a functioning local civil society that over the course of its development has succeeded conquering a steadily stronger involvement in political processes. Thus the thesis of weakness in East-German civil society cannot be confirmed, though the findings can also be understood as a strengthening of local state control, since – different from in the two West-German cities – politics has attained far more access to the resources of civil society. This is confirmed by Schuppert who says that the state, with the strengthening of civil society, strengthens itself (Schuppert 2003: 260, similarly von Winter and Willems 2009). The greater involvement in political processes has for civil society actors however a price: They must give up some of their independence and, for their part, offer the state actors some attractive implementation resources. The thesis of the different development of East-German civil society is supported rather than rejected, since the results thoroughly agree with other qualitative studies on East-German civil society (cf. Olk et al. 2009).

The observed weaker political participation in the two West-German cities cannot be generalised of course, because there are numerous examples of very successful senior-citizen representations in the older federal states (see Eifert 2006; Bundesministerium für Familie 1997). More strongly generalised conclusions would thus require a broader sample.

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