

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

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Abstract:

Each person has the right to access to various public and social services set up by its country, and get access to some aids granted for a specific category of populations. Each person is also invited to strongly participate in the growth and development of its territory, through its commitment in order to provide a great value. It's important to highlight a form of governance which calls for a strong citizen contribution by reinforcing the social inclusion process.

Keywords: participatory democracy, citizen participation, CapDel, “new generation” Municipal Development Plan, social inclusion.

Jel classification codes : R280, R290, R590, R580, I380.

1. Introduction:

Every society in the world is called upon to face numerous and growing challenges, mainly of a social, societal, economic and historical nature. Considerable efforts must be made, combining those of the public authorities with those of the various actors who interact positively within a territory, such as citizens and associative movements. The aim is to respond in a balanced and optimal way to the constant emergence of technological tools and information and communication technologies (ICT), in order to better understand the needs they create, such as job search, public services and investment projects. In the same vein, it is necessary to stop the proliferation of problems that can affect the general living environment. To this end, it is necessary to give every individual the opportunity to express themselves on issues that may directly affect them, thus promoting a situation of social

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Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

inclusion, encouraged by strong citizen participation channelled through a process known as participatory democracy.

In this work, it is useful to point out the effects that can be observed when there is a strong will to make citizen participation the Achilles' heel that promotes social inclusion. A problem is thus implicitly constituted: What observations can be made when citizen participation is strongly encouraged by decision-making centres in order to establish strong social inclusion in a constantly evolving internal and external environment?

Before reaching a concrete conclusion, we will first devote a section to participatory democracy, which is considered the starting point for any citizen participation action. A second section will focus on social inclusion, which is widely discussed in terms of concepts and approaches, while a third section will be devoted to outlining concrete situations of citizen participation in Algeria, which can significantly contribute to the creation of an inclusive and satisfactory social climate.

2. Participatory democracy and citizen participation

Two words that complement each other perfectly in order to achieve objectives that are generally presented in the form of an institutional hierarchy. In fact, a political approach such as participatory democracy can only increase the involvement of citizens in a society that encourages human commitment and group spirit. However, what is this participatory democracy that seems to be a strong link for the development of a territory?

2.1 Anchoring participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is one of the most popular trends, increasingly promoted by governments to encourage strong citizen, social and societal participation in the territorial management process. It is also a theme that adapts to technological advances, in particular ICT, by moving towards the digitalisation of administration, with the aim not only of reducing the communication gap between administration and citizens, but also of facilitating access to public services. In the same context, participatory democracy is seen as an integral form of territorial governance that encourages every citizen with the appropriate skills and abilities to play an appropriate role as a local actor, whether within an associative movement or individually.

The concept of participatory democracy originated in the United States of America, in the student movement of the 1960s. The term entered the academic scene in the early 1970s (Sintomer, 2011).

Participatory democracy is ultimately the instrument for establishing public reason (Forsé & Lafaye, 2008). It is considered a generator of legitimacy, a quality label for local governance (Bourgain, J.Brot, & Gérardin, 2010). It encourages both the promotion of active citizenship and the formulation of opinions on a large scale, based on the principle of cooperation (Lindner & Aichholzer, 2020), mainly between public authorities and various actors.

However, participatory democracy, as a deontological form, requires massive and effective contributions from the population in order to implement, together with local authorities in particular, the guidelines of territorial development programmes aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the territory.

2.1.1 The instruments of participatory democracy:

A stable, cooperative social climate is essential for a region's development strategies, which are now decided by mutual agreement between institutional bodies and other partners such as citizens, investors and associations of all kinds (cultural, scientific, social, etc.). For this reason, it is imperative to design appropriate support tools that will enable public action to flow more smoothly in terms of the design of various policies that require social, societal and even economic development, as well as aspects related to the relationship process between administration and citizens, and between central and local government. What's at stake is the credibility of this form of democratic expression, which favours collective action over individual action. To this end, a number of tools can be used to make this collaborative approach effective (Calame, 2006):

- Public debate tools: practices are gradually being developed to help citizens understand what is at stake in a project, criticize its assumptions and compare its advantages and disadvantages.
- Citizens' panels: consensus conferences, citizens' juries, participatory initiative nuclei, etc. are all well-suited to the task of developing collective thinking on complex issues, and structuring the political scene on the basis of informed opinions from a random sample of citizens.
- Charters: partnership agreements and charters are ideal when the aim is to jointly define the rules governing the co-production of the public good.
- Collective intelligence methods: in particular conceptual mapping methods, are well-suited to drawing up a shared diagnosis, building a common agenda and defining a collective strategy.

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

- Methods for collective evaluation of public policies: adapted to help raise awareness of the impact of institutional logics that produce the results of a policy without the knowledge, as it were, of political decisions. They help raise awareness of the fact that the outcome of public action is much more closely linked to the design of institutions than to the choices made by political leaders. They are part of an ongoing vision of public action based on successive learning processes.
- Multi-stakeholder labels are particularly well-suited to changing production, distribution and consumption patterns.

Participatory democracy is thus characterized by two important features: firstly, the direct, individualized participation of citizens, and secondly, the implementation of deliberation, i.e. a cooperative exchange of arguments geared towards finding the best solution/decision. Participation thus takes a less confrontational form than voting or contesting (Pourtois & Pitseys, 2017).

Other tools of participatory democracy can also be added to the above, namely consultation, concertation and co-development. All these forms reinforce the democratic framework put in place by central and local governments. These can be summarized in the following table:

Tableau 01: Forms of participatory democracy through a citizen's contribution.

Consultation	Collaboration	Co-management/control
Public opinion is sought after and considered important for managerial decision-making. Information flows in two directions (administration-administration), but decision-makers are not obliged to integrate the comments received.	Public representatives are actively involved in developing solutions and directly influencing decisions. This usually involves iterative activities, dialogue and in-depth working relationships, with greater emphasis on joint responsibilities.	Decision-making power and, in some cases, responsibility for organizing public participation is partially or totally delegated directly to the general public or their representatives.

Source: (A. Krishnaswamy, 2019, p.246)

In fact, and in addition to what has been said about participatory democracy, the contribution or participation of citizens remains the main core of this form of democracy, since it embodies the true image of a public that is officially called upon to contribute to the creation of an area of transparency when it comes to the right of access to information, and thus becomes a unit of measurement for the application of participatory democracy from the observer's point of view. It is important to add that the acceptance of the process by the

target groups must be demonstrated, otherwise the expected effects of democracy will not be perceived.

2.2 Citizen participation:

There's no doubt that the commitment of the various actors involved in the projects approved by the public authorities is a prerequisite for a win-win partnership between all the parties involved in territorial management initiatives. Good will and a sincere belief in such projects effectively contribute to the creation of a cooperative and trusting environment, a friendly and attractive situation, which is directly in line with the principles of participatory democracy. Citizen participation is a way of distributing and sharing power, involving a number of people in the management of local affairs and in decision-making, especially when information concerning the general interest of the territory is shared.

In fact, a global definition of citizen participation refers to the practice of involving local stakeholders in the formulation of local policies and strategies, as well as in related decision-making (Lovrić, 2021). Citizen participation can take several forms (Corrigan, 2017):

- **Public hearings:** this is a universal practice in legislative bodies that promotes this local governance mode, where citizens are invited to express their opinions on issues that affect their area, such as the consideration of a bill or a policy. In principle, there is an open exchange between citizens and the municipality, through which perspectives can be shared with a view to proposing new changes. Public hearings are often part of consultation processes and are usually a prerequisite for participation. The views and contributions of the public, particularly those likely to be affected by the proposed action, need to be gathered and considered. This may take the form of spontaneous verbal exchanges between members of the public at public meetings. Alternatively, it may involve fairly extensive formal presentations by interested parties. Written or recorded submissions (and possibly audio and video presentations) may also be considered.
- **Commission of Inquiry:** this method is used by political authorities to investigate a particular situation and would usually involve the intervention of experts from outside the local authority, who invite the public to contribute. The aim is to broaden the scope of intervention and, with the help of experts from different fields, to produce a set of tested ideas and proposals that can serve the interests of the territory and its inhabitants.
- **Public surveys:** can be used to measure public opinion on a variety of issues, both qualitatively and quantitatively. As such, public surveys can help policy makers to

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

understand the opinions and preferences of citizens. A survey has the advantage of being able to capture and aggregate the views of people who are not necessarily motivated to express themselves on issues, as would be the case with those who would participate in public hearings.

- petitioning: this is a more personal form of participation, focused on problems that may arise or develop. It consists of making a request to the relevant structure at local authority level to study the problem presented and then consider the ideal solution. Petitions can be largely symbolic in nature, as when groups of citizens collect signatures and hand them over to the local authority.
- Participatory budgeting: an intensive form of citizen participation developed in Brazil in the late 1980s, participatory budgeting is used mainly in the context of municipal budgets and offers citizens the opportunity to contribute directly to the allocation of resources in public budgets. Citizens' assemblies can be held to decide on their priorities and elect their representatives in the budget process.
- Negotiated rulemaking: Developed in the USA, this allows stakeholders to work with representatives of the administration to jointly design rules that address their concerns. Together, stakeholders explore common interests as well as differences of opinion, collaborate on the collection and analysis of technical information, and generate options based on priorities.

As a result, there is a strong cohesion between participatory democracy as a political process that fosters positive attitudes towards citizen participation. It's a form that places great emphasis on the human factor, because people are in the best position to recognise their vital needs and to be a force for proposal and cooperation with public authorities, essentially local communities.

3. Social inclusion: establishing social policies that meet the expectations of individuals and give them the right to participate in the development of their society

A policy of inclusion is a policy that fights against social exclusion (Printz, 2020), which means giving a human actor access to different stages such as public services, the right to work, the right to social action, etc. In fact, inclusion is a term used in social policy to express the idea that all individuals living in a given society benefit (should benefit) from equal rights of access and participation. In fact, inclusion is a term used in social policy-making to express the idea that all individuals living in a given society benefit (should benefit) from equal rights of access and participation. This means, on the one hand, that institutions, structures and policies must be positively designed to accommodate a diversity of situations, identities and lifestyles and, on the other hand, that opportunities and

resources must be distributed in a way that minimises disadvantage and marginalisation (Basarab, 2022).

According to the World Bank, building more inclusive societies means empowering citizens and fostering the development of more resilient communities. It means expanding the prospects of every individual, now and in the future. Like economic and environmental sustainability, it is essential for poverty reduction and shared prosperity (World Bank, n.d.).

The European Union sees social inclusion as a process that enables people at risk of poverty and social exclusion to have the opportunities and resources they need to participate actively in economic, social and cultural life and to achieve a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. Social inclusion also enables vulnerable groups and individuals to participate more fully in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and to exercise their fundamental rights (European Union, 2010).

Finally, UNESCO considers that social inclusion refers to the processes and outcomes that improve the conditions under which people participate in society. People may be excluded from various development processes, opportunities and benefits because of their gender, ethnic origin, immigrant or refugee status, religion, etc. Social inclusion is about addressing the needs and aspirations of those who are excluded. Social inclusion means taking these disadvantages into account in order to promote well-being and shared prosperity (UNESCO, n.d.).

From the above, social inclusion seems to be a great opportunity for everyone living in a given society, enabling them to benefit from a range of social actions, to express themselves on issues that concern them most directly, and also to take part in the various development projects of their territory.

3.1 Dimensions of social inclusion:

Five dimensions of social inclusion can be identified, which are directly linked to five basic human needs, which we quote below (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2010):

3.1.1 Inclusion through employment:

In the vast majority of countries, paid work is the key to gaining access to the basic resources needed for individuals to become full members of society: a stable income that

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

enables them to pay for necessities and a home, and to enjoy social protection or status. Paid work provides people not only with the resources they need to live, but also with such essential things as the exercise and development of skills, meaningful social relationships and, above all, the self-esteem and sense of personal dignity that comes from taking responsibility for oneself and sharing responsibility for the society to which one contributes by paying taxes.

The effects of unemployment on the individual have been well studied and described: progressive loss of skills, social contacts, motivation, self-esteem, etc. However, it is important to address the issue of employment in its broadest sense, understood as the performance of tasks with purpose, utility and/or social recognition, which can be developed on the margins of the labour market, within the family, group and/or community. Such work can provide the same benefits as paid work, but lacks one essential factor: access to income. Therefore, the ability of the third sector (social and solidarity economy) to generate attractive activities that promote inclusion will depend largely on the existence of alternative routes to income.

3.1.2 Inclusion through protection:

Protection, in the sense of security, is a value that is essential to people's well-being; it is to a large extent what encourages them to live in society. Individuals join together to better protect their physical and mental integrity and, to the extent that this protection functions properly, they are able to develop the feeling of being a secure part of the group. The very idea of social security indicates the essence of what has become an inherent feature of contemporary societies. It means access to resources (through income transfers) and public services (health, social, security, etc.) that guarantee people a degree of protection in the face of adverse, mostly unavoidable conditions, such as accidents and epidemics, which can damage their health and assets, and other adverse situations resulting from a gradual or sudden loss of earning capacity, such as illness, accidents or forced unemployment. It is also important to promote public health and the provision of health services, which must be accessible to all populations. Social protection mechanisms also have the no less important aim of reducing inequalities in income and wealth, which are caused by differences in people's abilities and by the logic of an economic system itself. When a society lacks social policies, many people are marginalised and have to struggle to survive.

3.1.3 Inclusion through recognition:

Diversity in contemporary societies has been increasing steadily for many years. This is due not only to the exponential growth in residential mobility, which brings people of very different nationalities and languages into contact with each other, but also to the diversification of political, dietary and other choices, the result of a process of individualisation that has overcome the obstacles to freedom of conscience and choice almost everywhere.

3.1.4 Inclusion through education:

Being part of a society means knowing, at least in broad terms, its codes of communication and having the knowledge to understand and find one's place in the spheres of life that satisfy the needs of each individual. The process of socialisation consists essentially in the transmission and learning of all that is necessary for life, starting from birth in the family environment and continuing mainly, but not exclusively, within institutions created for the specific purpose of education. And the more open, dynamic, complex and technologically advanced societies become, the more numerous and diversified are the educational conditions required to enter and remain in the productive structure. That's why we can say that inclusion in today's societies is largely a question of the transmission of knowledge. What are these spaces and how are they presented? Are they formal or informal? Public or private? Prestigious or discredited? Free or inaccessible to those on low incomes? Ultimately, are they or are they not designed to ensure that everyone has a real chance to access the skills that will enable them to live and thrive autonomously in society?

Given the scale of the challenge, an inclusive society requires the educational function to be exercised and present in all kinds of spaces, but with the guarantee of a common educational core that makes it possible to ensure the universal transmission of a core of shared values and codes that cannot be renounced.

2.1.5 Inclusion through connections:

People are social beings. Maintaining ties and belonging to numerous, high-quality social networks is positively correlated with levels of income, education and well-being. This is because, in addition to the possibility of sharing resources and assistance that can improve living conditions, social relationships provide an essential good known as information, mainly practical information that is useful in the various areas of life in society. Although this may appear to be the least political dimension of all, the social link is predominant,

2.1.6 Inclusion through participation:

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

this dimension is qualitatively different, since politics is fundamentally about shaping all of social life through the discourse and action of members of society as political actors. Participation enables us to engage in meaningful activity and creates strong bonds; through participation we fight discrimination to improve public services and working conditions. We should also take into account active participation in organisations or collectives that seek to produce public value, be it through the defence of certain causes, the organisation of public actions or the support of collectives in difficulty, to name but a few examples, all of which also have a more or less political impact. Ultimately, it's about citizenship, a dynamic idea of citizenship articulated around values such as equal opportunities, solidarity, democracy and personal autonomy. Finally, there is a positive correlation between the level of participation within a society and the quality of its democratic system, as well as the level of social inclusion.

3. Citizen participation for greater social inclusion: the Algerian model

It should be noted that participatory practice in Algeria is contained in a number of regulations, including (MICLAT) which contains:

- Regulations on urban planning instruments;
- Laws and regulations on public enquiries and public utility enquiries;
- The Municipal Code;
- The law on associations (public utility associations).

This demonstrates the importance that Algeria attaches to the involvement and commitment of its citizens in the joint management of their territories, in conjunction with the public authorities.

The CapDel programme, developed jointly by the Ministry of the Interior, Local Authorities and Regional Planning (MICLAT), the Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (PNUD), is a case in point. CapDel has helped to build the capacity of development actors by equipping them with theoretical and practical tools, essentially based on a "learning by doing" approach. Concrete examples include initiatives to create a local citizens' participation charter, a local consultative council, a "new generation" local development plan and a local multi-risk prevention plan (MICLAT). The programmes included in the CapDel project focus on social and territorial inclusion (young people, women, people with disabilities, disadvantaged or marginalised areas) and socio-economic and environmental sustainability (jobs, sustainable resource management, clean energy) (ELMOUDJAHID). This approach demonstrates Algeria's

determination to move towards systems that increasingly promote social inclusion through innovative systems of citizen participation.

In a study carried out between January and March 2021 on territorial marketing practices at local authority level, the issue of citizen participation and its modus operandi was raised in order to better illustrate the territorial governance model applied. The study was carried out in twenty (20) communes in the Wilayas of Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou.

Indeed, the contribution of each citizen or his association to the local management of the commune is a highly relevant form of territorial governance. A number of countries have opted for this approach in order to ensure an associative approach, based essentially on trust between citizens and administrations, and to enable citizens to put forward new ideas, air their grievances and be regularly informed about the progress of development projects affecting their territories. Citizen participation is currently emerging as the most appropriate form of territorial management, as citizens are more than aware of the challenges facing their territory and are called upon to contribute fully to its promotion and protection in order to maintain a significant level of well-being. Information technology has contributed greatly to this awareness.

Participatory governance is well established in Algeria. This approach is highly valued, as it is the citizens and associative movements that are most aware of their needs and expectations, and this requires collective action to meet them. In this research, we were particularly interested in the participatory governance model, which was the subject of discussions with local officials in the selected communes of the Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou wilayas. The aim was to establish the level of citizen participation in the territorial management model applied in these communes, and then to understand the methods used to involve local actors in the territorial management of their communes.

Figure 01: Cloud of words related to citizen contribution



Source: (Realised by us, based on NVivo software)

The involvement of various local actors in the management of the territory is seen as an advantage for the territorial manager, who demonstrates his intention to work

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

transparently and fairly and is committed to providing quality public services to the citizens, who are also kept informed of the projects planned and their progress.

The second part of the question on the involvement of local actors in the collective management of the municipality, which we put to the local officials we met, refers to the nature of the involvement of local actors in this management, with a view to establishing genuine citizen participation in accordance with the regulations in force.

The replies received are in line with those already presented, reinforcing the involvement of the various local actors in the management of the affairs of their municipalities, in conjunction with the local officials, who are all in favour of citizen participation. However, the methods used differ from one municipality to another. Below is the word cloud that forms part of the answers to this question:

Figure 02: Cloud of words relating to the way in which citizens are involved in territorial management



Source: (Realised by us, based on NVivo software)

In order to be consistent with the opinions of all the local managers we met, we have identified two ways of involving local stakeholders in collective management, one of which consists of directly involving these stakeholders in the identification and monitoring of development projects, with a total of 11 responses received in this regard, while the other method, although fully in line with the principle of citizen participation, is approached in a more indirect manner, as shown by the (09) responses received. In this context, it should be noted that the word "projects" was mentioned 26 times by all the respondents, followed by the word "development" 13 times, which shows the importance of the citizens' contribution to the identification of projects that have a positive and direct impact on the general living environment of the citizens and also on the attractiveness of their territories. The word APC (Assemblée Populaire Communale) and the word commune, mentioned 12 and 09 times respectively, refer to a local authority. This local authority, the APC, is responsible for the ongoing processing of all the information collected (proposals, problems, suggestions from citizens, associations, investors, etc.). This information is processed by the relevant municipal departments (technical, financial, social, etc.) or discussed at the general meetings of the APC. By managing the flow of information

collected, local stakeholders are indirectly involved in the local management process. However, local actors, such as associations and village committees, are directly invited to take part in coordination meetings, enabling the administration and the population to reflect together on projects of public interest. This valuable approach gives citizens a permanent right of control, particularly over the development and monitoring of community projects. It is also important to add that some municipalities support their citizens in carrying out certain operations on a voluntary basis, such as cleaning up neighbourhoods, by providing them with vehicles and handling equipment. Nevertheless, the declared determination of the public authorities to make local actors a privileged partner is a policy that is bearing fruit, as we have noticed during the various discussions. Overall, the participation of citizens in the management of local affairs is a sign of a cohesive social climate, of trust and mutual cooperation between all the parties involved for the benefit of the area concerned. In terms of social inclusion, Algeria is working to ensure that all categories of the population have the necessary conditions to meet their various human needs. In this part, the social development policy, and in particular social protection, is based on a set of fundamental principles that form an integrated and complementary foundation capable of providing protection against the risks of precariousness, but also of ensuring the participation of citizens in the creation of wealth (CNESE, UNICEF, & CONEVAL, 2017):

- Income transfers for the direct benefit of families: as part of the social safety net, the State assists vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the disabled and low-income groups; a family allowance is provided for all children of parents who pay social security contributions.
- Food security and maintaining purchasing power: the State supports household purchasing power by subsidising basic foodstuffs such as milk, semolina, table oil and sugar; the State supports agricultural inputs and production.
- Economic inclusion and participation in wealth creation: the State offers financial assistance so that people of working age who find themselves in vulnerable situations can access the labour market; the State also supports the creation of businesses through micro-credit programmes, aimed in particular at young people.
- Access to basic services, including social services: The State finances the construction and operation of the health services network, including hospitals, to ensure universal access to free health care; Public education services are free from primary school to university; The State also supports the price of access to energy (electricity, gas, fuel) and water, particularly in rural areas and the south; The State finances social housing for vulnerable groups, with the aim of combating precarious housing; The State offers social aid/assistance services to vulnerable groups.

Settling into an inclusive society, what observations can be made when citizen participation is widely encouraged?

4. Conclusion

Social inclusion and civic participation are interconnected and mutually reinforcing aspects. Effective citizen engagement is essential for translating social inclusion into tangible social and economic benefits for the population of a given area.

Citizens typically seek benefits from their country, such as healthcare, education, and social services, which are often guaranteed by constitutional provisions. However, individuals also strive to contribute meaningfully to their own fulfillment and the development of their community. Encouraging such active participation in various forms of development has been a focus in Algeria for several years.

Algeria has embraced processes that promote citizen involvement while emphasizing social welfare. This is evident in the subsidies and assistance programs implemented, particularly in ensuring free access to public services like healthcare and education, and controlling prices of essential goods.

Encouraging citizen participation has proven to positively impact social inclusion by addressing the needs of all segments of society, particularly the most vulnerable. This fosters a stronger sense of belonging and reinforces the idea of contributing to one's community, ultimately promoting greater social cohesion and human dignity.

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