

Participation of Citizens in Road Infrastructure Projects

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SUMMARY

Participation is first of all a political approach. But it also has technical and even economic aspects, which can be demonstrated by several examples. Experience has shown that the sustainability and quality of projects is influenced by the process of planning in which participation may increase the feeling of ownership and support good governance on the local level.

People can participate in various ways and on several levels.

Political participation consists of elections, formal participation, informal participation, public hearings or referendums. Financial participation involves different ways of contributions such as taxes, tolls and donations. Physical participation means honorable engagement and communitary work, which may include physical activities during realisation or continuous maintenance work.

Different types of participation are used around the world, which vary depending on the national or local situation, but all of them try to improve the relationship between decision makers and the population in order to find an optimum among the possible solutions.

Examples from Germany and Rwanda show the variety of different approaches: highly elaborated patterns of participation and activities of inhabitants and shopkeepers in Aachen as well as traditional forms of meetings and communitary works in Kigali.

1. INTRODUCTION

Almost everybody is involved in participatory processes, mostly without realizing it. Some examples are elections, paying taxes or activities in associations. Participation in a closer sense means involving the population in decision-making in a planning process. The term is used in various senses and is partly identical with democracy, good governance or similar meanings.

Looking for examples that are able to show the wide range of possibilities Germany and Rwanda were chosen to take a closer look at the methods and describe the experiences.

In Germany participation was introduced in the seventies as a reaction of the parliament after a lot of protests against public projects and it has gained increasing importance since then. **[1]**

In Rwanda participation as an element of democracy is practiced in another way, different from Europe. Participation is one target of democratisation as the minister of local government has stated in the introduction of the government's programme. *„In this phase, special attention will be given to those areas, processes and procedures that facilitate greater participation of the citizens in decision making, planning and implementation of their development programmes and projects.* **[2]**

Participation is also an important element in the poverty reduction strategy programme (PRSP): *“Two of the most important planks of the government's*

transformational agenda and of the PRSP are the broadening of grassroots participation and government responsiveness through decentralisation and human resource development and capacity building.” [3]

Besides this participation is mentioned in various programmes and descriptions of projects of national and international organisations which support democratisation and decentralisation.

2. GENERAL CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATION

Among the aims for general development and especially for urban development the ecological, economic and social sustainability of projects is very important. Around the world experience has shown, that the quality of projects depends on many factors, among which the participation of the population has a special influence.

Public infrastructure, in which inhabitants have been involved in decision-making, is more successful, because a feeling of ownership has been created.

Decentralisation also depends on the level of participation. In this context it is important, in which way the population faces problems and possible solutions. This means that it is important to develop instruments or tools to include inhabitants within the process at an early stage. Besides decision-making it includes financial contributions and activities during realization. Citizens may even support the local public budget by taking part in the maintenance of public infrastructure.

3. MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

During planning and realisation of projects there are different modes and periods to get people involved such as discussion and financial participation or physical engagement.

3.1 Political Participation

In countries with a democratic structure participation is organised in various manners, which can vary among the countries and according to the issue.

Elections

The parliamentary democracy is based on elections in which a temporary mandate is given to the elected representatives. The influence of the population is concentrated on fixed periods. In the meantime the power of citizens is less important but nevertheless possible especially through lobbying.

Legal participation

In several countries the participation of the inhabitants during decision-making for certain projects is fixed in the constitution or in special laws.

Projects with a certain impact on special groups of the population have to be published including their probable consequences. The comments and arguments of the citizens are introduced in the political debates and are evaluated. Thus citizens may influence decisions, if this does not clash with other private or public interests. German example: Baugesetzbuch [4]

Informal participation

Some countries practise certain forms of participation even if they are not obliged to do so by laws. Investigations, meetings, conferences, theatre and presentations are organised to sensibilise, to inform and to ask for people's position.

Petition

The citizens have the right to address themselves to a special commission in order to initiate or control certain decisions of the administration or the council, except in cases of legal objection.

Referendum

The referendum allows the control of a political decision during the period of government. It is possible on all levels of governing (nation, province, town).

3.2 Financial Participation

All public infrastructures needs not only planning but also financing, in which people can contribute in different ways.

Taxes

Taxes are payments to authorities that are not connected to certain projects or results. They form the general budget.

Figure 1 - Advertisement of the National Revenue Authority in Kigali/ Rwanda: " The one who pays his taxes builds his nation", Photo R. Poth

Contributions and Tolls

Contributions are connected to certain services of the authorities.
(Examples: real estate contribution, toll, parking meter)

Donations

Donations are deliberate payments to institutions or associations to support certain activities or projects (sponsoring).

3.3 Physical Participation

Besides political and financial contributions people can support projects by physical activities.

Honorary function

A special way of participation is a commitment in associations or civic groups, which can lead to very important positions besides political structures. The chairpersons of certain associations are able to dominate public discussions and influence political decisions by taking sides.

Communitary Work

Many nations practise traditional ways of working together for the sake of the local or regional community in order to carry out projects of public interest. In Rwanda they are called "umuganda" and "ubudehe", in Bolivia "minga", in Germany "Hand- und Spanndienst".

These examples are similar in the way of working together. They are an important contribution to public budget in countries with a high level of subsistent economy but

have less importance in a society with a monetary economy, where public services are paid by taxes.

But even in highly industrialised countries, where people complain about taxes, this way of personal engagement faces a revival: parents paint classrooms and teenagers collect rubbish in public parks.

4. PARTISIPATION IN PROJECTS OF URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Different types of participation are used around the world. They vary depending on the subject, the national or local situation, but all of them try to improve the relationship between decision makers and the population in order to find an optimum among the possible solutions. Some models of participation are based on traditional forms of decision making such as “Courtyard Meetings” (Asia) and “Meetings under the Tree” (East Africa). Some are based on traditional forms of working together like “Minga” (Latin America), and “Umuganda” (Rwanda). Not to mention new forms of participation, which were created in Brazil with the participatory budget, first practised in Porto Alegre.

The success of including inhabitants and users depends on the appropriate form especially in developing countries.

4.1 Examples in Germany

In Germany participation was officially introduced in the process of public projects such as road construction or urban planning in the seventies due to heavy protests among the population against decisions of parliament on various levels. The importance has increased since then, in order to avoid legal fights and because of the influence of participation on sustainability.

Besides the formal process that is obligatory in projects with a certain impact on the population and which is part of the law of administration [5], informal ways of involving the population even in projects of minor importance have been practised in the last 20 years.

Following the development of the project several steps of information and discussion are taken. They follow the scheme of planning and realisation gradually. The phases of planning and decision and the different steps of participation are shown in Fig. 2.

The first step is the general announcement and the information about the guidelines. In this phase possible solutions can be discussed on a more general level.

The second step is the presentation of the project to the inhabitants of the area concerned. In this phase proposals for modifications are still possible. The proposals including the arguments of the responsible public staff are submitted to the council for decision.

In the third step further details are planned and again communicated to the public. In this phase, knowing the project on a quite exact level, the price and the necessary contributions of the population can be published.

In the fourth step inhabitants and other users of the road are informed about the different phases of construction and the restrictions and nuisances to be expected are explicated. Even in this phase some modifications are possible with respect to the necessities of certain users.

The fifth step is the financial participation by paying the contributions fixed by national and local laws.

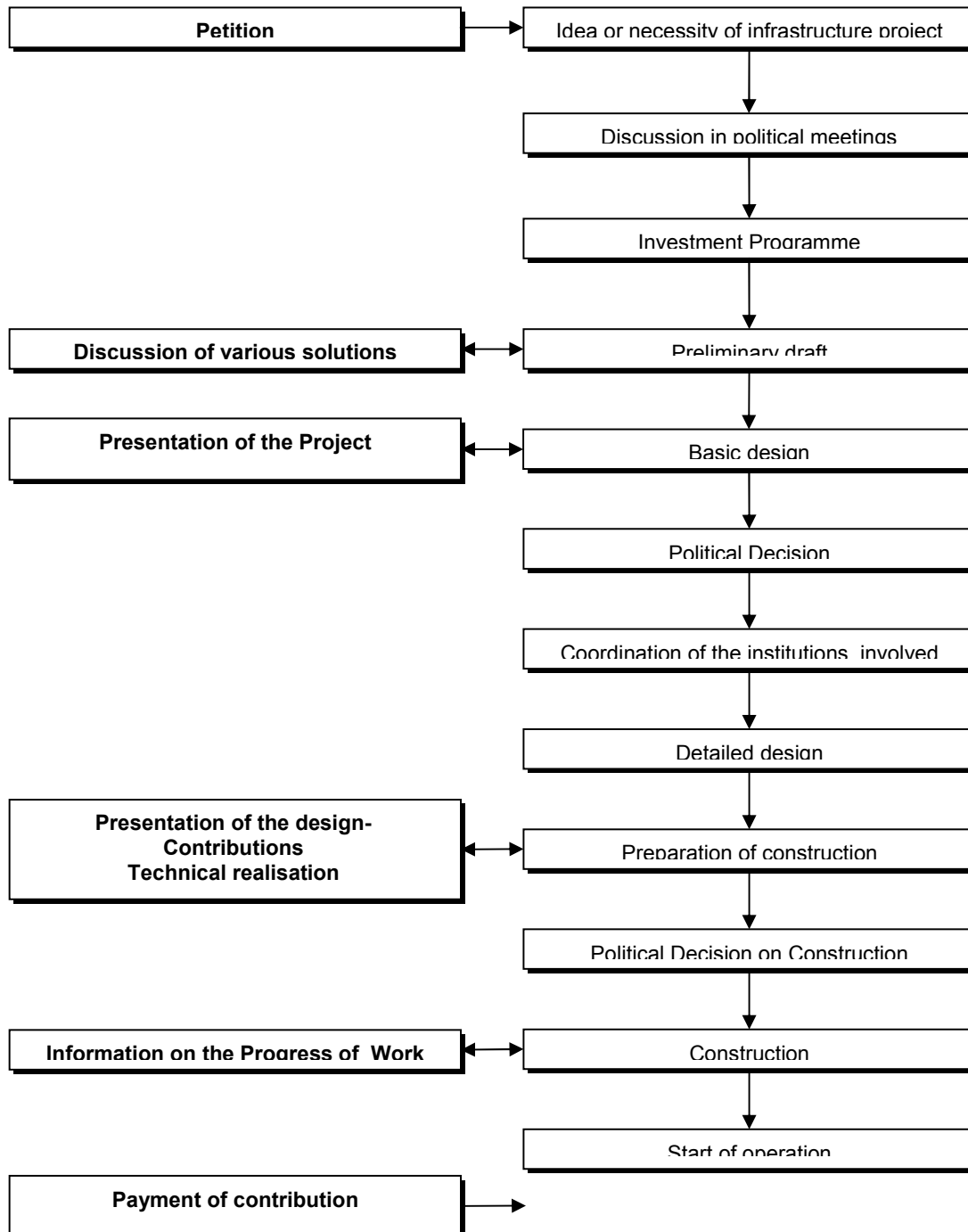


Figure 2 Phases of Projects and Participation [6]

In every phase discussions depend a lot on the quality of information given, but also on the grade of nuisance people are expecting and the amount of money to be paid. A special interest is frequently pronounced by shopkeepers and business people who are afraid of negative consequences for their turnover.

In this context one special example has to be mentioned. In general business people complain publicly about restrictions in accessibility and reduced turnover during works in progress. Realising that negative reports in the media telling the public about mud and noise may worsen the lack of customers the shopkeepers of a small

pedestrian area in the city centre of Aachen decided to take different measures. They joined and thought about positive messages of the road works. From the beginning they started positive campaigns in the media. Public lectures, expositions, events and even bowls tournaments (petanque) were organised in the gravel, turning the disadvantage of the reduced quality of the road surface into the chance to offer citizens and visitors a unique atmosphere of a holiday at the Mediterranean. Thus no complaints about reductions of turnover were heard even when the road works lasted longer than usual because of archaeological finds [7].

Figures 3&4 Events organized by local shopkeepers in Aachen during the construction period Photos: cANNAle grande

Another example of participation in a special way is the construction of a cycle path by local citizens in Westbevern/Germany. Public authorities did not agree to build a cycle path which was regarded necessary by the population for safety reasons after a heavy accident in which three children were seriously injured. The inhabitants of the village founded an association and succeeded in realising their project by contributing manpower, machines and money. 110 volunteers spent more than 2,700 hours and dedicated their heavy machines for almost 1000 hours. They succeeded in constructing a cycle path with half the ordinary budget. The authorities finally agreed to pay the material [8]

Several of similar projects have been practised in the meantime.

Figures 5&6 Building of a cycle path by the local population
Photos: Bürgerradweg Lengericher Straße Westbevern e.V.

4.2 Examples in Rwanda

The application of participation in Rwanda does not follow foreign examples. Government and population have found another way, based on traditional forms of communitary work and decision making which are called “umuganda” and “inama muns y’igiti” (meeting under the tree).

Umuganda is a traditional form of communitary work in public interest with a long tradition. During the period of colonialism it was abused as a way of forced labour. During the last years the image of umuganda has changed. It is practised one day every month by the whole population. The work is concentrated on collecting waste, cleaning ditches, building classrooms or houses for vulnerable people, planting trees and even constructing feeder roads. The physical activities are organised by local authorities and are combined with meetings on the grass root level, where important matters are discussed. These “Meetings under the tree” have a long tradition, too. These days such meetings are used among other purposes to discuss local activities and to spread information about HIV or healthcare in general. In the second phase of the PRPS such meetings are supposed to be organized when the grass-root level is requested to nominate their representatives.

The combination of umuganda, in which an average of 70-80% of the population is present [9], with monthly meetings is a chance to include a big part of the people in the discussion of their matters and future projects.

Figures 7-10 Meeting under the tree and umuganda Photos: Regina Poth

Umuganda has also initiated a project that is the Rwandan example explained in detail. The inhabitants of the district of Mwendo Kigali/Rwanda have taken the initiative to build a road which connects them to the city centre. 200 people have constructed an earth road of about 2.8 km length and 22 bends without any machine only with the tools they use in their fields: hoe, shovel and panga. First they worked without any support or technical advice, based on umuganda, which meant in 2004 one day per week. Later the project was accepted within the framework of the HIMO-Programme [10] of the EU with technical and financial support, which allowed people to work every day, but was still based only on the collaboration of the concerned sector.

The workers belonged to different groups among the population: demobilised members of different military groups, widows and victims of the genocide: culpables and victims working hand in hand.

At the same time the project had an emancipatory impact. Men and women (54% corresponding to their percentage in the Rwandan population) got the same payment, whatever work they did. The qualification of all workers was an indirect effect of the project, for the site manager as well as for the simple labourer. [11]

The project was partly finished in 2004. Having passed many rainy seasons it shows little deterioration, which proves the quality of workmanship, the competence and the continuous care of the inhabitants feeling responsible for "their" road. The whole project consists in 10km of road, which was inaugurated in October 2005. The total costs were published as 500.000 FRW. [12] At the same time the price of a rough road of similar quality was 80 Mio. Frw [13]

Figures 11&12 Rough Road constructed by village people Photos: Regina Poth

5. CONCLUSION

The examples from Germany and Rwanda: different continents, different economic situation, different history of democracy, different level of education show that participation is possible and practised in different ways according to the local and national background.

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