

Call for applications for a cooperative project of the Daimler and Benz Foundation “New Technologies and Innovative Methods for Participation”

Over the next few years, the Daimler and Benz Foundation will be promoting the topic of “New Technologies and Innovative Methods for Participation” in its *Ladenburg Research Networks* format and will be providing a sum of up to 500,000 euros annually (max. duration three years) for a research consortium. Independent research group leaders (professors, junior professors, junior research group leaders) from universities and from non-profit, non-university research institutions are eligible to apply.

1. Challenge/motivation

The participation of individuals in political, social, and cultural processes is a key element of democratic societies. Participation encompasses the active involvement of people in decision-making and in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies that relate to their own lives or their communities. Since a functioning democracy is based on consideration of different opinions, perspectives, and interests, individuals should be given the opportunity to play an active part in shaping (political) measures.

Participation research sets out to evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken and to identify what practices are suitable for enabling participation. It analyzes and researches mechanisms, methods, and instruments for putting participation to efficient and effective use. The potentials of participation are seen in particular in

- improving decision-making processes
- strengthening democracy
- promoting social justice and
- ensuring empowerment and self-determination.

Especially in times of crisis and periods of rapid change, which generate dissatisfaction and a feeling of insecurity among many, participation plays a highly significant role. As many people as possible who are directly and indirectly affected by the consequences of various different decisions should be reached. Participation is subject to severe time constraints in this connection. The Covid-19 pandemic, for example, and the current situation of global political security – which has undergone change particularly in the areas of AI, digitalization, automation, and – in particular, since the Russian attack

on Ukraine – energy technology have triggered enormously accelerated technological developments, these are being enhanced by the rapid dissemination of information via the social media and the Internet. The results are compounded by misinformation and the frequent lack of competence, or of the opportunity, to rapidly evaluate the truth content of information. Such constantly changing situations require politicians, the society and its citizens, companies, as well as the scientific community to accelerate decision-making and implementation processes. This occurs in view of obvious conflicts of aims in terms of efficiency, resilience, sustainability, security, and freedom.

Participation may find its manifestations in various degrees of involvement, e.g. the participation at information events, or at citizens' consultation sessions, to partnership-based involvement, as in the form of corporate idea management.

The application of new technologies and innovative methods can support participatory and majority-based decision-making processes. Through early cooperative involvement of key stakeholders, consensus and compromise can be achieved even in complex decision-making situations characterized by conflicting goals. Participation thereby enables individuals to exert influence on important decisions – influence that is otherwise the preserve of parliamentarians or of representatives at local or state level.

Participation also affects working life. It can help improve the quality of processes within a company or organization by enabling employees to leverage their experience and know-how in order to influence processes and decisions in their respective working environments. Participation also offers the opportunity to involve stakeholders in projects so that the outcome of the processes are in keeping with their requirements.

New technologies – such as augmented reality/virtual reality (AR/VR) technology, apps, social media, and information platforms – create new opportunities for participation. For example, the diverse impacts of new buildings or wind turbines may be rendered experienceable even before construction begins (aesthetic aspects, noise levels, shadows cast, etc.). Participation research has a role to play here, too, in analyzing the factors and conditions for the best possible application of these technologies. The success of participation also depends on the fit between the degree of involvement, the mode of technological support chosen (e. g. a VR model), and the embedding of this technology in a methodological setting (e. g. town hall meetings).

2. Focus of the call for applications

In an interdisciplinary and possibly also cross-national research project, approaches for innovative, technology-based participation methods and instruments are to be investigated that enable, intensify, improve, or expedite participatory decision-making processes in terms of various different matters of detail and stakeholder constellations. The point of departure for the proposed project can be (a) a decision-making situation that is to be shaped in a participatory manner through the innovative use of technology and methods, or (b) expertise for an innovative technology whose potential for participatory processes is to be tapped in the future.

Within the scope of the cooperative project, at least one – but preferably several – real participative situations (e.g. the redesign of a public space, or the new construction of a factory/wind power plant) are to be methodically and technologically devised together with and scientifically accompanied by the relevant stakeholders. Participation can be viewed here from different perspectives:

- a) Political perspective: Participation takes place in the context of political processes and provides formats that enable citizens to be involved in political decision-making processes, as well as determining what factors influence participation and how this affects political legitimacy and effectiveness.
- b) Sociological perspective: This perspective analyzes participation as a social phenomenon and investigates the social structures, dynamics, and patterns that influence people's participation in different contexts. This encompasses the study of social inequalities, power relationships, and social norms that shape participation.
- c) Communication theory perspective: This perspective investigates participation in the context of communication and media. It analyzes how communication channels, media content, and media structures influence participation, how people receive and share information, and how this affects opportunities for participation and access to information.
- d) Psychological perspective: This perspective looks at participation at the individual level and analyzes psychological factors that influence people's motivation, behavior, and attitudes toward participation. It encompasses the investigation of individual values, attitudes, convictions, and psychological barriers to participation.
- e) Interdisciplinary perspective: This perspective integrates findings from various disciplines such as political science, sociology, communication science, psychology, or geography in order to identify the complexity of participation.

The collaborative project should be assigned to at least one of these research perspectives.

3. Description of the funding format

The *Ladenburg Research Networks* format covers research projects with funding normally for a period of three years, the results of which are then published. Under the management of a scientific coordinator, who acts as spokesperson for the consortium, a research topic identified by the Foundation (in this case “New Technologies and Innovative Methods for Participation”) is worked on jointly by several research groups at various scientific institutions in Germany and abroad. The members of a Research Network are accorded a high degree of freedom, determine their research program independently, and regularly convene at locations including the Foundation's headquarters.

The Foundation provides funding primarily for positions for doctoral students and travel expenses; funds for consumables can only be approved to a very limited extent. Basic equipment, overheads, and administrative costs cannot be covered. Funding for the position of coordinator can only be provided for a person actively participating in the research activities of the respective Network. The *Ladenburg Research Networks* are open to scientists from all disciplines.

4. Applications

The Daimler and Benz Foundation initially receives project outlines in German or English by e-mail (info@daimler-benz-stiftung.de). Following a pre-selection process and initial review, the Foundation invites individual applicants to submit full proposals.

4.1 Preliminary applications

Preliminary applications can be submitted up until January 14, 2024. To submit a project application, a potential research consortium must have already been defined/established. Applications for individual projects will not be considered, as the Foundation does not configure the consortia itself. Preliminary applications must include the following information:

- a) Applicant (scientific coordinator of the consortium; name, function, institution, address, contact data)
- b) Project title and description (max. 3 A4 pages)
- c) Requested budget
- d) List of scientists and/or institutions participating in the research consortium

4.2 Initial review by the Foundation

Upon receipt, the preliminary application is reviewed by the Foundation; this process may take up to four weeks. Applicants are kindly asked you not to contact the Foundation during this phase.

4.3 Full application

Following a positive initial review, the Foundation invites up to four applicants to submit a detailed full application. In addition to the information provided in the preliminary application, this full application should include the following information:

- a) Detailed description of the project, with information on the current state of research and categorization of the planned research project (max. 20 A4 pages)
- b) Statement with regard to the societal relevance of the project
- c) Information on all project participants (co-applicants, project management, cooperation partners, co-financiers etc.)
- d) Detailed budget
- e) Time schedule and milestone plan

The full application, including all attachments, may only be submitted via the Foundation's online portal. When registering, please note that only persons previously registered in the application portal will have access to the application data, be able

to submit an application, and receive email notifications. Applicants responsible for a project are therefore required to register themselves or, if applicable, to commission colleagues to set up a user account in their respective names and to provide an e-mail address.

4.4 Review and final decision

Upon receipt, the full application is reviewed internally by the Foundation and with the involvement of external experts. The final decision regarding the full application is made by the Executive Board and the Management of the Foundation.

5. Contact

Should you have any questions, please contact the Foundation's Managing Director, Dr. Jörg Klein.

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