

**Participatory democracy from theoretical rooting to
mechanisms of local embodiment:****The CAPDEL program as a model**

الديمقراطية التشاركية من التأصيل النظري إلى آليات التجسيد المحلي:
برنامج كابدال كنموذج

Dr. SEKRI Hiba *1
Lecturer, Class A
University center Nour El Bachir ElBayadh
E-mail: h.sekri@cu-elbayadh.dz

Date of send: 12/04/2026

date of acceptance: 04/06/2026

date of publication: 10/06/2026

Abstract:

Participatory democracy is a vital bet for restructuring the relationship between local administration and citizens, as this study aims to trace the path of this concept from theoretical foundation to field embodiment mechanisms by focusing on the "CAPDEL" program in Algeria. The importance of participatory local management lies in its being a tool for rationalizing development decisions, enhancing transparency, and transforming the municipality from a mere "administrative facility" into an "economic actor" that invests in its local components.

Despite the advanced technical tools provided by the "CAPDAL" model, such as (the new generation municipal development plan) and institutional structures (municipal advisory councils), the reality reveals gaps and structural obstacles that prevent the achievement of local development.

Keywords: Participatory democracy; CAPDEL program ; local governance; municipal advisory council, municipal development plan.

ملخص

تعد الديمقراطية التشاركية رهاناً حيوياً لإعادة هيكلة العلاقة بين الإدارة المحلية والمواطن، حيث تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تتبع مسار هذا المفهوم من التأصيل النظري إلى آليات التجسيد الميداني بالتركيز على برنامج "كابدال" في الجزائر. تكمن أهمية التشارك في التسيير المحلي في كونه أداة

لترشيد القرار التنموي، وتعزيز الشفافية، وتحويل البلدية من مجرد "مرفق إداري" إلى "فاعل اقتصادي" يستثمر في مقوماته المحلية. ورغم ما جاء به نموذج "كابدال" من أدوات تقنية متطورة مثل (المخطط البلدي للتنمية من الجيل الجديد) وهياكل مؤسساتية (المجالس الاستشارية البلدية)، إلا أن الواقع يكشف عن فجوات وعراقيل بنيوية تحول دون تحقيق تنمية محلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الديمقراطية التشاركية؛ برنامج كابدال ؛ الحوكمة المحلية؛ المجلس الاستشاري البلدي ، المخطط البلدي للتنمية.

Introduction :

Contemporary political and administrative systems are witnessing a radical shift in the philosophy of managing local affairs, as the focus has shifted from "representative democracy," in which citizens' will is confined to the ballot box, to "participatory democracy," a strategic option for reengineering the relationship between administration and society .

Therefore, participatory democracy in contemporary political thought is considered a "new social contract" that seeks to overcome the crises of traditional representative democracy, which has confined the role of the citizen to a mere "election number" called for every five years. The shift towards participation is not just an intellectual luxury, but an inevitable necessity to restore the collapsed bridges of trust between authority and society, especially in light of the complexity of local development problems that central "superior" solutions can no longer accommodate . 1

In this context, Algeria has adopted a comprehensive reform strategy for local communities, embodied in its best form through the CapDel program in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program and the European Union. This program did not come to be a passing technical project, but was presented as a "sociological laboratory" to reformulate the roles of the municipality. In the imagination of the "CapDel" program, the municipality is no longer that rigid "administrative facility" whose role is limited to obtaining documents and civil status, but rather has turned into a "leading development actor" that possesses a strategic vision and the ability to invest in regional components to create wealth.

This study is based on an analysis of the innovative structures introduced by the program, starting with municipal advisory councils that enshrine the principle of "participatory sovereignty", all the way to the New Generation Municipal Development Plan (PCD-GN), which moved the planning process from the logic of the "list of sectoral projects" to the logic of the "integrated strategic vision". However, the qualitative shift brought about by the program on the ground in some states of the country collides with a number of structural challenges; this is what the study stated. Between the ambitions of "participatory governance" and the reality of "administrative bureaucracy," many gaps emerge in reality, including those related to the financial subordination of the center, the weakness of the legal arsenal that protects these newly created structures, as well as the absence of "digitization" as a tool to enhance transparency.

Problem of study:

The problem of the study revolves around the contradiction between the theoretical ambition of participatory democracy as a tool for reformulating the relationship between administration and citizens, and the structural obstacles facing its field embodiment. While the "CapDel" program in Algeria proposes innovative mechanisms such as "municipal advisory councils" and "new generation development plans" to transform the municipality into an independent economic actor, this experience collides with fundamental challenges related to several requirements, and from here the fundamental question arises:

To what extent have the institutional and technical mechanisms of the CapDel program been able to bring about a real transformation in the architecture of local governance in Algeria, in an administrative environment dominated by financial centralization and traditional legitimacy?

First main title: Theoretical rooting of participatory democracy

The development of societies and the world's openness to human development have led to the necessity of preserving the citizen's right and equal opportunities through the people's participation in making decisions that

affect their lives. From this standpoint, participatory democracy has emerged as a sign of the participatory dimension of the citizen.

First subtitle: The nature of participatory democracy

It is a set of procedures, means and mechanisms that allow citizens to engage directly in the management of public affairs, i.e. participate in decisions that have an impact on public affairs .

It defined as a new form or image of democracy represented by citizens direct participation in discussing public affairs and making decisions related to them. It is also defined as expanding the exercise of power to citizens by involving them in public dialogue and discussion and making decisions appropriate to it." 2

The concept of democracy is considered one of the most prominent concepts circulating on the international and domestic political scene throughout the past period, and perhaps the reason is due to the emergence of many initiatives that worked to consolidate and expand the circle of democracy in many totalitarian regimes in the world in general, and in Eastern European countries, Latin American countries, and Third World countries in particular.³

Despite the frequent use and marketing of the term democracy at the present time, this term is not new. Many studies have agreed that the origin of democracy goes back to the ideas of many philosophers in previous eras, such as: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

1-1 - Definition of democracy

Democracy is embodied in the equality of all before the law. Since it is the opposite of dictatorship, which imposes a single rule in making decisions, it is difficult to describe. On the one hand, some see it as allowing people to participate in making decisions, while others see it as sharing power between the state and the people in a fair and equal manner, where the people have freedom and political rights.

First: Democracy took its place through its linguistic meaning consisting of two syllables: (demos) means the people and (kratos) means rule, i.e. rule of the people, and it is a Greek innovation .

Secondly, as for terminology, democracy eliminates the existence of government in the hands of one person, and this is what researchers agreed upon, with different ideas and how to apply it according to the circumstances that each society lives in. Thus, the classical definition appeared, which is that it is the rule of the people, or the rule of the people for themselves by the people, and in the name of the people, and the people choose their rulers.

In order to implement democracy, several forms have been known, including direct, representative, and participatory.

1-2- The emergence of participatory democracy

Theories of participatory democracy that emerged in the 1960s are experiencing a revival today. In the pursuit of a larger vision of social justice, they situate the intrinsic value of participation at their core. With contemporary roots in Dewey's work ; inspiring a vision of democracy that strives for deep structural transformations, participatory democrats aim to realize democracy's unfulfilled promise of popular self-government. In contrast to elite-driven conceptions of liberal democracy confined to institutional arrangements, in participatory democracy political engagement becomes an everyday practice in a variety of participatory spaces including worker-own businesses and self-managed workplaces, neighborhood associations, , educational facilities and public services, and the criminal justice system. These participatory spaces function as "schools of democracy" that afford empowerment and personal development .

A rich and growing field of democratic innovation has developed over the last three decades bridging participatory and deliberative democracy.

Democratic innovations have the ambition to strengthen citizens' role in governing and often advancing social justice through a more equitable resource distribution. Recent literature and practice stress the structural nature of inequalities and the systemic form a participatory response needs to take to further social justice. Citizen participation, according to this argument, requires institutionalization to tackle structural oppression in a sustainable manner .

Theories of participatory democracy increasingly recognize the limits of focusing inordinately on institutional design, at the expense of paying sufficient attention to how new participatory institutions, such as citizens' assemblies or participatory budgets, function within existing political and socio-economic contexts. Participatory institutions can sometimes have a limited impact on policy change. They can be prone to cooptation, or bypass and even alienate civil society and grassroots action, and in so doing depoliticize participation .4

1-3- Definition of participatory democracy

Participatory democracy happens when individual citizens of a democracy participate in the formation of policies and laws through consistent engagement. Participatory refers to something that involves active participation. Democracy is a form of government in which power is held by the people. If the people themselves vote directly on policies and laws, it is called a direct democracy. If they elect representatives to make laws and policies, it is called a representative democracy. The term participatory democracy refers to something somewhere in between: the people elect leaders but also play a role in forming policies. Participatory democracy is all about participation. Its goal is to ensure that all citizens, not just politicians, have a real say in the creation of the rules and programs that make up their government.⁵

Understand participatory democracy, a governance model where citizens directly shape decisions .Unlike representative democracy, where power is delegated to elected officials, this model emphasizes direct engagement in the decision-making process.

we discuss this concept more deeply, by present of its core definitions :

- Participatory democracy is a model of democracy that encourages active involvement by citizens in the governance and decision-making processes. Unlike traditional representative democracy, where citizens elect officials to make decisions on their behalf, participatory democracy seeks to involve citizens directly in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of policies and laws.⁶

- The philosophy behind participatory democracy centers on the belief that individuals should have a direct say in the policies and decisions affecting them. This approach seeks to empower citizens, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for collective outcomes. Direct involvement enhances the legitimacy of decisions and promotes greater accountability from governing bodies.⁷
- It as providing appropriate means and mechanisms for local citizens, such as individuals and groups, in order to contribute to the decision-making process.⁸
- A set of procedures, means and mechanisms that allow the citizen to engage directly in the management of public affairs, i.e. participate in decisions that have a direct impact on public affairs.⁹

Second subtitle: Normative foundations and objectives of participatory democracy

2-1-Principles of participatory democracy

Participatory democracy has several principles that must be present, which are limited to the following:

- 1- Human rights, as it is necessary for the citizen to have a reserved right in order for his participation to be in decision-making.
- 2- Citizenship: respecting duties, enjoying rights vis-à-vis the state and society, and preserving the public interest.
- 3- Party pluralism, which results in developing transparency, whether political or even cultural, without power being based on a specific party.

Some limit the general principles of participatory democracy to the following principles:¹⁰

- The right to expression, freedom of opinion and access to information
- Ensuring effectiveness and participation in all stages of the decision from completion to implementation
- Providing participation frameworks (location, material resources).
- Legal guarantees for establishing participatory comparison

- Applying the principle of comprehensive participation for all segments of society without exclusion
- Codifying participation tools and mechanisms to establish an interactive participatory approach with all participating groups
- Ensuring effective and genuine participation in all stages of decision-making, starting from the completion stage and ending with implementation (identifying needs, planning, implementation, evaluation.)
- Spreading the culture and values of citizenship and the duties and rights it entails towards the state and towards society, so that the private interest does not overshadow the public interest.

2-2-Objectives of participatory democracy

The goals of participatory democracy lie in involving citizens in decision-making processes :

- 1-It consists of improving management affairs through track activities, decision-making, and conflict and conflict prevention .
- 2-Participatory democracy is considered filling the gaps in representative democracy and trying to reform it.
- 3-The economic and cultural importance expected from involving citizens directly in submitting proposals to the central authority in general .
- 4-Participatory democracy is an effective democracy in solving problems, ensuring everyone's involvement, and providing social security.

Second main title: Components and mechanisms of actual implementation and participatory democracy

Participatory democracy, in its concept that is closely linked to the citizen, presents us with the necessity of having foundations and components in order to achieve its goals.

First subtitle: Conditions for participatory democracy

To embody participatory democracy, a set of conditions must be met, including the following:¹¹

- A- The existence of an organized civil society, i.e. structured into social, cultural and economic associations and institutions

It frames citizens in various fields, and civil society must be distinct from society political "political institutions" and independent of them; It is also required to be representative .

B- Providing adequate, multiple and diverse media to citizens, so that they can be informed of affairs

Generality; It allows them to form opinions on the issues raised, and this media should be independent .Also as a manifestation of civil society.

C- Providing permanent and effective means of communication for all, as achieved by modern media technologies and communication, especially the Internet, television and telephone, with all the modern services they include, in addition to other written means such as announcing municipal deliberations and decisions to enable citizens to be informed, participate and communicate their opinions.

D- Establishing a legal framework based on the need to involve citizens in discussion and decision-making

By making it mandatory for local community decisions and legal texts to be at the parliamentary level a subject of prior public dialogue and discussion.

E- It is mandatory for elected bodies to take into account the opinions and suggestions of citizens, and in the event that it is not possible.

Therefore, its refusal must be justified and explained so that participation has an effective impact by expanding areas of representation through elections to other various monitoring sectors; By establishing various councils accompanying and benefiting from them.

D- Distributing methods of popular oversight at the level of implementation and application of decisions issued by local groups and facilities to enshrine the right to claim before the judiciary for every interested party, especially civil society.

Second subtitle: The foundations of existence and motives for response in the participatory democracy model.

Given the many accumulations that countries have gone through, which are considered a reason for the emergence of participatory democracy, including the completion of what was brought by representative democracy, which was

criticized, where the role of the citizen stops at the ballot box, so the voter gives up power to the representative, and in the event that the elected officials do not meet the needs of the citizen, trust falls and democracy is not embodied, which makes development programs described as templates without content. 12

The reluctance witnessed in the elections, and the failure to vote or express an opinion, is the result of rejecting a certain political system that the citizen does not see as meeting his needs for equality or freedom.

The state is no longer the only one responsible for public decision-making, but has ceded some of its roles to new actors, with the exception of issues related to sovereignty that directly affect national security.¹³

Hence, the concept of the participatory approach emerged .

Although many countries rely on decentralization and opening the way for citizens, the problem of communication remains, especially in the regions, in order to reach citizen satisfaction in all fields and regions.

Third main title : Institutional and technical engineering for the CapDel program.

The CapDel Program (Participatory Democracy and Local Development); is a program promoted by the Ministry of the Interior, Local Communities and Local Development and the United Nations Development Program, with support from the European Union. By supporting the capacities of local actors in local development, the program aims to promote consultative and transparent local governance, enhance social cohesion, and foster a cohesive and diversified local economy. Kapdel's approach is implemented at the level of model municipalities representing the richness and diversity of the national territory: Baber (Khenchla); Djanet (Ilizie); Djanet (Setif); karoub (Constantine); Ghazaouet (Tlemcen); Messaad (Djelfa); Ouled Ben Abdelkader (Chlef) and Timimoun (Adrar).

The Program for Supporting the capacities of local development actors (CAPDEL) was not just a passing technical project, but rather represented a sociological laboratory for trying to reformulate the social contract between the local administration and the citizen in Algeria; His strategy aimed to move

the municipality from the role of a 'rigid administrative facility to the role of a 'dynamic development actor'.¹¹ This structural transformation required the establishment of an arsenal of field mechanisms, most notably the New Generation Municipal Development Plan' (PCD-GN), which was designed to be a tool for participatory strategic planning based on the needs of the real population.¹⁴

However, a close reading of the implementation paths of these mechanisms in the ten model municipalities reveals the existence of research 'shadow areas' that have not received the same analysis as in previous studies; where the program's modernizing ambition collided with a solid sociological wall, represented by the implicit resistance to the traditional bureaucratic apparatus, which sees citizen involvement as a threat to its functional sovereignty and inherited powers.¹³ This often led to a hidden conflict between the 'electoral legitimacy' of the elected officials and the 'participatory legitimacy' of the new social actors.¹⁵

Moreover, a clear technical gap emerges in the program's mechanisms, represented by the complete reliance on physical encounters and physical presence, with an almost complete absence of 'digital citizenship' and electronic participation (E-Participation) mechanisms, which contradicts the directions of the National Strategy for Digital Transformation Horizon 2030, which seeks to digitize local governance as a condition for its sustainability.¹⁶

In this section, we will dismantle these mechanisms in the field, highlighting these gaps that prevented the transformation of participation from a temporary model experience into a sustainable institutional culture.

First subtitle: Institutional engineering of local consultation mechanisms: a model of municipal advisory councils.

Participatory democracy is one of the most important concepts that has received increasing attention in the management of local public affairs. In order to embody the axes of the CapDel Program for Participatory Local Development, especially the three major axes related to managing major risks, modernizing public service, and local economic development, the first axis

related to participatory democracy must be implemented, which will serve all other steps of the program's implementation.

In this requirement, we touched on participatory planning engineering and the role of local advisory bodies (CapDel program model)

This axis focuses on the institutional and field aspects of how to transform "consultation" into an executive tool for development, and includes the following points:

1-The new generation municipal plan as an integrated advisory approach:

- This scheme goes from being just a "project list" to a "strategic context" based on participatory diagnosis.
- The role of municipal advisory councils (introduced by the CAPDel program) in breaking the centralization of decision-making, as these councils become the link between local administration and civil society to ensure comprehensive planning (economic, social and environmental integration).

Embodying real local development with a qualitative leap at the municipal level based on CapDel approach necessitated the launch of the embodiment of the first axes of the program, which relate to the axis of participatory democracy and joint work between local actors, which will establish the mechanism of the advisory council that will accompany the implementation and embodiment of the various axes of the program, either through direct work or through accompaniment.

Among the tasks of these municipal advisory councils are that they are permanent mechanisms for dialogue, consultation, and citizen consultation between representatives of various categories of civil society actors (associations, professional organizations, neighborhood committees, economic operators, youth, women, and people with special needs), who have been appointed to the municipal people's councils to participate in the management of municipal public affairs, alongside elected officials and the local administration.

The Capdel program was accompanied by the establishment of municipal advisory councils at the level of 7 model municipalities

during the years 2018 and 2019: Djanet; Djemila; Messaad; El Kharoub; El Ghazouet; Timimoun; and Ouled Ben Abdelkader.) The work of these councils is based on the Municipal Charter for Citizen Participation, which was adopted through deliberation by those elected to the municipal people's councils.

Since their establishment, the Municipal Advisory Councils have actively contributed to the preparation of the first municipal development plan “of the new generation”, based on a shared vision for the future of the region and its development priorities identified among local actors, and specific action strategies according to a regional approach for comprehensive, integrated and sustainable development.¹⁷

Within the framework of establishing the regional consensus and agreement mechanism, the Municipal Advisory Council was established.

In this regard, the program, through its founders, was supposed to hold preparatory meetings, the aim of which was to introduce the program, prepare the local community, and mobilize the concerned parties to contribute to the mechanisms of regional consensus and agreement. Preparations were made to install the Municipal Advisory Council, which includes various segments of society at the municipal level.¹⁸

This was done by involving the Municipal Advisory Council with its various bodies, categories and members. It was necessary for the Cabdal Program Directorate to support this council with training courses and Workshops to support the capabilities of its various categories, especially in the cognitive and applied aspects of the process of preparing the new generation municipal plan.

This stage witnessed several steps, including appointing representations of citizens and local actors and their seat shares in the council, and secondly, electing representatives of the groups to form members of the office of the Municipal Advisory Council.

Then we move on to preparing the new generation municipal plan ; in order to prepare the municipal development plan for a new generation, program experts developed a set of sequential methodological steps.⁹

In an analytical reading of this part, despite the strategic importance that the "Capdel" program ; brought in re-engineering local advice, the transition from the "sectoral projects" model to "participatory strategic planning" faces structural obstacles that can be monitored in the following critical points:

1- The dilemma of the conflict between electoral legitimacy and participatory legitimacy:

Municipal advisory councils lack a "binding legal basis" in the current Municipal Law (01-11), making their advisory role optional depending on the "will" of the President of the Municipal People's Council. This situation creates a kind of institutional fragility, as these councils are sometimes viewed as a parallel entity that may pull the rug out from under elected officials, generating administrative resistance that hinders the implementation of participatory diagnosis outcomes.²⁰

2- The problem of financial sustainability and dependency on the center:

Building a "new generation municipal plan" requires financial flexibility that the Algerian municipality does not currently have. ²⁰The criticism directed here is that these plans, despite the accuracy of their participatory diagnosis, collide with a central financial system (the traditional budget system), which makes the implementation of the priorities of the "Advisory Council" dependent on state or ministerial approval, and this empties the concept of "participatory democracy" of its independent development content.²¹

3-The challenge of qualitative representation (the risk of elite takeover):

It is noted in some field experiments that the selection of members of advisory councils may fall into the trap of "local clientelism" or the dominance of traditional associations, leading to the exclusion of the most vulnerable groups (unstructured youth, women in shadow areas). The absence of technical mechanisms to ensure "fair representation" may turn these councils into tools for passing management decisions with a formal participatory character.²²

4-Shortening participatory channels: the stereotype of "in-person meetings" and the marginalization of the digital space

The field practice of the CapDel program demonstrates a remarkable commitment to the "physical participation" model through traditional meetings, which represents a modern obstacle to comprehensive consultation. This is evident in the following:

- Limited temporal and geographical scope: Limiting participatory democracy to meetings inside municipal meeting rooms automatically eliminates the most vital groups (youth, professional frameworks, and students) whose obligations prevent physical attendance. This pattern reinforces the presence of "traditional elites" and prevents the voice of the "digital citizen" from being heard.

- Absence of digital mechanisms for interaction (E-participation): Model municipalities lack interactive platforms that allow them to contribute to remote "participatory diagnosis." This marginalization of the digital deprives the program of the massive data and accurate technical opinions that digital civil society can provide, leaving the outcomes of advisory boards locked into the "view of the audience alone".

- Weak oversight and interactive transparency: The absence of publicly available digital documentation of the course of decisions weakens the principle of social accountability, as minutes of meetings remain locked in paper drawers, instead of being digital platforms that allow citizens to track the outcome of their proposals moment by moment.²³

Based on the above-mentioned communication and field obstacles, digital transformation emerges as an inevitable necessity to overcome the "dilemma of physical presence" that has restricted the effectiveness of advisory councils. Despite the advanced methodology provided by the CapDaL program in Algeria, a critical reading of the technical path reveals a clear "digital divide"; While Italian municipalities have made advanced steps in enhancing civic engagement through fourth-generation tools such as "urban digital twins" (Urban Digital Twins) that allow development decisions and

their impacts to be simulated in virtual environments prior to implementation, the technical aspect in Algeria still depends almost entirely on "Material participation and tangible encounters.

Linking the two experiences highlights the urgent need to draw inspiration from the Italian model in balancing "online" (Online) and "on the ground" (On-site) engagement, so as to transform "local workshops" from their traditional, monotonous character into interactive digital platforms that ensure the integration of residents of "shadow areas" into the process of remote regional diagnosis. This approach does not represent a technical luxury, but rather an inevitable response to the requirements of the "Digital Algeria 2030" strategy, which seeks to digitize local government as a condition for its sustainability and achieve "cognitive justice" in access to information and decision-making.²⁴

Second subtitle: Analysis of the methodology of the new generation municipal development plan

The municipal development plan is a comprehensive plan for development in the municipality, which came to establish the principles of decentralization at the level of local authorities. Its function is to provide the necessary needs for citizens and support the economic base, and includes all basic, agricultural and completion equipment.

It aims to establish and strengthen local ties, and unify and create a representative group that includes individuals, groups, organizations and institutions within the region of one municipality. This enables the mobilization of forces capable of working to improve the local situation and achieve local development. It also expresses the efforts made to govern consultative local government.²⁵

The new generation municipal development plan is approved by the elected municipal people's council for a five-year term of its electoral term. Therefore, the new generation municipal development plan has a triple function, which is:

*It forms a strategic plan that presents the vision for the future development of the municipality and the goals to be achieved.

*It constitutes a regional planning tool that makes it possible to organize the municipality and control sectoral choices.

*It constitutes a local development mechanism that can mobilize all stakeholders to improve the quality of life within the territory of a single municipality.²⁶

Achieving local development and bringing about positive change at the local community level is everyone's responsibility, and the participatory approach in managing municipal space contributes to creating lasting development, as the developmental impact of local strategic planning is through:

2-1- Upgrading the participatory approach : from consultation to partnership

The development impact in this aspect is evident through:

***Institutionalizing local dialogue:** Participation is no longer just spontaneous meetings, but is embodied in "municipal advisory councils" that ensure broader representation (women, youth, people with special needs), ensuring that development projects express the real needs of the local community. (participatory legitimacy)

***Participatory territorial diagnosis:** The impact here is technical and scientific; Data is collected from the field through neighborhood workshops, allowing the municipality to obtain an accurate database about its resources and weaknesses, which increases the efficiency of allocating limited resources.

***Enhancing trust and shared responsibility:** By involving citizens in setting priorities, they transform from "service consumers" to "development partners," reducing local conflicts over project arrangements and increasing the preservation of development gains.

2-2- Participatory strategic vision of the plan (PCD-GN)

The strategic vision of the "CapDel" program moves from a narrow sectoral view to a comprehensive view of the municipality:

*Achieving local development: The plan does not focus only on solving current problems, but rather sets a future vision for the municipality based on

its economic potential and competitive advantage (agriculture, tourism, industry), ensuring sustainable development.

*Shifting from social to economic logic: The participatory strategic vision seeks to make the municipality an "economic actor" capable of creating wealth and jobs, instead of its traditional role as a "distributor of subsidies", by encouraging local investment and valuing available resources.

*Contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: The participatory vision ensures that projects are consistent with national and state plans, while preserving local specificity, preventing conflicts of authority and achieving greater effectiveness in implementation.

The process of preparing the New Generation Municipal Development Plan (PCD-NG) within the framework of the CapDel program is based on a systematic process consisting of sequential steps, aiming to move the municipality from the logic of "expenditure management" to the logic of "strategic development engineering."

Methodological steps for preparing the municipal development plan (new generation)

1-Preparation and launch: Forming a municipal planning team, mobilizing the necessary human and technical resources, and launching an information campaign for citizens about the path general directorate of local communities.

2-Participatory regional diagnosis: collecting statistical and field data through "neighborhood workshops", where untapped potential and deep problems experienced by residents are identified: 28

***Defining the strategic vision:** Formulating a "regional project" that defines what the local community wants their municipality to be within 10 years (e.g., a leading municipality in the green economy).29.

***Defining strategic axes:** Translating the vision into major axes (such as: strengthening local food security, promoting mountain tourism, improving digital public service.

3-Project programming and operations: selecting priority projects that serve the strategic vision, taking into account financial and technical feasibility .30

4-Approval and agreement: Presenting the plan to the Municipal Advisory Council and the Municipal People's Council for approval, to ensure "community consensus" on priorities.

5-Monitoring and evaluation: Develop a "dashboard" containing performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor the extent to which goals are achieved on the ground and evaluate the development impact .31

Examining these methodological steps reveals an application gap. While the seven steps appear technically complementary, their implementation collides with the limited legal powers of mayors to change the destination of financial appropriations directed from the center, making 'strategic programming' (step five) merely an intellectual exercise if it is not approved by the state guardianship.³²

Hence, we find that upgrading the participatory approach requires transforming the municipal plan from a consultative document into a development contract binding on all parties.

However, in contrast to this ambitious path, a paradox emerges between the modernization of technical tools represented by the "new generation municipal plan" and the stagnation of local administrative culture, which still views advisory councils as a secondary entity, which prompts us to present the following critical reading on the transition from formal institutionalization to development effectiveness:

Although the "CapDel Program" model has succeeded in establishing the structural framework for municipal advisory councils, the transition to the "new generation" of municipal planning faces fundamental challenges that require analysis. First, the problem of "participatory legitimacy" versus "electoral legitimacy" arises; Advisory councils, as not directly elected entities, may sometimes encounter resistance from municipal people's councils, which may see these structures as a competitor in decision-making authority rather than a technical partner. ³³

Second, the success of the experiment in the model municipalities was driven by external support and intensive training, raising the question of "institutional sustainability": Does the Algerian municipality, under its current

laws, have the capacity to independently finance and manage these councils after the program's support ends?.³⁴

Third, moving from a "project list" to a "strategic vision" requires a revolution in local administrative culture. The criticism here is that the new municipal plans may remain trapped in "bureaucratic logic" if this is not coupled with granting real financial independence to municipalities, as there is no point in an accurate participatory diagnosis if funding sources remain centralized and linked to ministerial sectors far from the field. ³⁵

Accordingly, we propose that developing this axis entails moving from "optional consultation" to "legally mandatory" within the upcoming municipal law, with mechanisms in place to evaluate the impact of these councils' recommendations on the final plans, to ensure that participatory work does not become a mere cosmetic facade for administrative decisions.³⁶

Conclusion:

This study concluded that bridging the gap between normative theories of participatory democracy and field practices of participatory research represents a strategic necessity for achieving "epistemological justice" (Epistemic Justice). Experience has shown, through an analysis of the CapDel programme in Algeria, that the success of the transition to local governance does not stop at designing institutional structures alone, but extends to the extent to which these structures are able to absorb citizens' local knowledge and transform it into rational development decisions.

The study reveals that mutual learning between "theory" and "practice" forces a shift beyond the logic of formal participation toward "actual partnership," which requires addressing the structural barriers of financial centralization and the digital divide. In conclusion, the municipality's transition from a mere administrative facility to an economic and democratic actor requires political will to establish a "participatory legitimacy" parallel to electoral legitimacy, ensuring the sustainability of local development in light of contemporary challenges.

Recommendations and Suggestions :**First: Recommendations**

- 1- Updating the legal system: The need to expedite the review of Municipal Law (01-11) and State Law, to demarcate "municipal advisory councils" as permanent legal entities and not just circumstantial committees, while clearly defining their powers to avoid their overlap with the powers of elected officials.
- 2- Constitutionalizing participation: Strengthening legal protection for the right to access local information, ensuring that civil society exercises its oversight and advisory role based on accurate data.
- 3- Financial independence: Granting municipalities real financial independence that allows them to implement the outcomes of the "New Generation Municipal Development Plan" without waiting for the central financial visa for each individual project.
- 4- Establishing digital governance: Activating interactive electronic platforms that allow citizens in remote areas (shadow areas) to participate in regional diagnosis and vote on development priorities remotely, in line with the "Digital Algeria 2030" strategy.
- 5- Building regional data bases: It is necessary to provide municipalities with geographic information systems, that assist in "participatory regional diagnosis" to ensure that investments are directed towards the most productive sectors based on realistic numbers.
- 6- Investing in human capital: Organizing continuous training courses for elected officials and local employees to change the "administrative doctrine" from rigid bureaucratic management to open participatory management.
- 7- Adopting an economic approach: Encouraging municipalities to exploit their productive assets and value local resources (tourism, agriculture, and traditional industries) to transform them into "economic institutions" that create jobs and contribute to national food security.
- 8- Ensuring qualitative representation: Establishing mechanisms to ensure the awareness of marginalized groups (unstructured youth, stay-at-home women,

people with special needs) within advisory councils to ensure that "participatory legitimacy" is comprehensive and not limited to "local elites".

Second : Suggestions

1-Integrating knowledge: The need to integrate participatory research outcomes into the formulation of local public policies.

2-The intersection of participatory democracy and digitalization: moving from in-person to digital participation to ensure fair representation. It is the ideal solution to address the "dilemma of physical presence," because digital platforms allow groups commonly described as "silent" or "busy" (such as youth, professionals, and women) to contribute to participatory diagnosis anytime, anywhere.

3-Legislative reform: Transforming Cabdel's mechanisms from a model experiment into a binding law within the local community system.

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