



UN HABITAT

FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2009



BACKGROUND

PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING

WHY PARTICIPATION IS NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE URBAN PLANNING

Rapid urbanization, the corresponding lack of urban infrastructure, informality and crime: these are just some of the factors driving new forms of urban planning and management in the 21st century. One of the innovative methods of dealing with these problems, that has been gaining popularity in recent years, is citizen participation in the planning and management of towns and cities.

Potentially, participation in planning can empower communities and build social capital, lead to better design of urban projects and allow for participants' concerns to be incorporated within planning strategies.

GLOBAL & REGIONAL TRENDS IN PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING & POLITICS

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

- In Australia, Canada and the United States 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, meaning that specific organized interests exert more influence to advance their own causes and some social groups are under-represented.
- Since 1989, some transitional countries of Europe 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.

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

- In the 1980s, and throughout the region, the need for newly-elected democratic governments to establish their political credibility as well as the growing importance of municipal government led to experiments with participatory governance. Strengthened mobilization of civil society organizations further contributed to widespread democratization at national and local levels. Countries such as Bolivia and Brazil have made the most progress in this regard.
- Despite the significant political changes and participatory initiatives in the region, approaches to planning have failed to change commensurately or kept pace with new 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 politicised and manipulated by elites.

ASIA

- 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 as well as resources is limited at the local level.
- 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.
- In East and South East Asia strategic and spatial planning for urban development and growth is frequently not well provided for, with outdated legislation still in place in many countries. Interest in participation and the capacity to become involved is lacking for various reasons that include a fear and distrust of government institutions.

PLANNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

- Since the 1980s, the inability of government agencies to implement urban development plans, and the irrelevance of these to most people in informal settlements, led to attempts to revise planning legislation and adopt more participatory approaches.
- However, serious efforts to involve citizens in decision-making are uncommon in most of Sub-Saharan African countries 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.

LOCAL-LEVEL: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES & WAYS TO ENHANCE PARTICIPATION

- 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 citywide data disaggregated by service provision, well-being indicators, social groups etc. In addition, participatory urban appraisal is not a decision-making tool and, therefore, needs to be taken further in a process of community action planning. Sometimes these are collaborative but, just as frequently, they are characterised 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; nor can they be self-sufficient with regard to resources.

CITY-LEVEL: PARTICIPATION IN STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING

Experience of participation at the city-level is illustrated through a review of participatory budgeting and city development strategies. Successful participatory planning depends on the local political context, the legal basis for participation and available resources.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

- Participatory budgeting originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Key elements of participatory budgeting in this city and many others 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.

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 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 positive outcomes this approach 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 that applied in conventional master planning.
- However, a number of common challenges remain. Planners, other officials and elected representatives may also resist wide and lengthy participatory processes from planners. In addition, concentration on participatory planning at the expense of broader political processes may threaten the process and content of planning, while participation may fail to tackle entrenched power inequalities.

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