

Population participation in urban development: Obstacles and activation mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

Through this paper, we attempt to discuss the topic of population participation in urban development. Population participation has become both a demand and a necessary condition for producing quality cities that provide a comfortable urban life for residents. Given the significance and active role of population participation in the development of their cities, we have sought to understand how they contribute to the urban development of cities. Thus, we embarked on this study with a primary question: How does community participation contribute to urban development? To answer this question, we first attempted to elucidate the importance and role of community participation in the urban development of cities. Additionally, we presented an overview of the degrees and levels of this participation, acknowledging the existence of impediments that hinder its effectiveness and success. Consequently, we identified various anticipated obstacles that could confront the process of community participation. In conclusion, we presented some mechanisms through which population engagement in urban development can be activated and enhanced, with a resulting impact on the overall development process.

1. Introduction

Urban development is considered one of the most prominent aspects of comprehensive and sustainable development, referring to the directed changes that affect a city. The interest in this type of development has grown with the increasing urban population as well as the rapid expansion and urbanization experienced by major cities. This necessitates more technological, economic, and service projects to ensure a better urban living environment for residents. Additionally, it contributes to the elevation of the cultural, economic, and civilizational levels of these cities.

On the other hand, urban development, as a concept, represents a collaborative process that necessitates the consolidation of efforts from various social actors to ensure its sustainability in accordance with the daily life requirements of individuals and the community. This implies that the responsibility for organizing and developing cities is a collective duty that begins with the state and its various institutions and extends to the individual, who is considered influential and a key link in the developmental chain of cities. This is because the individual constitutes the foundation of residential communities and their focal point, making their participation in the organization of this urban domain and its preservation a crucial necessity to ensure the continuity of balanced urbanization.

Therefore, the modern perspective on development explores means that open the door to individual and collective initiatives with the aim of harnessing all human and material potentials available in society. Consequently, it relies on the principle of participation across all fields, levels, and domains, working towards creating a social, economic, and political environment that encourages the emergence of creativity, innovations, and ideas for effective and productive engagement. In light of this perspective, community participation in urban development is not merely a tool but rather a crucial element to ensure the success of the developmental process. Participation works to unify the efforts of community members with those of official authorities, resulting in the success of plans and developmental policies

within the local and overall community.

The topic of population participation and its role in urban development holds significant importance in light of the social, economic, and political conditions experienced by most cities worldwide, especially those in the third world. Governments, particularly in these third-world cities, are striving to strengthen the foundations of local governance and move towards decentralization by encouraging the active involvement of the population in the development process. In our current study, we embark on the exploration of the following question: How does community participation contribute to urban development? Subsidiary questions include:

- What is the role of community participation in urban development?
- What are the obstacles to community participation in urban development?

The aim of our study is to understand the concept of population participation and the meaning of urban development. Additionally, we emphasize the significance of involving the population in contributing to the success of development projects, thereby fostering the growth and prosperity of the city.

The main reason that prompted us to investigate this topic is the dire conditions of the neighborhoods in Algerian cities and the ongoing urban decay in our cities, especially in the deep-rooted and historic districts. All of this has driven us to explore the reasons behind the lack of activation of the population participation strategy, despite it being a global demand advocated by all countries and encouraged for adoption. Therefore, it is necessary to examine this phenomenon and discuss the possibility of opening the field for residents to organize and develop their urban space.

The importance of this research paper lies in several aspects:

the significance and role of population participation in the success of development projects in the city. Therefore, it is essential to address this topic and understand the various obstacles that hinder effective participation in urban development projects.

Population participation enhances the residents' ability to take responsibility and fosters a culture based on dialogue and rationality. This is particularly needed in Algerian society, which lacks a culture of dialogue, cooperation, and contribution for the benefit of all.

Population participation promotes democratic values and transparency between local authorities and residents. The Algerian administration has experienced and continues to face challenges in this regard. Hence, it is crucial to avoid anything that obstructs the strategy of population participation, ensuring it extends beyond election participation and opens up various avenues for involvement.

2. Defining the concepts of the study

2.1. Population participation

The term "population participation" is one of the modern terms with multiple definitions that vary from one country to another and even within the same country. This variability is attributed to the diverse disciplines that have studied this concept.

Dr. Hala Mansour defines empowerment as the process through which an individual plays a positive role in various dimensions of social life, having the opportunity to participate at any level of development and its diverse processes. This necessitates a minimum level of awareness, education, and training to ensure the positivity of this participation and its positive interaction within the societal framework.

The term "community participation" also refers to the process through which an individual actively and voluntarily contributes to shaping the public lifestyle in social, economic, and political aspects. This involves providing individuals with full opportunities to participate in establishing the overall goals of the community movement and envisioning the best means to achieve these objectives (Habshi & Ben-Alhaj, p. 116).

The focus here is on population participation in development. According to Hay, population participation means voluntary contribution in the relationship between the individual and the community, as well as between one community and another. In the same vein, Dr. Abdel-Moneim Shoukry sees population participation as the voluntary contribution of citizens to development activities, whether through opinion, action, financing, or otherwise. Moreover, participation is considered the degree to which people sense their local problems and their response to solving these problems (Al-Halabi, 2005, pp. 8–9).

It can be inferred that population participation, in its developmental sense, refers to the involvement of individuals to varying degrees in the design and supervision of the implementation of local development policies and projects. This involvement may take the form of their own efforts or through collaboration with central and local government agencies (Barkat, p. 66).

Based on the foregoing, population participation in urban development is not merely a tool but rather a crucial element in achieving an effective development process. Local, regional, and national involvement of residents means that development starts from the grassroots and moves towards the apex of the pyramid. In other words, the development process originates from the bottom, and participation serves to connect the efforts of individuals in the local community with the central government. This makes it one of the most important pillars for the success of development plans, projects, and policies in society. It should be noted that it is characterized as voluntary efforts by the residents, who seek through them the development and improvement of their neighborhoods. This participation can either be through the establishment of projects and programs through self-initiative in urban areas or through participating in expressing opinions and enriching decisions related to urban development processes in their neighborhoods and cities.

2.2. Urban development

Manal Talat Mahmoud sees urban development as a collective, cooperative, and democratic effort that encourages citizen participation. This participation is guided, organized, and directed towards achieving and instigating the desired social change with the aim of transferring the urban community from a specific social condition to a better one. The ultimate goal is to elevate and coordinate the economic and social standard of living for people (Betayeb, 2017, p. 54).

In another definition of urban development, it refers to "directed changes that affect the city; these changes encompass housing and the construction of towering buildings, the establishment of streets and neighborhoods, as well as tree planting (Rashwan, 2004, p. 17).

Based on the aforementioned, regarding the definition of urban development, it can be stated that it represents a collective, cooperative, democratic, and voluntary effort that encourages the participation of residents in bringing about change in the city. These changes encompass housing and buildings, improving streets and neighborhoods, planting trees, conducting cleanliness campaigns, creating green spaces, and preserving them, all with the aim of raising and coordinating the living standards of the population in urban neighborhoods, as well as enhancing and organizing the urban landscape of cities.

3. The importance and objectives of population participation in urban development

The studies conducted on the subject of development in third-world countries, specifically in the late twentieth century, pointed to the significance of population participation in local urban development and its inevitability. This is because it works towards aligning the services provided to the local population with their self-identified needs. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for various segments of society to participate and play a positive role in supporting, implementing, and monitoring the progress of development projects in their community. Furthermore, it contributes to the rationalization of the distribution of services among different social groups and levels within the community.

Participation also works to enhance the cohesion of community members and strengthen collaborative aspects between them and the government by providing the opportunity for democratic practice through the dedication to the decentralized management approach (Barkat, p. 66). In addition to those socio-political goals, there is another set of objectives that can be achieved through the adoption of a strategy for community engagement in urban development. These objectives have an economic nature and involve reducing costs and easing the burden on the government by

optimally utilizing local resources within the community (Betayeb, 2017, p. 78); this includes avoiding the squandering of public funds on projects that do not benefit the population.

Population participation has other objectives on an ethical level for individuals. It works on training the individual to bear responsibility and supports their sense of duty, enhancing their social awareness. This leads to the encouragement of participation and facilitates its vertical extension (between the population and authorities) and horizontal extension (among the population themselves). Through this, individuals become accustomed to being vigilant about available resources by combining their efforts with those of the state to achieve developmental goals at the local and national levels (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 247).

From this perspective, population participation works towards achieving the following goals (Qiyati, 2017, pp. 78-79):

- Cost reduction: It operates by streamlining decisions and prioritizing based on the needs of the population, thereby achieving optimal utilization and efficiency of available local resources.
- Ensuring public and community support for projects: Participation is a means to bridge the gap between the needs and demands of the population and the reality of available local resources, achieving satisfaction and support from the local population for developmental projects.
- Directing local resources towards productive projects: In the absence of participation, popular pressures tend to focus on material or consumptive needs, overlooking the significance of independent developmental productive projects. Therefore, community engagement works towards directing local resources towards productive projects rather than consumptive needs, which positively impacts the lives of participants in the medium and long term.
- Enhancing project effectiveness: This is achieved through providing authentic data about the reality of local communities and establishing a framework of healthy relationships that respect the values and customs of society, in addition to ensuring integration and mutual collaboration between national and local development levels.
- Optimizing the utilization of social assistance: Participation has become a requirement for international organizations to ensure the optimal use of aid and direct it in favor of the masses. This poses a challenge for governments to enhance population participation in meeting the demands of international organizations.

4. Levels of population participation in the development process

Before delving into the realms of community involvement in urban development, it is essential first to understand the levels or degrees of population participation in the developmental process in general. These levels can be outlined as follows:

4.1. Participation in the plan preparation stage

The urban development planning phase is considered one of the most crucial stages in urban development. During this phase, various characteristics of the community are identified, and problems and needs are determined. Information exchange occurs between government officials and residents, involving discussions on projects, their alternatives, and prioritization. The significance of this stage lies in its ability to empower the population to influence the administration, ensuring alignment of the plan with their needs. Temporally, participation processes are distributed between the stage of information gathering and the stage of framing the general plan. The crucial point here is to emphasize participation when framing the general plan, facilitating its subsequent discussion and incorporation of modifications. In this stage, various forms of engagement include meetings, visits, surveys, limited discussions, and then expanded public meetings following the drafting of the plan report. The plan is distributed to the population and announced through various means. Officials then elucidate the plan and its objectives, followed by discussions and modifications, before the final decision is legally announced.

4.2. Participation in the implementation phase

The volume of participation is expected to increase during the implementation phase if the population engages in the preparation phase and the plan is responsive to their needs. Among the forms of participation in this stage is

voluntary self-help, which leads to a transformation of negative behavioral patterns into positive ones, and a reliance on self, especially in the face of limited resources of local authorities in particular.

4.3. Participation in oversight

Inverse feedback from the population constitutes a method of popular oversight and project evaluation. Through it, the efficiency and effectiveness of executive bodies are assessed. It serves as a successful tool for mitigating risks and deviations, as well as correcting the course of public projects (Qiyati, 2017, p. 81).

It is worth mentioning that population participation is supposed to take place generally at each stage of the development process. Furthermore, all members of society should have the right to participate, and if that is not feasible, representatives should be appointed to participate on their behalf, such as neighborhood committees or associations. It should also be noted that sometimes official authorities intervene to determine the type, organization, and regulation of participation. On the other hand, the process of community participation may face difficulties and obstacles arising from various reasons, preventing local authorities or residents from effectively contributing to urban development.

5. Areas of population participation in urban development

Urban development is a comprehensive development that encompasses various aspects; it concerns the political, social, and economic dimensions within a city, this entails identifying developmental areas in which urban residents participate, such as:

5.1. Citizens Participation in Political Development

Participation of city residents has long been associated with political engagement, granting individuals the opportunity to contribute to the establishment and formulation of the community's overarching political goals, as well as devising optimal means to achieve and accomplish these objectives. This opens the door to constructive collaboration between residents and governmental institutions.

5.2. Community Participation in Social Development

This refers to activities aimed at addressing various social problems that hinder the daily lives of residents; community participation typically occurs in two fundamental realms: firstly, through efforts to provide or facilitate essential local services needed by the community, often through volunteerism and self-resources. Secondly, it involves resolving daily problems and conflicts that may arise among individuals or groups within the community through peaceful means (Aaraar, 2015/2016, pp. 197–198). Such community involvement in development endeavors contributes to fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual support among members of society.

Population participation in the development and improvement of urban neighborhoods is considered one of the areas of participation whose social importance is highlighted by involving residents in the implementation of certain projects through self-efforts, gradually relieving the burden on the state. Additionally, it satisfies the community's need for change and utilizes the diverse energies and capabilities of participating residents, preparing them to shoulder social responsibility. The participation of citizens in social development transcends mere involvement; it extends to mitigating pollution issues, enhancing urban awareness among residents, thereby fostering increased community self-assurance, fostering collaborative capacity, and augmenting cooperative spirit within the local community. Moreover, it enriches decisions concerning urban development in city neighborhoods, as they become repositories of diverse experiences and information. Additionally, each participant becomes more attentive to issues and more receptive to outcomes, provided they have contributed to decision-making and implementation processes.

5.3. Population participation in economic development

Refers to the involvement of residents in economic development projects, contributing to decision-making regarding the planning, financing, and implementation of such projects. It also encompasses activities undertaken by individuals to support the national economy, such as paying taxes and fees. Additionally, individual efforts by urban residents, through establishing small or medium-sized enterprises in local communities, whether with their own funds or with support from official entities, contribute to the establishment of effective local economic development

initiatives. These initiatives aim to address latent unemployment in both major urban centers and rural areas, thereby alleviating the social pressures faced by various governments. Furthermore, they contribute to reducing poverty rates and narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas (Aaraar, 2015/2016, p. 200).

From this, we can briefly outline the participation of the population in the development process as follows:

- * Participation in project planning.
- * Participation in identifying demands and needs
- * Participation in project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of progress.

Through our examination of various domains through which the populace can be engaged in urban management, we find that this is manifested through two different approaches. The first involves direct participation in various forms of public intervention by intervening in the local urban space. The second approach is indirect, either through delegation or representation, as practiced in the system of elected councils.

Regarding direct methods: This process is carried out through direct intervention in the management of local affairs by involving the population, either through the restructuring and management of various facilities surrounding the neighborhood, or by intervening as intermediaries between the residents and various local authorities. It can be defined as (Ghaneem, 2001, p. 178) "the participation of various segments of the population, organizations, or organized groups targeted by governmental authorities in all matters related to the development process and at any stage thereof." It takes several forms, such as:

* **By suggestion** : Article 03 of Executive Decree No. 18/131, which regulates the relationship between the administration and the resident, asserts that the resident is required to contribute to improving the administration's performance by presenting effective suggestions aimed at achieving the public interest. This has been achieved by establishing suggestion and observation books across all local administrations (Berrim, 2017/2018, p. 50). Several questions come to mind here: Do administrations or local authorities take these suggestions recorded in the notebooks into consideration, or do they remain? Also, are residents aware of the existence of these notebooks? And if they are aware of them, do they actually take the initiative to jot down their suggestions regarding the developmental situation of their city? All of these questions remain in need of study, with the necessity of finding what prevents the realization of this step, which is considered one of the easiest and simplest methods of citizen participation.

* **Through referendums**: Referendum is considered one of the most important and newest methods for engaging the population in the public life of society. It involves consulting the residents on all projects of public intervention in the urban area. This form is used in the most advanced countries in terms of citizenship, decentralization, and participatory democracy.

* **Through protest**: This type of participation ensures the citizen's right to object in case of dissatisfaction with the interventions and actions of public administration. Executive Decree No. 131/88 has provided citizens with the opportunity to lodge appeals in case of dissatisfaction.

* **Social empowerment**: refers to the capacity for individual and collective responsibility. Many advanced nations have developed this form of intervention, referring to it in various legislative texts with terms such as labor authority, agency power, among others, granting citizens the ability to autonomously change their environment and build social awareness conducive to self-improvement (Dahbee, 2020/2021, p. 88).

For indirect methods: These may take the form of delegation or representation, whereby appointed delegates and representatives act on behalf of the population in conveying their concerns and proposals to decision-makers and local authorities; examples include:

* **Elected councils**: These are councils whose members are elected by the population to represent them in all public and official occasions and meetings, from the municipal council and its deputies to the members of parliament, all are concerned with conveying the concerns and proposals of the population.

* **Civil society:** refers to associations and neighborhood committees that are authorized by the authorities and serve as intermediaries between the population and the public administration and local authorities.

6. Obstacles to population participation in urban development

The importance and role of population participation in urban development have been highlighted in the preceding discussion. However, every society faces a set of obstacles that hinder the actual and genuine participation of its citizens in achieving urban development. Various reasons contribute to the reluctance to participate, whether they are political, social, or economic in nature. These reasons are necessarily linked to the citizens themselves or to organizations and civil society entities interested in urban development; local authorities may also impede population participation. These obstacles include, but are not limited to:

6.1. Obstacles stemming from the local population

* Cultural obstacles: Primarily, these are obstacles resulting from individuals in the local community adhering to their culture, such as kinship systems, class status, and tribalism, which entail various values regarding the importance of participating in influencing public local projects.

*The increase in illiteracy rates among the population, coupled with the spread of cultural and political illiteracy, contributes to a lack of social and political awareness among the populace.

*There is a deficit in societal and political consciousness, compounded by a lack of cultural awareness within the community regarding the significance of civic engagement. This leads to a lack of appreciation for its importance, as well as misconceptions surrounding it.

* The participant's passage through a negative experience while engaging in a project often renders them hesitant to participate in subsequent instances.

*The lack of free time among residents due to their engagement in daily livelihood matters further compounds this issue.

* Non-alignment of the projects requiring participation with important priorities from the participant's perspective is a significant challenge.

* The individual's low income level constitutes a major obstacle to engaging in urban development processes, as it diminishes the importance of attention factor towards developmental schemes, participation in them, and their evaluation.

* Loss of trust among residents in officials.

* Lack of clarity regarding the role of citizens in participation.

* The problem of rapid and unbalanced demographic growth, which is considered the most significant challenge facing urban development.

6.2. Barriers stemming from the nature of projects include

* Projects not being aligned with the basic needs and priorities of the population, or these projects being incompatible with the preferences and needs of certain segments of society, often resulting in their reluctance to engage and fear of participation.

* Lack of involvement of the population in all stages of the project, from study and planning to implementation, culminating in monitoring and evaluation.

* Following the projects away from the population mass.

* There is a deficiency in the services provided by these projects.

6.3. Political and administrative obstacles arise from

- * Political instability and a lack of firmness in implementing urban development plans.
- * Most municipalities fear openness to the population due to the potential increase in their demands, which often exceed the municipalities' capabilities.
- * Some mayors deliberately refrain from involving the residents in order to cover up the scandals they commit, especially since most of the news circulating about local elected officials indicates the presence of misconduct and the referral of their cases to justice, especially regarding development projects. Moreover, most of the deliberations are not suspended according to the law but are endorsed by the municipal authorities, and are approved by the district's interests without taking the opinion of the residents into account as stipulated by the deliberation law (Betayeb, 2017, pp. 59-60).
- * The poor relations between local authorities and the populace create a gap between them.
- * The incapacity of professional leaders to identify, train, and engage with grassroots leaders hinders their ability to combat successful grassroots leadership.

6.4. Obstacles associated with population participation itself

Participation itself can contribute to creating a kind of conflict and disagreement between the residents on the one hand and the experts and technicians in local authorities on the other hand regarding the authority to make decisions. Experts are relied upon because they are responsible for decision-making in their units, while residents believe they are more capable of determining their priorities. Additionally, the problem of varying needs among the population based on their different categories and social classes may pose a challenge to arranging solutions for local problems (Ghaneem, 2001, p. 179).

6.5. Obstacles related to the shortcomings of media

whether through various forms of journalism or across different social media platforms in disseminating a culture of civic participation.

7. Mechanisms for activating population participation in urban development

Perhaps the most important and effective mechanisms for enhancing and activating population participation are those that are linked to and classified within the patterns related to the degrees of participation mentioned earlier. The following table illustrates these patterns, providing examples for each. It should be noted that these mechanisms serve population participation at the levels associated with local municipality and city planning, ensuring the achievement of urban development at its level.

Table illustrating mechanisms for activating population participation in urban development

Type	Sharing mechanism	Activation methods of participation
The participation in the planning phase	show	Placing images, advertisements, and informational brochures about future developmental projects and plans prominently in the city center serves to inform residents through informal means and ensures accessibility at all times
	Public meetings and sessions	Organizing public meetings to inform the community about projects, providing them with information about the objectives of the development project. Additionally, allowing all

		individuals to express their opinions and comment on the proposed development plan, as well as to offer suggestions.
	The Media and Communication	Utilizing local newspapers and radio stations, as well as establishing a webpage on the internet, to disseminate information to residents regarding the developmental plan in the city.
The participation in the implementation phase	Workshops	Conducting official mini-meetings, which involve presenting and discussing project stages before volunteer participants from the local community, enhances interaction with individuals from the local community. Moreover, it serves as an excellent mechanism for critical discussion and problem-solving.
	Volunteering	The voluntary provision of self-help by residents, such as relying on self-reliance to address some urban problems, especially in light of the inadequacy or limitations of local authorities' capabilities. This can be through providing financial support or physical labor for developmental projects in the city, as well as taking the initiative to offer solutions and suggestions.
Participation in oversight	Social sites	Establishing a page on a social media platform where all the latest updates regarding developmental projects in the city are disseminated is essential. This page should facilitate the reception of messages to enable residents to express their opinions on developments, as well as provide the opportunity to vote on specific decisions.
	Periodic meetings	These meetings are attended by representatives from local authorities, civil society, project implementers, as well as dignitaries of the region and representatives of beneficiaries of development projects, in order to update them on the project's progress and to facilitate constructive criticism and dialogue.

	The establishment of committees for investigation	This committee is comprised of volunteer residents tasked with addressing complaints submitted to officials, as well as identifying the reasons behind the community's boycott of these projects and their lack of participation and benefit from them.
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Source: Prepared by the researchers

8. Conclusion

Based on the theoretical analysis of various books, references, and scientific articles, it becomes evident to us the significant role that population participation plays as a developmental process and a social phenomenon in achieving urban development. The effective utilization of population participation strategies in various developmental activities within the city will undoubtedly yield positive results, which will provide substantial assistance to the state, alleviate its burden, and achieve this through sharing responsibilities with the population, civil society organizations, and private entities. To ensure the attainment of these positive outcomes from employing the population participation strategy in urban development, more rigorous studies are imperative to better comprehend this phenomenon and assist in removing barriers for residents inclined towards the development and enhancement of their cities. Additionally, encouragement for those hesitant or fearful of participation should be pursued through the dissemination of awareness regarding the significance of population participation among community members.

In conclusion, it can be stated that despite the existence of legislation allowing residents to participate in the developmental plan of their community and despite occasional efforts by certain associations or individuals, this remains insufficient. The participation of residents as a social phenomenon primarily necessitates initiative and voluntarism on their part. If residents do not take the initiative and voluntarily engage in the affairs of their community, no method can compel them to do so. The issue here, in our belief, lies in a certain degree of apathy among residents, which hinders their involvement in all matters of public concern, especially those related to the development and improvement of the urban environment in which they reside.

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