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PLANNING, PARTICIPATION AND POLITICS

The focus of this chapter is on participation and politics as it relates to planning. It reviews forms of citizen participation in urban planning, the extent and nature of participation in urban planning in different parts of the world and political contexts as well as innovative approaches in this regard. Lessons from these experiences are taken into account in identifying ways to enhance participation in urban planning.

CHARACTERISTICS AND FORMS OF PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING

Participation implies that planning is not a purely technocratic exercise in which policies and decisions are made by professionals in conjunction with political power holders. It incorporates voice, responsiveness and accountability. Voice refers to the expression of citizen preferences and opinions through both the electoral process and other channels. Consultation and the expression of views may not influence plan proposals and planning decisions in the absence of responsiveness. Policies and plans mean little unless they determine the allocation of resources and decision making, so ways of ensuring that views are heard and acted upon – accountability – are also essential.

Participation is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches and it is useful to distinguish between different forms and purposes of participation (Table 6). Citizen control over decision-making is generally regarded as the most transformative and empowering form of participation. Consultative and instrumental forms of participation are commonly associated with efficiency and effectiveness arguments.

However, consultation implies that key decisions are taken by external agents, who may or may not take into account all the views expressed, especially those of socially marginal groups. Moreover, in both developed and developing countries, consultation is widely used to legitimize decisions that have already been made and its outcomes are used selectively or potentially disregarded by those in power. Thus, in addition to its functional value, participation may be used purely as a tokenistic, legitimizing device.

The electoral process enables the expression of citizens' preferences

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GLOBAL TRENDS IN URBAN PLANNING, PARTICIPATION AND POLITICS

In this section, global trends in urban planning and participatory practice are summarized and some of the factors that explain differences between regions and countries identified.

Developed and transitional countries

Formal procedures for public participation in planning decisions have long existed in developed countries. Invariably, these countries have democratic political systems and elected representatives have a responsibility to take their constituents' views into account and balance conflicting interests.

In recent years, a great variety of tools and techniques for citizen participation in urban planning have been widely applied at both city and local levels in developed countries. In some countries such as Canada, the US and Australia, governments have provided technical and financial support for ordinary citizens to participate in public review processes. Even so, it is not always easy to secure wide citizen participation, with the result that specific organized interests exert more influence to advance their own interests and some social groups are under-represented (e.g. women, youth and ethnic minorities). Therefore, more extensive and radical participation in decision making remains exceptional.

Street politics give citizens a voice, especially in developed countries

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Form	What 'participation' means to the implementing agency	What 'participation' means for those involved
Nominal	Legitimization to show it is doing something, pre-empt opposition	Inclusion, in the hope of gaining access to potential collective or individual benefits
Consultative	Better informed decision making with no loss of control	Policies and plans that are more appropriate, but with no guarantee of the outcomes of consultations are taken into account
Instrumental	Efficiency, to draw on beneficiaries' resources, increase cost effectiveness, and improve the prospects for successful operation and maintenance	Access to facilities and services that are normally provided only to those that can afford to pay
Representative	Sustainability; established systems are used for the expression of voice, improving responsiveness and ensuring accountability; provides a means of organizing and aggregating different views	Leverage, direct or indirect influence
Transformative	Partnership with non-governmental actors; collaborative decision-making and implementation	Joint analysis and development of plans; empowerment to enable people to define objectives, make their own decisions, control resources and take action

Table 6

The form and meaning of citizen participation

The nature of citizen participation in urban planning has evolved differently in transitional countries of Europe. In the communist period, participation was merely a formality, taking the form of pseudo-open public hearings and ceremonial exhibitions during which the public was allowed to see master plans. Since 1989, however, most transitional states have introduced new legislation that includes provisions for participation. In the Czech Republic, for example, environmental non-profit organizations have promoted participation in environmental planning hearings.

Nevertheless, even when attempts are made to increase the scope for participation in transitional countries, it is frequently tokenistic. In countries which have maintained a centralized government such as Russia, significant obstacles to participation remain. As such, master planning, with its pursuit of an idealized urban future at a citywide scale, persists and, unlike local plan proposals and specific construction projects, generates little citizen interest. The under-development of civil society and its dominance by a few large, often Western-funded, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a further hindrance.

Sub-Saharan Africa

In the period following independence from colonial rule, governments often adopted a technocratic approach to national development planning that restricted the direct involvement of citizens or other stakeholders in planning and decision-making. Radical revisions to the inherited legislative base for this technocratic approach have been rare, despite its failure to provide effective guidance for rapid urban growth. The post-independence period has also been marred by unstable governments, further restricting the consolidation of participatory planning processes.

Since the 1980s, the inability of government agencies to implement urban development plans and the irrelevance of these to the majority of residents living in informal settlements led to attempts to revise planning legislation and adopt more participatory approaches. The scope for democratic participation further increased since democratization and decentralization in the 1990s. Even so, upgrading and rehabilitation projects provide more meaningful opportunities for participation than urban plan preparation as illustrated in countries such as Niger, Cameroon, and Cote d'Ivoire.

In sum, serious efforts to involve citizens in decision making are uncommon in much of Sub-Saharan Africa and participation often takes the form of consultation, which may or may not result in influence. Moreover, the institutional base for effective urban management and planning is weak and often in a state of flux. Most local governments have a limited revenue base, inadequate technical and administrative skills and insufficient autonomy. In practice, therefore, decisions tend to be made by technocrats, with some input from elected representatives.

Asia

Democratic local governance in the urban areas of Southern Asia has shallow roots. Despite the patchy trend towards more democratic local government since the 1990s, urban planning practices and the legislative basis for it have changed little in the region. There is limited evidence of alternatives to conventional master planning being seriously entertained among planners, in spite of its shortcomings. There is not much provision for participation in plan preparation, by elected representatives, private sector interests or urban residents in general. Government is often highly fragmented and capacity and resources are limited at the local level.

Nonetheless, some countries in the region have made progress with regards to participatory urban planning. In India, for example, the federal and state governments have adopted a variety of measures to increase citizen participation and government responsiveness and accountability at all levels. However, in practice, local government autonomy in India is restricted by limited resources, continued state government control over decision making and the external appointment of officials.

In East and South East Asia also, many countries, particularly the transitional economies, have a weak democratic tradition, with limited civil liberties and political rights. Strategic and spatial planning for urban development and growth in this region is frequently not well provided for, with outdated legislation still in place in many countries. Even in countries that have attempted to deepen democracy in recent years such as Indonesia, civil society organizations are not necessarily well developed. Furthermore, interest in participation and the capacity to become involved is lacking for various reasons, including a fear and distrust of government institutions. Although community-derive development approaches to basic service provision are being pursued in a number of countries, stakeholders play a minimal part in the urban planning process on the whole.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Attempts to introduce participation in Latin America and the Caribbean before the 1980s were limited. In the 1980s,

economic crises and increased poverty eroded the resource base for clientelist politics and fuelled pressures for political change. Throughout the region, the need for newly elected democratic governments to establish their political credibility and the growing importance of municipal government led to experiments with participatory governance. Strengthened mobilization of civil society organizations further contributed to widespread democratization at both national and local levels.

The extent to which participatory approaches have been institutionalized in national or local legislation varies across the region and is explained largely by the political orientation of governments. Where deliberative arrangements have been introduced, they have increased citizens' agency and responded directly to the expressed needs of participants. Countries such as Brazil and Bolivia have made the most progress in this regard.

Despite the significant political changes and participatory initiatives in the region, approaches to planning have not changed commensurately or kept pace with new governance ideas about governance. Technocratic planning persists and although it may in certain circumstances achieve positive results, it is often ineffective, hindered by a lack of political will, technical expertise and adequate data. At the same time, planning is often heavily politicized and manipulated by elites.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING

Increasingly, the need for direct participation in planning is recognized and in some countries and cities, determined efforts have been made to develop innovative ways of involving a wide range of stakeholders in decision-making. Some of these approaches are reviewed in this section.

Participation in local planning

A variety of terms are used to refer to local participatory planning approaches. In practice, though, they have common characteristics, especially a focus on identifying needs and priorities, devising solutions, and agreeing on arrangements for implementation, operation and maintenance. The process of identifying needs and priorities is often called participatory urban appraisal, while arriving at proposals and implementation arrangements is often called community action planning.

Local residents should be able to determine plan implementation and resource distribution

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Participatory urban appraisal methods are primarily for collecting community level information and undertaking preliminary needs assessment. For this reason, they need to be complemented by systematic city wide data disaggregated by service provision, wellbeing indicators, social groups etc. In addition, participatory urban appraisal is not a decision-making tool and thus needs to be taken further in a process of community action planning.

The outcome of participation at the 'community' level depends, amongst other things, on the source of the initiative and the nature of relationships between communities, NGOs and the urban administrative and political system. Sometimes these are collaborative but, just as frequently, they are characterized by clientelism or confrontation.

Even where community level participation is appropriate, it needs to be linked to wider political and administrative systems. This is so because poor communities do not exist independently of the external economic, organizational and political context and nor can they be self-sufficient with regard to resources.

Participation in city level and strategic decision-making

City-level planning is essential for strategic policies and decisions that refer to a wider geographical area and longer time scale than those typically dealt with in community action planning. Experience of participation at the city level is illustrated through a review of participatory budgeting and city development strategies.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting originated in Brazil and is now being emulated more widely in Latin America and beyond, following the landmark experience of Porto Alegre. Key elements of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and many other cities include the creation of regional and thematic assemblies in which every citizen can participate and vote on budget issues and the principle of self-regulation whereby the rules for participation and deliberation are defined by participants.

Evaluations show that participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre has strengthened civil society by encouraging the development of open and democratic civic associations, given previously excluded groups influence over decision-making and brought investment to neglected communities.

The arrangements and outcomes of participatory budgeting elsewhere have varied, both within Brazil and beyond. Reviews of these experiences indicate that certain conditions are necessary for participatory budgeting to be successful, including strongly developed civic associations; a previous tradition of participation; a reasonable level of prosperity; and a unified governing coalition committed to fostering participation. Transparency, including revealing the resources available and uniform criteria for redistribution of resources, is also critical for a successful process. A further challenge is linking participatory budgeting with a city's long term strategic and development plans.

City Development Strategies

City development strategies are approaches that use participatory processes to develop an action plan for equitable growth in cities, although their format, scale and priorities vary. The intention is for stakeholders to participate in problem identification, prioritization, visioning and development planning, rather than merely commenting on draft plans. The participatory process is intended to lead to an agreed vision, goals and priorities for a city, a set of strategies and action plans and the establishment of institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The city development strategy approach has gained considerable support amongst local governments, professionals and international agencies. The positive outcomes it has generated include improved coordination and coherence of the efforts of local and international partners; development and strengthening of consultative and participatory mechanisms; enhanced understanding of local

needs and priorities; and consideration of a broader range of solutions than in conventional master planning.

However, evaluations also note a number of common challenges. Few cities have established any means for assessing how effective or systematic their participatory processes are, and these are not always institutionalized as part of the ongoing planning process. There may also be resistance to wide and lengthy participatory processes from planners, other officials and elected representatives. In addition, concentration on participatory planning at the expense of broader political processes may threaten the process and content of planning, while participation may not tackle entrenched power inequalities.

ENHANCING PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING

Lessons from the experiences reviewed above suggest that it is possible to encourage wider and more meaningful participation by addressing the factors outlined below.

An enabling political context and system

The political context is a key determinant of the scope for, and likely outcomes of, participation. Governments must therefore establish a political system that allows and encourages active participation and genuine negotiation, and is committed to addressing the needs and views of all citizens and stakeholders.

In this regard, recent governance thinking stresses that government agencies cannot and should not take sole responsibility for urban planning and management, but rather work in partnership with civil society and private actors. Their involvement in direct democracy and transformative participation can consolidate democratic practice and lead to reform of the formal political system. However, many of the serious problems faced by cities cannot be tackled effectively by non-governmental actors. Responsive and accountable formal political institutions are needed for effective urban governance.

A strong legal basis for planning and participation

For participation in plan making to be both substantive and influential, a strong legal basis which specifies how outcomes of participatory processes will influence plan preparation and decision-making is required. Brazil's City Statute is an

excellent example of such legislation (Box 5).

In the 1990s, changes to the legislation governing local government often aimed at democratic decentralization, although the extent to which national governments have been willing to give local governments significant roles, resources and autonomy varies. Often, however, revisions to planning legislation are overdue. When they occur, the provisions regarding participation should be made applicable to multi-sectoral urban development planning rather than being restricted to the urban land use planning process.

While inserting requirements for consultation and collaborative approaches in legislation is insufficient to ensure real and equal commitment by all local governments, without a mandatory requirement, opposition from vested interests, including political actors, or changes in political control can compromise citizens' rights to participate.

Understanding the pitfalls of participatory approaches

The ideals of participatory approaches and the outcomes they generate are often quite divergent. An awareness of the shortcomings of participatory approaches and measures to counter these are therefore necessary if urban planning is to be effective.

For instance, if participation by low income groups in the design of projects is not accompanied by a wider redistributive programme, they may see few improvements in their living conditions. Local participation in projects with immediate practical outcomes should therefore be accompanied by opportunities to participate directly or indirectly in decisions related to the allocation of resources

at the city level, lest poor residents become disillusioned with its outcomes.

It is also possible that different categories of stakeholders, such as disadvantaged social groups fail to take advantage of opportunities provided by consultative and participatory processes. Thus, in addition to measures to improve their representation and effectiveness in the formal political representative system, specific actions are needed to ensure that such groups can and do participate, including building their knowledge and organizational capacity, and designing events and activities tailored to their needs.

Sufficient resources to support participatory processes

Participatory approaches to urban planning are demanding of resources and time. In addition to official commitment, municipal councils and planning agencies must allocate adequate human and financial resources to initiating and sustaining participatory processes.

It is also necessary to enhance the capacity of professionals, in terms of their commitment and skills to facilitate participation, provide necessary technical advice and incorporate the outcomes of participation into planning and decision making.

Participation also poses a number of ethical issues for planners. The laws and regulations that specify requirements for participation in planning, professional bodies and planner's training can all play an important role in providing them with ethical guidance and protecting them if they come under pressure not to adhere to the specified practices.
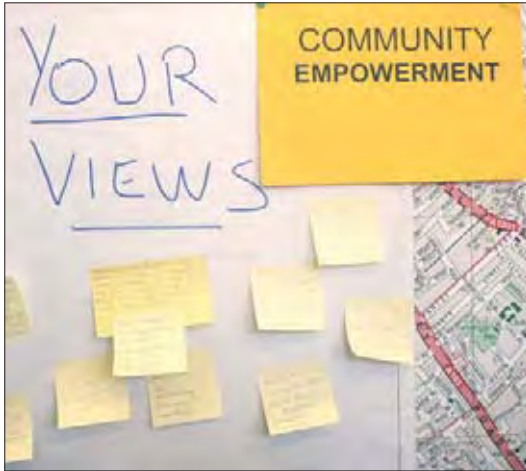
Citizen control over decision-making is the most empowering form of participation

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Participatory mechanisms relevant to the scale and purpose of planning

Participatory approaches need to be tailored to match the scale and purpose of planning. Experience shows that participation is likely to be higher if the outcomes affect people's everyday lives. In contrast, it is harder to ensure political interest and wide participation in strategic and long term policy making and planning, which seems remote to many citizens, and which has time horizons longer than a typical political term of office. Thus, as the scale at which decisions need to be taken increases, it is inevitable that only a small sub-set of those affected can participate. By building on local participation in practical projects, however, local actors can be interested in wider issues and enabled to make constructive inputs into citywide planning.

There is a difference between periodic intensive participatory exercises when plans are prepared or revised and continuing engagement in agenda setting, monitoring, policy review and decision-making. What may be feasible on a periodic basis is not necessarily feasible or appropriate on an ongoing basis. Therefore to sustain direct democracy alongside representative democracy, it is necessary to institutionalize participatory channels and strengthen the organizational capacity of disadvantaged sections of the city population, as well as secure ongoing support from elected representatives.

Successful participation conditions and characteristics

The following conditions for meaningful and inclusive participation can be identified from the experiences reviewed in this chapter:

- Committed city leadership, both political and bureaucratic;
- A conducive national policy and legislative framework, with support from higher levels of government;
- Suitable political arrangements at the city or metropolitan level to ensure coordination and accountability;
- Participation that is broad and inclusive, involving all relevant stakeholders, with multiple channels for participation;
- Open, fair and accountable processes, which are comprehensible, transparent and based on clear ground rules;
- Timeliness – opportunities for participation that can influence decision making;
- A high likelihood of outputs being adopted, through prioritization and sequencing of action;
- A distinction between short and long term objectives, with rapid progress on selected short term actions to build legitimacy and sustain commitment, and proposals linked to investment plans and a financing strategy;
- Skilled, independent and flexible facilitation by planners;
- Tools appropriate to the form and purpose of the participatory process;
- A willingness to strive for consensus, backed up by conflict resolution techniques;
- Support for and collaboration with civil society and community organizations and learning from their proven methods for organizing and empowering the poor;
- Monitoring and evaluation processes to track progress and outcomes and learn from experience;
- Closer links in legislation and practice between multi-sectoral urban planning and management and land use planning.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Increasing numbers of cities have adopted more participatory approaches to urban planning linked to action programmes and investment plans. The main positive lessons from the review of these experiences in recent decades are that:

- Urban planning and management can be improved through the adoption of collaborative approaches that involve all key stakeholders, and enable agreement on priorities, actions and the allocation of responsibilities between relevant agencies;
- Participatory planning at the project level can result in more appropriate design and significant resident contributions, leading to improved living conditions in low income settlements; and
- Participation by residents in planning and implementation of practical improvements in the areas where they live and work, in municipal budgeting and in local plan preparation has positive outcomes and can be scaled up to play a role in city level planning.

However, it has been observed that much participation in urban planning is only consultative, or instrumental, and gives participants little real influence over plans or public expenditure. Thus, as illustrated in this chapter, certain conditions need to be satisfied for participatory approaches to be adopted and have favourable outcomes. These particularly apply to stronger forms of participation that seek to promote citizen control over decision-making. A number of challenges must also be addressed to ensure that participation is meaningful, socially inclusive and contributes to improving urban planning.