

GOVERNANCE AND NEW DISCOUNTER OUTLETS IN GERMANY

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Summary: In response to public decisions made by planners and policy-makers interest groups have been forming in order to act as a corrective to participatory processes that they do not consider sufficiently transparent. In Germany this has been occurring not only around large-scale projects that generate a lot of media attention, like the plans to upgrade and completely remodel the Central Station of Stuttgart (“Stuttgart21”). Increasingly frequently we also see this in response to local projects at the grassroots level. Discount grocery stores have not been excluded from this development. Because many discount supermarket chains are continuing to expand spatially, “enlightened” customers and affected residents increasingly feel that there is a “glut of discounters.” Community action groups, ad hoc working groups and associations have formed to prevent discounters from opening new outlets or expanding old ones. Or they try to join planners and policy-makers in influencing the process of opening new outlets. New types of governance are developing in which self-help groups are able to give spontaneous and competent answers on short notice to questions that had never before been asked by planners. The fact that there are other coalitions of interest groups that, e.g., try to prevent a discounter from moving out of their local neighborhood, reveals the diversity of peoples’ reactions to developments in discounting. Various examples from Schleswig-Holstein (Germany’s northernmost province) will be used to show the motivations guiding the citizens’ groups. How elitist or “citizen-centered” are their actions? What is their legitimation, whether inherent or self-proclaimed? And what power can they as a group of actors develop to influence planning and policy? To what extent do these groups serve to protect/preserve established types of retail trade? To what extent do other groups contrive to form “coalitions of change” together with discounters (not infrequently by means of “gifts” in the form of infrastructure), in order to put pressure on policy-makers to allow new outlets to be opened?

Zusammenfassung: Nicht nur im Bereich medienwirksamer Großprojekte wie Stuttgart21 konstituieren sich Bürgerinteressen an öffentlichen Entscheidungen von Planung und Politik vorbei, um als Regulativ zu unübersichtlich wahrgenommenen „Beteiligungsprozessen“ zu wirken, sondern immer häufiger auch im Bereich lokaler Projekte auf Graswurzelebene. Lebensmitteldiscounter sind hiervon nicht ausgenommen. Weil viele Discounterketten weiterhin räumlich expandieren, verstärkt sich bei „aufgeklärten“ Kunden und betroffenen Anliegern die Perzeption einer umfassenden „Discounterschwemme“. Bürgerinitiativen, Ad-hoc-Arbeitsgruppen und Vereine haben sich gebildet, um Discounteransiedlungen oder -erweiterungen zu verhindern oder neben Planung und Politik die Ansiedlungsbegehren mitzusteuern. Es entwickeln sich neue Formen von governance, die als Selbsthilfegruppen spontane, kurzfristige, hoch engagierte und kompetente Antworten auf in der Planung vorher nie gestellte Fragen geben können. Dass es wiederum andere Interessenkoalitionen gibt, die z. B. den Umzug eines Discounters aus ihrem lokalen Umfeld verhindern wollen, zeigt die Diversität von Bürgerreaktionen auf Discounterentwicklungen. Verschiedene Beispiele aus Schleswig-Holstein (der nördlichsten Provinz Deutschlands) sollen zeigen, von welchen Motivationen die Bürgergruppen geleitet werden, wie elitär oder „bürgernah“ diese Gruppen hierdurch agieren, welche Legitimation sie besitzen oder sich selbst geben und welche Macht sie als Akteursgruppe entfalten können, um Planung und Politik zu beeinflussen. Inwieweit fungieren diese Gruppen für den gewachsenen Einzelhandel als bewahrend-konservativ, inwieweit verstehen es andere Gruppen, zusammen mit Discountern (nicht selten durch infrastrukturelle „Geschenke“) „Veränderungskalitionen“ zu bilden, um Druck auf die Politik auszuüben und Ansiedlungsbegehren zuzulassen.

Keywords: Retailing, governance, community groups, food discounter, legitimacy, planning culture, Germany

1 Introduction

Over the past decades a great deal of discussion has been devoted to the importance of retail trade as an expression of vitality and recreational quality in residential areas and towns and of its role in provid-

ing the inhabitants with basic needs or its “shopper-tainment” function for leisure and tourism. In contrast to other commercial sectors, retail trade is subject to short-term dynamics that are observable even to nonspecialists. These are evident in the opening and closing of shops, changing opening hours, a

constantly adapting sales mix, or price adjustments. Every citizen thus has rational and emotional reasons to become involved with the retail trade system, seeing its dominant effect on the daily range of activity of every individual, whether he/she is out running errands or combining various activities (JÜRGENS 2011). There are retail formats in the food industry that are dominated by discounters and, as a result of increasing concentration, reveal oligopolistic traits. Their life cycle results in a more long-term dynamics of change oriented to at least several years or decades. Although already in 2010 there were more than 15,000 discounters in Germany, their spatial (external) and operational (internal) expansion is not yet completed. Food retailers continue to apply for permits to open new outlets and communities continue to try to attract new discounter outlets. This has led to a conspicuous “glut of discounters” that today impacts every central place in Germany. The arguments in favor of discounters, that they assure that basic goods are available at affordable prices, increase the appeal of a locality or that the opening of a new discounter outlet will attract other businesses, are increasingly being challenged, criticized and rejected by citizens. Not only major projects such as train stations or airports, but also projects at the microlevel, raise the ire of residents and induce them to question ritualized systems of planning and “public participation.” The opening of new outlets was originally a matter for a top-down approach. Now diverse groups of actors, complex constellations of interests, citizens’ networks and their positioning in the system of discourse between local politics, investors and the media make this a more complicated/complex and time-consuming issue than in the past. Moreover, more consideration must be given to the spatial and operational effects of a discounter. Opening a new outlet of a discounter is no longer a matter of course. It can even fail if the pressure from “below” is aimed not at consensus and compromise but instead at prevention. How does this type of governance function, in which citizens (who are these citizens?) empower themselves to plan their “own town” without having been democratically legitimated by elections? What arguments do they bring forward, what instruments do they use to demonstrate their legitimacy vis-à-vis the citizens who are not participating? Does this result in a benefit for the community or does the necessarily self-serving NIMBY concept lead to the disintegration of the public weal and such altruistic political goals as equality and social justice? Using examples from Schleswig-Holstein and interviews with experts we will examine these questions.

Furthermore, the growing importance of governance for urban planning will be a central theme.

2 Post-democracy and governance

Where does the growing importance of participating citizens or even “do-it-yourself citizens” come from? On the one hand such persons are increasingly speaking up because they want to be included formally in government decision making. On the other hand they form informal platforms such as ad hoc neighborhood groups, community action groups and self-help groups that act outside of the system of representative democracy and represent a new “additional” type of democracy that involves participation or also protest. Various authors (NOLTE 2011; JÖRKE 2011; PULLER 2009) refer to the works of CROUCH (2008) and MOUFFE (2005; 2011), who identify an age of post-democracy in which political decisions (a) tend to become less transparent because processes of negotiation no longer (only) take place in democratically legitimated institutions but increasingly through “privatized interaction between elected governments and elites” (JÖRKE 2011, 13). (b) They become more supranational and less open to the public, which means that locally, regionally and nationally elected representatives are deprived of power and are lacking as local contact persons and counselors. (c) They appear more “staged” and emphasize persons more than substance, increasingly focusing on the next electoral success. (d) They become more focused on dialog and consensus, meaning that compromises can be achieved, but alternatives can no longer be derived, from which MOUFFE (2011) recognizes the danger of a depoliticization of the population. (e) They become more opaque because diverse actors, different types of government and (coalitions of) interests produce complex, contradictory and flexible results.

What are the reasons for this? They lead us back to the arguments already described in the 1980s in the concept of post-Fordism (cf. TICKELL and PECK 1992) that can explain the extensive disruptions not only in the economic sphere but also in the policy and social sphere (cf. MACLEOD and GOODWIN 1999, 516): (a) shifts in the traditional Fordist system of production and consumption (deindustrialization), (b) an increasing invalidation of national strategies as a result of globalization and supranationalization, (c) an ideological shift from a welfare state and market that regulate to an entrepreneurial and neoliberal approach in which latent “inefficiency, bureaucracy and wastefulness” (ECKARDT 2001, 35) are replaced

by efficiency, debureaucratization and austerity (“practical constraints”), (d) heightened competition between/for persons and region(s) at all regional levels for limited resources on all scales from the global to the local, (e) a tendency toward liberalization/privatization of responsibilities (in a time of cutbacks) that were originally subject to state/communal authority. Here “the” state does not retreat suddenly, it initially combines state and private interests in the form of public-private partnerships, but has less and less financial leeway to function as a caring, regulating and social state.

Civil society not coincidentally seeks, even pursues, these missing (financial, human and inventive) resources in order to close the gaps in governmental activity with models such as that of the “activating” or “enabling” state (BVBS 2010) and to structure civil protest by “embracing” it and integrating it into the system. For this the “state” needs social partners who adhere to “an ethic of mutual responsibility or duty” (RACO and IMRIE 2000, 2187ff.), which means that increasingly frequently not only rewards but also risks are being redistributed and individualized. “Management by command”, which was inherent in the Fordist-paternalist system, is gradually being replaced by “management by negotiation” (LEVER 2011, 90), in which informal types of procedures and topics displace Weber’s bureaucratic rationality (characterized by rules and laws, effectivity, obligations, impersonality, hierarchies), because it tends to preclude spontaneity as well as initiative and creativity (LEVER 2005, 908f.).

Terms with a positive connotation such as “activation of endogenous potentials,” strengthening the “initiative of the citizens” or “empowerment” (STECKEL 2008, 4ff.) are signs that representative democracy has developed “creatively” into a “multiple democracy” (NOLTE 2011, 10). This means that complexity, spatiotemporal variability, decentralization, shared responsibility and variable “arrangements” are currently called for to contribute to political solutions that are “shared” (by politicians and “the” citizens). With this the construct of “depoliticization” is subject to at least a dual contradiction: (a) Has the retreat of the state not opened new doors for so-called civil society and political newcomers to become involved, organize, participate, though still within the democratic rules of the game? (b) Did the retreat of the state already at the beginning of the 1980s provoke social movements and “democracy from the bottom up” whose protagonists initially understood it as (fundamental) opposition, but that would prove to be a dry run for what the civil society of today and

the future could achieve? (“various local bodies ... thus have become a kind of basic infrastructure in the district neighborhood”; STAUBACH 2006, 317 referring to the example of Dortmund’s Nordstadt district). Government therefore increasingly goes hand in hand with or is replaced by governance, which in a neoliberal system that relies on private responsibility, self-realization, but also success and failure, logically requires participating citizens, commitment and so-called volunteer work.

The concept of governance has been discussed for several years in such varying fields as economics, political science, sociology and applied spatial sciences. The literature on the topic is accordingly broad (e.g. HARVEY 1989; HEALEY 1998; VALLER et al. 2000; LOWNDES and SULLIVAN 2008; FARRELLY 2009; GEURTZ and VAN DE WIJDEVEN 2010; PETERS 2011). All of these authors concern themselves with the question as to how the activities of humans (should) be collectively controlled and coordinated. Particularly the state has experienced a considerable restructuring of its role as actor, or rather statehood. The disintegration of the welfare state principle, an increasing individualization or at least a splitting up of values and norms that were originally collectively shared, increasing competition between groups of actors, in contrast to the earlier dominant corporatist cooperation, led to an “altered technology of governing” (HAMEDINGER, 2006, 12), to a system of managing and coordinating. More and more nongovernment groups of actors, advocacy groups, persons and coalitions in variably long-term partnerships have caused the state to lose its importance in its traditional *government* function or has delegated procedures and the search for solutions to a great number of new groups of actors in the form of *governance*. In the context of decentralization, deregulation, privatization and participation the “slimmed-down” state shrinks to one of many institutional actors, one that only wants to be a “cooperative state that sets the environment” (HAMEDINGER 2006). A great variety of nongovernment actors participate. They are supposed to achieve a consensus between the concerned parties in complex “communicative processes” and “a politics of small steps” down to the grassroots level (KAMLEITHNER 2008). HAMEDINGER (2006) logically points out that not only the “system” of actors and the services they expect of it have changed, but also the “mentalities of those who are governed.” They are happy to fill the initiatives allotted to them as an increase in democracy, in the sense of “neoliberal governmentality” of responsibility, versatility, mobility, flexibility and self-determination, or

as Joyce formulated (cited in ROSE-REDWOOD 2006, 476): “It was through the formation of the calculating self-regulating citizen that liberal governmentality sought to achieve the active and inventive deployment of freedom as a way of governing or ruling people.”

The concept of governmentality is based on works by FOUCAULT (1991, originally 1978; RACO and IMRIE 2000; LEVER 2005, 2011; MERLINGEN 2011). With this term FOUCAULT wanted to emphasize the interplay and the diversity of institutions and groups of actors, goals, positions of power and tactics that produce different “ways of thinking” or “political rationalities” or discourses. In these “mentalities of government” the “state” represents only one specific form of government and one way to comprehend power, ends, strategy and implementation.

DEAN nevertheless discusses the dangers arising from this as “new prudentialism,” in which the “mentalities of government” aim at risk minimization and strategies of self-care (DEAN 1999). The greatest priority here lies on the analysis of the “how” of government, how to implement power and the requisite conditions and techniques (techniques for “governing at a distance”) and technological aids, changeable power constellations and relations (ROSE-REDWOOD 2006, 474). The basis of this system of “liberal governmentality” is “freedom” in which people are “freely” responsible and take on responsibility, are self-determined but nevertheless “guided” by laws. It thus stands in opposition to an “authoritarian governmentality” that aims “to neutralize opposition to authority” (DEAN 1999, 131; ROSE-REDWOOD 2006, 476).

It becomes problematic when the governance structures courted by the state do not want to be incorporated into formalized planning institutions and legal frameworks (such as round tables, future workshops and public involvement), but instead view themselves as extraparliamentary opposition and as “informal” providers of ideas. They evade “growth machine politics” and the mainstream approach of unchallenged urban entrepreneurialism that understands urban governance only as a concept with which to provide a “good business climate” in inter-urban competition (HARVEY 1989, 11; PECK and TICKELL 2002). Only to a limited extent can the so-called collaborative approaches to urban planning discussed by HEALEY (1998) be observed, in which concepts related to “building places” (in the sense of building projects) are transformed into “place making activities,” i.e. collective designing of places.

Examples of this “informal governance” outside of participatory processes called for by planning law will be discussed in the following: on the one hand they reflect MOUFFE’s post-democratic ideal, demonstrating political alternatives beyond traditional party structures; on the other hand they are “trouble-makers” who increasingly challenge local planning, but nevertheless represent local knowledge and discourse networks within a non-state governmentality. They do not automatically subordinate the management and configuration of geo-spaces to a “capital-centric approach” and view themselves as committed to other ideals (ROSE-REDWOOD 2006, 482). The question arises what learning potential “informal governance” has for the local discourse and to what extent these “solutions” are integrated into or bypassed by the conformist governance structures (HARVEY 1989, 7).

3 Methods

The approach used in the following was exclusively qualitative, and the results cannot be either quantified or extrapolated, but they allow sufficient generalization beyond the investigated cases. The examples were identified by a systematic evaluation of the results, opinions and material on the Internet either published by citizens’ groups or made available to a broad public as a result of press reports (and their searchable archives to identify local structures). Particularly interesting were the examples in which up-to-date discussions of new discounter outlets could be expected and whose results in many cases were still “ongoing” or “pending.” Thus the influences, the negotiating power and the interaction between residents and politicians/planners could and can be analyzed in real time. Moreover, the willingness of citizens’ groups to engage with third parties in an open discussion of their goals, structure, organization and legitimation is and was (still) high. There is of course an unavoidable danger that the citizens’ groups want to instrumentalize the academic discussion partner for their own publicity and view him as support for their own line of arguments. With such problems in mind, the interviewer must have a sufficiently large set of questions. They must nevertheless be loosely structured and not only include leading questions that can be interpreted as confirmatory, but also critical questions reflecting on the work of community action groups. The examples show that after a problem has been “solved” the emotional

identification of a citizens' group with the contentious issue can fade rapidly. With this the chance of finding a discussion partner for a (meanwhile retrospective) issue diminishes. Academic requests for discussion are then no longer important for the public relations of a community action group. The interviewer must also bear in mind that "other" actors from politics and the administration may view his choice of discussion partners as "taking sides" and no longer be available as interview partners for a different point of view. The search for "insider" views from citizens' groups existing solely to protest against the political establishment can lead to a situation in which the latter representatives feel discredited.

The interviews were almost never carried out with only one person, but rather in groups. The results were either noted down in writing or documented as an audio recording, so that the sometimes complex dialogs with different interview partners were still comprehensible. All interviews were carried out "on site," as a rule in rural communities and county seats in Schleswig-Holstein. Despite a standard set of questions the interviews were structured so as to be open-ended and, like a snowball system, were accessible to questions that might arise through "on-site learning." The interviews were carried out both "on site" in the process of inspections and at round table talks. The examples were chosen on the basis of their currentness. The latter lay no claim to being statistically representative, but can answer the core questions as to motivation, organization, legitimation, interaction or willingness to protest of a citizens' group. Interviews with representatives of retail trade and planning also helped to relativize assertions made by citizens' groups in the search for "truth" and to better interpret their role within governance networks. The results are presented in anonymized form, without naming the specific community or the specific interview partner whose assertions were made "in good faith." For documentary purposes the interview partners are nevertheless listed at the end of the study.

4 Case studies

The case studies include two so-called lower order central places and additionally rural central places that lie below the lower hierarchy order and rural places that have no central place classification. Four of the places do not have discount grocery stores on

their own territory, but they do have a full-line store belonging to the Edeka (retail) Group. In both of the lower order centers four discounters belonging to various competing groups are concentrated plus further full-line stores. The starting conditions for four of the communities are thus similar, in that a family-led "full-line store" that has existed for a long time and with which the local neighborhood is emotionally involved is competing with a possible new outlet of a discount grocery store. The fact that in three cases the involved discounters are NETTO (Dansk) or Netto (Edeka) shows (a) their immense need to expand, (b) the enhancement of sites whose local population figures tend to be suboptimal (as a rule a minimum population of 4000-5000 is assumed to be required), (c) the overabundance of discounters in "better" locations (e.g. Reinfeld or Nortorf), so that the diffusion of discounters is now progressing in small rural towns as well, (d) the fact that full-line stores (belonging to the Edeka Group) facing predatory competition from (Netto) discounters belonging to the same (Edeka) group.

Despite the presence of the Internet the towns and the various representatives had no knowledge of similar experience elsewhere, nor did they have any interest in sharing their experience. Only the citizens' group in one community wanted to try to promote "networking" of ideas and perspectives (on the basis of the experience that I as author was able to communicate). All cases show a high degree of local isolation and their interests, concerns and search for a solution are firmly embedded in the "grassroots level." In accordance with the NIMBY principle they do not attempt to examine, classify or relativize their own problems by means of a regional comparison.

5 Discussion

5.1 Initial situation

For local government representatives, investors, property owners or residents, discount grocery stores (a) represent "better" and low priced shopping, (b) guarantee that shopping will be possible over the long term, in view of the demographic transition and the aging of the population, (c) bolster the central significance of a town because of the attraction they exert (combined with the wishful thinking that other shops will profit through linkages), (d) are a chance to stimulate development that will be cofinanced by the discounter (e.g. road improvements, traffic lights, other infrastructure), (e) "invigorate"

Tab. 1: Examples of current discussions about new outlets of discount grocery stores in Schleswig-Holstein, November 2010–June 2011

Town	Population (2010)	Location in SH	Subject of dispute	Actors against	Contact persons
Felde	2073	12 km west of Kiel	New Aldi outlet; no discounter in town	Community action group or association	Community action group; Edeka proprietor; mayor refuses interview
Brande-Hörnerkirchen	1608	Pinneberg county	New Netto outlet; no discounter in town	Edeka plus citizens' group	Community action group plus party representatives; Edeka proprietor
Hamdorf	1297	Approx. 15 km southwest of Rendsburg	New Netto outlet; no discounter in town	Edeka plus citizens' group	Edeka proprietor
Eggebek	2557	Schleswig- Flensburg county	New Netto outlet; no discounter in town	Edeka plus new local political grouping	Representative of a local political grouping; meeting of residents
Reinfeld	8517	Stormarn county between Bad Oldesloe and Lübeck	New discounter outlet; four discounters in town	Citizens' group	Local political grouping, community action group; meeting of residents
Nortorf	6245	North of Neumünster	Expansion of Penny; four discounters in town	Ad hoc neighborhood group	Telephone interview with community action group

Source: survey by the author, websites of the towns

and stimulate competition so that the established shopkeepers also have to “make more of an effort,” (f) only in the rarest of cases yield substantial revenue in the form of business taxes. In one case the revenue from the business taxes of a discounter was compared with that of a “thriving restaurant.” Independent of the size of a place therefore we see not only the strategic search for new locations on the part of the discounters. There are also cases in which towns and existing full-line stores contact discounters and recommend themselves as potential locations. If it is not possible to talk to the mayor or the company about this, this information remains secret, as does the identity of the person who could be considered the “opponent” in this conflict.

The other side in the discourse about discounters, in the struggle for the preeminent position, for popular or populist semantics, in the best of cases for more convincing arguments, usually consists of

“concerned parties.” These may be (a) businesspeople who expect their sales to decline dramatically if there is a (soft) discounter in the neighborhood, (b) residents who would have to live with the impacts of construction and traffic, (c) residents who feel that if a discounter outlet is opened the “village atmosphere” will be lost, the available range of goods will be trivialized, they will lose their home town feeling and end up with architectonic blight and a spoiled landscape, (d) consumers who view the “shopping culture” of discounters critically, (e) groups that expect more arguments and more transparency in planning procedures and see themselves as an antidote to the system of party discipline and decisions made in closed circles. Political affiliation, in contrast, often does not play any role between “them” and “us” and this is voiced as a maximum demand and without compromise. To the extent that political party interests prove to enhance one’s own posi-

tion, they are nevertheless assimilated into one's own calculations. In one case a citizens' group was initially not even aware which party took which side when a discounter applied to open a new outlet. A strategic ally, less in the form of a political party but through its members, can enhance the importance of a citizens' group, but can also damage its acceptance and legitimacy vis-à-vis persons with a different political orientation. In town A "concerned" citizens felt the discussion in the town council to be uncritical and amateurish when in their debate about a new discounter outlet the members acted above party lines and marginalized dissenters as "troublemakers."

5.2 Origin and course of action

Even before the lessons of "protest democracy" in other places (e.g. in Stuttgart with regard to the new train station), citizens' groups teamed up in the places that are our case studies. In town B it was a rather ad hoc neighborhood list of signatures; in town A two independent initiatives happened to meet at a birthday party; in town C concerned residents and "their" Edeka shopkeeper joined forces to exploit personal contacts to a representative of the local press in order to gain attention and recognize potential coalitionists or sympathizers "for our cause"; in town D there is a local political grouping that can identify emotionally with small town life better than the representatives of the big parties. Particularly initiative A considers itself a "concentration of know-how" in which residents with an academic background play an important role in the discussions in the "inner circle." Representatives from the fields of law, architecture, economics and medicine, some of them highly committed retired persons "with lots of time on their hands," can challenge the arguments of the representatives of the town council, draw up alternatives to the officially presented plans and organize public relations. "In a village like this ... there are always two parties. There always were; there still are. And certainly there are now other overlaps: they go right through the sports club, sometimes this way" (Interview in town A, November 2010).

New coalitions and temporary combinations can arise and their common goals can bring people together across ideological boundaries. A representative of the initiative is simultaneously a (marginalized) member of the town council and is thus

familiar with political and planning processes and discussion threads that can be "utilized" for the initiative's strategy. That this can result in dangerous personal animosities for the local community and that people can lose "sight of the big picture for all the special interests" (SELLE 2006, 502) can be observed in this case. The initiative feels "manipulated" by the mayor's use of a poll of the residents to determine the acceptance of a discounter (asked in connection with the construction of a senior citizens' home). Consequently they started a survey of their own to gather more systematic information about retail trade in the town. "You can really see very well here on a small scale the liberties that politicians take and how they try to manipulate And lots of it proves to be a pack of lies". (Interview in town A, November 2010).

The initiative has become sufficiently formalized through its activities, such as traffic counts, door-to-door surveys, lists of signatures, information circulated through the Internet, expert panels and reports in the local press. The group has been organized as a so-called "unregistered association" with advisory members, treasurer and donation receipts. All of this has forced them into "opposition" to the town council, although representatives of the group stress that what they want to do is to "point out alternatives" and that they would make related expertise available to the mayor. It is not unusual for local government representatives (like in town E at the town hall meeting) to flaunt their LACK of expertise and to gather information from external experts or at town meetings. In contrast to the "desirable" controlled public participation in the planning process, however, politicians tend to perceive the informal governance practiced by citizens' groups as a challenge, a "threat" and as activism aiming at preventing projects. This threatening scenario also holds the other way round: in one case the local Edeka shopkeeper threatened to ban the representatives of a certain party from his shop because they were in favor of a new discounter outlet. In the same case the group repeatedly submitted petitions to the planning authorities, hoping to drag out the procedure and thus wear down the discounter and cause it to lose interest. Because, as interviews in other towns have indicated, it is foreseeable that more permits to open new outlets are being applied for than will actually be realized, the tendency is for the "simpler" cases involving bargaining to be successful rather than the "more complicated" ones. In an extreme case in Kiel it took eight years from the first preliminary plans to the opening.

5.3 Legitimation

In contrast to institutions that have been democratically legitimated by elections (e.g. the members of the town council), citizens' groups want to exert influence on legally formalized procedures without themselves having experienced the legitimation of free, general, direct and secret elections. CONNELLY (2011; see also JOHNSON et al. 2006)) discusses here a set of "norms" that could legitimate institutions, actions and their results outside of elections, with legitimacy meaning the exercise of power via authority that others voluntarily follow (cf. CONNELLY 2011, 931). The basis of this authority can be (a) personal and moral integrity (charismatic) across traditional party boundaries, (b) reliability and a high level of competence, (c) identity as "local people", from which direct responsibility and trustworthiness are derived, (d) the resulting output legitimacy, meaning recognized fairness and a worthwhile perspective. Legitimacy is here a changeable construct for groups of varying sizes and for variable periods of time that emerges in complex interactions, negotiations and discourses, can change and can disappear again (CONNELLY 2011, 933).

On what basis does this discussion take place in our case studies? As a rule the work of the groups begins in the form of self-empowerment of a group that teams up because of similar personal involvement and social and rural socialization. They employ lists of signatures that may well instrumentalize leading questions in the hope of determining rapidly how far the protest potential extends beyond the "formalized" citizens' group. "There are favorable conditions for the residents to fight back, because for a long time we have had ineffective mayors. Well, the anger of the population has grown, not only against Aldi. That's why we basically have a nurturing environment". (Interview in town A, November 2010).

In the case of town C the "citizens' group" initially consisted of four persons and therefore needed to appeal to a broader public to stake out its own claim to existence and legitimacy (who else does the group speak for?). In the case of town A a poll of the residents was used as an instrument for achieving maximum feedback by contacting people personally at their front door. The reason why not more than approx. 635 citizens signed the petition against a new outlet of a discounter was that some of them feared unspecified "disadvantages." Because of their long professional career some residents are additionally recognized as "experts" who, in combination with

seniority and experience, exude an aura of competence vis-à-vis other members of the group. The compromised local politicians, however, perceive this as presumptuous and arrogant. Because the town didn't want to provide the initiative with a room where it could meet, the group meets in a hall in the church, although this meeting place met with some controversy within the church. Since the founding of the group in 2009 it has developed an internal structure, organized itself in terms of content and timing and even expanded, so that the original initiative has become an umbrella organization for other controversial projects (e.g. a senior citizens' home, a biogas plant, or remodeling of the town center). In this way it was possible to expand the single cause that was the original concern, namely to prevent a discounter in the town, and interest further persons in the association's work. Because the owner of the property also was not interested in selling his property to a discounter and Aldi announced in the press that it did not want to expand into town A, the mission of the citizens' initiative would have been fulfilled. Some of the members of the group have suggested forming a party that town A still lacks around this nucleus in order to get their hands directly on the levers of power and to take on the challenge of a "new" type of legitimation via elections. The idea is still being debated.

5.4 Vision

Do citizens' groups have a vision that is an "overall model" for their actions and that extends beyond current events and the fact that they are personally affected? In towns A and C the desirable image of a rural community ("village atmosphere") or the neighborhood environment is shaped by such concepts as "historical," "traditional," "established structures," and "family businesses" that can be identified as local patriotism and local roots. The alternative model is the vision of local politicians, who are aiming at "competition," "investments," "opportunity" and "development potential." While the world view of the citizens' groups tends to be conservative and aimed at preservation and (also) social responsibility, they question the consequences of a discounter outlet for employment, other shops and diverse population groups (seniors). Local politicians see in a discounter "of their own" innovation, modernity, escape from rural marginalization, an improved image and a gain in importance vis-à-vis neighboring communities – along with the pragmatic wish to ensure

that the basic needs of the population are provided locally. This can at times result in deep social rifts in which both “parties” confront each other irreconcilably and particularly the citizens’ group does not feel any necessity to deviate from its maximum demands (“as a matter of principle we are against business that is incompatible with the village character”). For the citizens’ groups “the” discounter has become the symbol of “change,” “distorting the local area,” a challenge to a way of life that is worthy of protection, at least where you live (which does not mean that the same people do not like to shop at discounters “elsewhere”). It also stands for the feeling of not being taken seriously by politicians and the administration and being caught up in a system that with its technical terms excludes the citizens more than it includes them. As a consequence many residents first learned about building plans from the local page of their newspaper and not from public notices announcing changes to land use plans (as reported in town C).

Analogous to the emancipated and “moral” customer, citizens expect of their politicians sufficient information, “studies,” facts, arguments and “far-sightedness.” They should be concerned about the consequences of their decisions beyond their term of office. For this reason some citizens’ groups consider themselves “proselytizers” who are called upon to “enlighten” other less interested or less well informed persons or to influence them with their own material. As autodidactic citizens they are nevertheless forced to immerse themselves in the “system” of town council meetings, minute taking, expert opinions and planning law, where governance and government again intersect.

5.5 The other side – we need a discounter

The supporters of new retail outlets attract much less attention than the keepers of the status quo (be it those who object to a discounter or those who only want to prevent a discounter from moving to a new location). Despite a systematic search of the sources I found very little evidence of initiatives analogous to the “naysayer” groups (e.g. supporters of a hypermarket in Berlin-Lichtenberg, whose referendum, however, failed because too few voters participated; *Berliner Morgenpost* 21/03/2010). Part of the reason is certainly that the network of bulk suppliers is already so sufficiently tight that the wish for more discounters rarely arises. Here innovative constellations of interests are more likely to develop to make further discounter outlets “attractive.” For instance

the retail trade function is combined with lodgings (student dorms, housing suited to the needs of the elderly) or with social infrastructure (a gymnasium). Or the discounter is used to revitalize unused inner city land and to attract the food sector back to the inner cities, where in many cases it had been lost in the course of the last decades (e.g. Mannheim). The argument is that this prevents further “greenfield” sites and makes desirable housing and leisure facilities financially affordable in the community. The multifunctionality of the building and the vibrancy of the site outside of business hours are stressed and, in accordance with the dictum of demographic transition, that fact that a pedestrian-oriented supply for an aging population is provided. Who supports a discounter can only be determined in each individual case. The wish no longer emanates only from the individual discounter groups. At times it can be influenced by the mayors, members of the local advisory council, sports clubs or interested retailers, as long as the new outlet “fits” the existing local retail trade mix and is not contradicted by planning and political considerations. To open a new outlet requires increasing moralization (like in shopping itself), to be able to prevail (in the media) against potential opponents not only in verbal “hard” arguments but also in emotional “soft” criteria. Thus the combination of a gymnasium with a discounter tends to be a sufficient argument to induce several thousand members of the club to approve the plan. This type of governance takes place completely differently from the previously discussed examples: (a) there is no Internet presence, (b) “background discussions” between decision-makers are sought, (c) the official governance channels, such as town meetings and participation of residents in planning, are used, (d) the legitimacy of inquiries and agreements with discounters derives from administrative and institutional affiliation.

6 Conclusions

The examples reveal on the one side civic engagement outside of the established institutions, furthermore local resources of knowledge, the overcoming of “inhibitions” to participate in local political decisions, the “learning” of the rules of the game and the logic and techniques of politics in the sense of organization, structure, power, argumentation and goal setting by means of which “the” citizens have adopted a governmentality of their own. On the other side friction exists in the form of an obstructionist attitude, a “limited innovative capacity,”

legitimacy problems, high-grade emotionalization, lack of responsibility and a selective will to participate (STECKEL 2008, 30ff.). Participatory processes and coordination in planning have become more complicated and have opened new and more abundant communication channels, platforms and needs that have already been characterized as a “communication turn” (SELLE 2006, 500). Locally adapted ways of cooperation, partnership and bargaining involving moderators and mediation are required. The challenge this involves became obvious in the case studies.

As HEALEY (1998, 1535) pointed out, in contrast to “collaborative approaches” in planning “the competitive approach ... may merely increase the fragmentation and confusion of the ‘game’ of urban governance,” and the goal of government to seek “not to govern society per se, but to promote individual and institutional conduct that is consistent with government objectives” (RACO and IMRIE 2000, 2191) is at least delayed or even obstructed. Where the “game of governance” of the various local stakeholders results in “strategies of self-care” (DEAN 1999), this does not prevent either the local discourse or the exchange of knowledge and learning processes between partners who do not want to be “social partners” based on “mutual-self interest.” Nevertheless, the “informal governance” outside of the intercommunal competition for new discounter outlets and their “growth coalitions” can work at projecting a “different” image of social solidarity and of “belonging to that place” (HARVEY 1989, 14) and challenge the traditional governance players with their answers to new questions that have not been asked so far.

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