

Challenges to the Ombudsman function in times of democratic and technological change

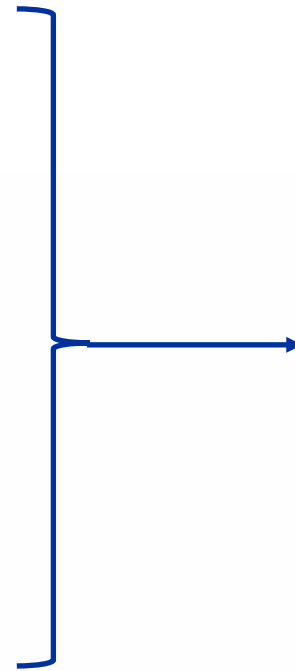
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THE IMPORTANCE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

- Rising educational levels
- Shift from “government” to “governance”
- Crisis of representative democracy
- Citizen co-production



Participatory turn

Big impact on Ombudsman

OMBUDSMAN'S POSITIONS ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Survey results:

- Many Ombudsman offices acknowledge the increasing reliance on citizen participation
- Many offices are reflecting on possible answers, but very few have taken concrete steps
- Most offices hold a **predominantly *passive* view of citizen participation**
- Most offices hold a **predominantly *internal* view of citizen participation**
- There are many **varying definitions of citizen participation.**
- Very few attempts on behalf of Ombudsmen to embrace the full potential of citizen participation

PASSIVE VS. ACTIVE VIEWS: SOME NOTABLE CASES

- Austrian Ombudsman:
 - Passive view, but very active in disseminating information (visitor center, TV programs...)
- Dutch Ombudsman:
 - Ombudsmen and govt administrations should actively create more opportunities for participation
- Icelandic Ombudsman:
 - Ombudsmen should interfere when there is a lack of participation in projects with big impact
 - Ombudsmen are ideally suited to act as independent experts informing citizen participation
- Estonian Ombudsman:
 - Was involved in the evaluation of participatory budgeting processes
- Belgian Federal Ombudsman:
 - Citizen Panel “Make My Administration” → Results presented tomorrow

INTERNAL VIEW OF PARTICIPATION

- Croatian and Scottish Ombudsmen used participation to improve their own functioning
- Maltese Ombudsman used citizen surveys to assess its own performance

DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

- Some Ombudsmen see citizen participation as involving “ordinary citizens”
- Others consider citizen participation to occur within and through civil society organizations.

CONDITIONS FOR OMBUDSMAN INVOLVEMENT IN PARTICIPATION

- Right of initiative
- Legal/statutory limitations
- Politicization
- Ombudsmen under threat

OMBUDSMEN AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

- Most Ombudsmen use social media to keep in touch with the public
- Most Ombudsmen have some experience with new ICTs and e-gov procedures
- Blockchain has not yet appeared on the radar of many offices
 - Notable exception: Estonian Ombudsman
- Problematic: governments gain strategic advantage over Ombudsmen

GENERAL CONCLUSION

- Most offices are thinking about participation, but in rather limited ways
 - Important for Ombudsmen to keep up with participatory evolutions, if they do not want to lose their importance as links between citizens and administrations.
- Overall limited reflection on the impact of new technologies
 - Important for Ombudsmen to keep up with technological evolutions, if they do not want to lose their importance as guarantors of democratic rights.