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"The power of patients 3.0" – Patients are changing the face of health care

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Community participation in health system governance in Brazil and India: potentials for reverse innovations in Germany?

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Teaser: A review and policy analysis of innovative features of institutionalized community participation in Brazil and India in order to derive potential lessons for health system governance in Germany.

Background, objective: The 2008 World Health Report has revitalized the concept of primary health care (PHC), placing emphasis on institutionalized participation of communities and civil-society actors to increase the accountability of health systems. Some low- and middle-income countries have effectively embedded elements of the PHC strategy in innovative ways. These experiences can provide lessons for the enhancement of health systems in industrialized countries. Pertinent examples are: (i) community-based monitoring and planning mechanisms piloted in the scope of the «National Rural Health Mission» in India to improve access to and quality of health care services, and (ii) health councils in Brazil implemented in the scope of the establishment of the National Health System. We aim to analyze how institutionalized community participation in Brazil and India has been operationalized in order to derive potential lessons for health system governance in Germany.

Approach, methods, patient engagement: Review of empirical and grey literature with subsequent policy analysis (including analysis of key-informant interviews) using the «health policy triangle» as analysis tool.

Findings: Overview of institutionalized community participation in Brazil, India and Germany with a focus on policy content, contexts, processes and actors.

Discussion and implications: Four commonalities between India and Brazil emerge as particularly relevant for the promotion of institutionalized community participation in the German health care system: (i) an explicitly rights-based approach towards community participation, (ii) a prominent focus on the reduction of health inequities as leading motive of reform processes towards institutionalized participation, (iii) the co-occurrence of vocal civil-society organizations and social movements and «open-minded» state officials and politicians supporting the claims to strengthen community participation, thereby inducing true shifts in (decision-making) power in health system governance, (iv) a socio-spatial orientation in attempts to enable participation on small-area levels. While health system governance in Germany allows for participation of «patient communities» in various institutional fora, there is yet no institutional platform which allows for shifts in power (between conventional actors and citizens) comparable to those analyzed in the context of Brazil and India. An orientation towards the factors that spurred transformations in these countries is, however, not yet visible in Germany.

Key terms: reverse innovation; community; participation; power; policy analysis