Authentic Participation for Territorial Public Management: A Challenge for Citizens and the Government

Una participación auténtica para la gestión pública territorial: un desafío para la ciudadanía y el Gobierno

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Abstract. This article aims to discuss the need to identify when authentic exercises of participation in public planning and management are taking place in order to differentiate these exercises from others where manipulation and legitimization are the order of the day. Documentary and bibliographic research was conducted to investigate the characteristics required to achieve authentic participation. With the help of categories or steps, including requirements for authentic participation, advanced exercises can be differentiated from nonparticipation exercises. People must react and seek greater decision-making power so as not to let others decide, by casting lots, the future of the citizenry through authentic planning and public management exercises, to which this article hopes to have contributed.

Keywords: social participation, community participation, planning, management

Resumen. En este artículo se pretende discutir la necesidad de identificar cuándo se está ante ejercicios de participación auténticos en la planeación y gestión públicas, para diferenciar estos ejercicios de otros donde la manipulación y los fines de legitimación están a la orden del día.
Fueron realizadas investigaciones documentales y bibliográficas para profundizar en las características necesarias para alcanzar una participación auténtica. Con ayuda de

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categorías o escalones que incluyen los requisitos de lo que sería una auténtica participación, se pueden diferenciar ejercicios avanzados de aquellos que no son de participación. El pueblo debe reaccionar y procurar un mayor poder decisorio, para no dejar que sean otras personas las que decidan a suerte el futuro de la ciudadanía, en ejercicios de planificación y gestión pública realmente auténticos, para lo cual este artículo espera haber contribuido.

Palabras clave: participación social, participación comunitaria, planificación, gestión

Introduction

A traditional thought of the Nasa People:

"Words without action are empty. Action without words is blind. Word and action outside the spirit of the community are death" Escobar, 2014, p. 5.

Low citizen participation is a strong trend in public planning and management in Latin America. It prevails in almost all projects, programs, or initiatives implemented by the public administration or in "development" projects carried out by multilateral organizations. Neither of these institutions nor the State want to give the communities the opportunity to decide and influence the interventions to be carried out.

Reading any final graduation papers or a dissertation or thesis, in the case of postgraduate programs, with planning or public management in Latin America as an object of study, is enough to find this recurring trend.

That vision of multilateral organizations, where patients are called upon to participate in the cure, listening to how they manifest the symptoms of their diseases, has also been appropriate in the Latin American public administration.

In these dynamics, they do not go beyond being informants, only to minimize the possibilities of opposition to the interventions already planned by them beforehand. This way, the members of the community *(stakeholders* or those involved in the jargon of these organizations) classify themselves as possible collaborating and opposing forces to use, then, this information to their advantage.

The main point is that these processes are no more than simple consultation, and almost nothing of what is discussed and submitted by the communities is incorporated into the interventions. That only happens because they consider it necessary to do so in order to be able to continue with their project in the face of threats of opposition to the intended initiatives.

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This version of citizen participation is the hegemonic version. When speaking of citizen participation, reference is made to this type of exercise, which is no longer a monopoly of multilateral institutions, because national, departmental, provincial, state, and municipal governments in Latin America have aligned themselves with this participatory model.

The core issues of this article are the following: How to identify what type of citizen participation is being implemented in a specific public management exercise? And what characteristics must citizen participation have in order to be authentic? The article initially presents the advantages of citizen participation and deconstructs the terms *participation* and *participatory*.

Then, it gives an example where broad citizen participation supposedly took place, but where the result was a failure, and ends by presenting what would be true participation through the use of a technical instrument for its evaluation.

Methodology

In this article, the author used a theoretical essay to draw attention to the need to move towards more consistent and authentic participatory processes, as well as to seek reflection from the reader regarding the role of the government and that of the citizenry in this task.

The work was carried out based on bibliographic and documentary research to find answers that would help clarify the central issue.

Theoretical Approach

"Participation is one of the most significant elements of social transformation processes in all times (...)" (Simonian, 2018, p. 132, author's translation) because of the possibilities it offers to the majority of citizens to transform their reality. "The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you." (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216).

Among the benefits of participatory exercises, Buarque (2002) emphasizes social learning; for him, when planning is done in this way, as a structured reflection on reality, its context and the possibilities for the future also represent a fundamental contribution to the formation and socio-political and cultural development of society.

For Buarque (2002), this learning is motivated by the interaction and negotiation of different types of knowledge and interests that, in his opinion, broaden the capacity of local society to adapt and respond to global challenges and changes, promoting the construction of a "strategic posture" of the organized territory.

Another benefit of citizen participation Buarque highlighted is what he calls the *democratization of society*. For him, this exercise "(...) also broadens and democratizes the spaces for negotiation in local society, encouraging the involvement of all social stakeholders and the organized and civilized confrontation between different views and interests (...)" (2002, p. 90, author's translation).

According to the same author, this also contributes to reconstructing the local power structure, increasing the presence of broad social segments, normally distanced from decisions and elections, in the political game. He also points out that this situation tends to break down centralized and verticalized decision-making and management structures, which distances social players from the role of subordinates and dependents, playing the role of partners and collaborators.

For Rebeca Abers, the main benefits of participation are the following: 1) it provides citizens with greater control over the government and allows them to understand and deliberate on the problems affecting their lives; 2) it contributes to the political development of people; 3) it stimulates social and political awareness of the communities; 4) it facilitates promoting cooperation between different social groups; 5) it increases the sense of responsibility and ownership of people about public works and works of common interest, facilitating their maintenance and conservation in the long term; citizen surveillance is an efficiency factor (Abers, 2000, cited by Souza, 2006).

Souza (2006) states that among the benefits or arguments of participation, seen as a goal, are the following: 1) it helps to shape better citizens. He makes it clear that given the eminent value of the argument and the variability of the "good citizen" model, parameters such as an increased sense of responsibility and interest in public affairs should be adopted as "objective" criteria (including public assets), as well as an increased awareness of rights. 2) It allows or facilitates citizen empowerment. Here he also clarifies about empowerment that either that word designates a considerable decrease in heteronomy, or it is empty, or worse, it is at the service of political illusionism.

For Souza (2006), direct participation, already seen as a means, is justified above all for reasons of economic and managerial efficiency, in terms of better meeting the needs of the citizenry and minimizing the possibilities of waste and corruption.

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He also adds that probably what most attracts the "average citizen" is the possibility of improving his or her quality of life, with particular emphasis on the material aspect, through or as a result of his or her direct participation in decision-making processes involving businesses of collective interest.

Participation and Participatory: The Domestication of the Term

However, several authors of the post-development trend question both planning and participation, considering them part of the developmentalist strategy implemented by the capitalist model. For example, Escobar (1998) is a scholar who strongly criticizes planning within capitalism:

> Planning techniques and practices have been at the core of development since their inception. As an application of scientific and technical knowledge to the public domain, planning gave legitimacy to and fueled hopes for the enterprise of development. Generally speaking, the concept of planning embodies the belief that social change can be manipulated, directed, and produced at will. Thus, the idea that poor countries could move more or less easily along the path of progress through planning has always been held as an unquestionable truth, an axiom that does not need, according to development experts, to be proved in different ways. Perhaps no other concept has been so insidious, and no other idea has gone so unchallenged. This blind acceptance of planning is more remarkable given the pervasive effects it has had historically, not only in the Third World but also in the West, where it has been associated with fundamental processes of domination and social control. Because planning has been inextricably linked to the rise of Western modernity. The planning conceptions and routines introduced in the Third World during the post-World War II period are the cumulative results of intellectual, economic, and political action. There are no neutral frames through which "reality" moves innocently. They bear the marks of the history and culture that produced them. (p. 55)

Thus, this author places planning as a legitimizing tool of domination and social control at the service of world hegemonic capitalism.

Rahnema (1996), who works on the deconstruction of the term participation, asserts that modern jargon uses stereotypical words similar to the way children assemble pieces of Lego toys since, like these toys, the words are interlocked arbitrarily, resulting in the most fantastic constructions. He says that these

words have no content but serve a purpose: to the extent that these words have been separated from the context, they are ideal for manipulation purposes. *Participation* belongs to this class of words, he says.

Rahnema (1996) argues that the terms *participation* and *participatory* first appeared in development jargon in the late 1950s. The reason for most of the failures of development projects was attributed to the fact that the populations were marginalized from the processes related to their design, formulation, and implementation.

This happened after Elton Mayo (1949) did the Hawthorne studies and proved that there is no cooperation from the workers in the projects; if they are not listened to or considered by their superiors, it is difficult and, sometimes, almost impossible to achieve the established goals.

Based on these contributions from the administrative theories of human relations, cooperation agencies provided this theoretical support to the importance of grassroots participation, but without giving it enough relevance, only to remove barriers or obstacles to implementation.

According to Rahnema (1996), some large international cooperation organizations agreed that development projects had failed because the beneficiaries were not consulted. They also found that when these people participated in the projects, they had done more with much less, even purely financially.

Then, the logical framework methodology proposed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) appeared, incorporating communities under the name of stakeholders. The methodology mentioned above calls, among other things, for an analysis of the stakeholders to limit negative impacts, by which it identifies those who may have an interest and those who may receive a direct or indirect benefit from the intervention.

After, as Ortegón *et al*. stated (2005), people evaluate roles, interests, relative power, and capacity for participation, as well as their position (cooperation or conflict) in relation to the projects, to propose management strategies.

Rahnema says that, after this consensus, the word participation has lost its initial subversive connotation and that at least six reasons can be identified thanks to the preceding interest that governments and development institutions have recently shown towards the term *participation*:

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1. The term is no longer perceived as a threat.

2. Participation became a politically attractive advertising slogan.

3. Participation has become an economically tempting offer.

4. Participation is perceived as an instrument of greater efficiency and as a new source of investment.

5. Participation is becoming a good mechanism for fundraising.

6. An expanded conception of participation could help the private sector become involved in the development business. (1996, pp.- 199)

This way, participation is domesticated to achieve the interests of the organizations, and they focus on limiting the citizenry's capacity, making people believe that planning is something to be done by specialists working in the government.

Rahnema (1996) points out that, given the danger of the indiscriminate use of participation as a manipulative tool and a misleading myth to understand the multiple dimensions of participation, people need to seriously question it right down to its roots, reaching the heart of human relationships and the socio-cultural realities that condition them. He states that no form of social interaction or participation can be meaningful and liberating unless the people who participate act as free and unprejudiced human beings.

One of the main planning problems is the isolation of citizen majorities from decision-making spheres, in view of the acceptance of representative democracy as a solution for the course of the destinies of municipalities, regions, and countries. This deviation also stems from the belief that planning is a technical and complex tool that should be employed by professional experts and not by ordinary citizens. This distancing is a renunciation to take part in the construction of the future course to follow; even worse, it is the beginning of accepting that other people decide our future.

Usually, in the search for legitimacy and acceptance of planning interventions, some sectors of the citizenry are invited to participate in decision-making bodies through participatory planning, but the room for action is very limited due to the scarce presence of authentic participatory processes.

Therefore, as far as participation is concerned, attention must always be paid to the presence of opportunists, as Souza (2006) states, ranging from "false friends" to "declared enemies" of authentic participation.

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An Example: The Peace Agreement in Colombia, Citizen Participation or Pseudo-Participation?

October 2, 2016, will be remembered in Colombia and worldwide as the day when this country had the historic opportunity to put an end to more than fifty years of war with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército Popular,* FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army)

This was done through a direct democracy exercise, a referendum that voluntarily summoned millions of Colombians to decide whether they accepted or rejected the agreements reached in Havana through multiple meetings and extensive working days between the Colombian negotiating team, the Government, and the FARC, accompanied by guarantor countries such as Norway and Cuba, negotiations that lasted four years between September 4, 2012, and August 24, 2016.

The government of President Juan Manuel Santos, in an "unnecessary" (as those who sympathize with representative democracy would say) gesture, wanted the Colombian people, via direct democracy, to decide on the validity and ratification of the signed agreement. It was an opportunity for direct democracy to prove the full strength of its attributes in the face of a representative democracy discredited by vices such as clientelism and corruption.

Everything suggested that this was a procedural matter, as it seemed clear that most Colombian citizens agreed with the end of the war. According to data from the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (n.d.), there had already been more than 220,000 victims of homicides, more than 45,000 missing persons, at least 74,000 victims of attacks on populations, more than 45,000 victims of enforced disappearances, more than 30,000 kidnappings, at least 13,000 victims of sexual violence, more than 11,000 victims of anti-personnel mines, more than 10,000 victims of torture, more than 9,000 victims of looting or abandonment of land, at least 7,000 victims of forced recruitment, more than 2,500 victims of extrajudicial killings, more than 2,000 massacres, and more than 6.7 million victims of displacement, mostly innocent civilians.

Contrary to what almost all polls[1] showed, the result of the elections was a victory of the NO with 50.21% with 6,431,376 votes over 49.78% of the YES with 6,377,482 votes, with Colombia losing the historic opportunity to support

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[1]   Only the Ipsos Napoleón Franco poll gave a NO-win result on July 8, 2016.

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this agreement through direct democracy, in a result only separated by 53,894 votes (less than 1%), in a strongly polarized country. The curious thing about the outcome is that, in addition to the horror and war scenario of more than fifty years, the process was supposed to have been very participatory.

The following can be extracted from the infographic published on the website of the High Commissioner for Peace: A total of 5,835 proposals were received (of which 56% were authentic and 44% were spam) and where it is stated that the purpose was to gain first-hand experience and analysis of the topics on the agenda: Development policy and political participation. The infographic also explains that the delegations agreed to invite a group of people to enrich the opinions of the Government and the FARC-EP on issues one and two of the agenda, including experts on the agrarian topic, leaders of farmers' associations, and scholars.

In terms of participation spaces, the infographics show farmers' organizations and movements, indigenous organizations, Afro-descendant organizations, churches, youth organizations, the educational and cultural sector, development and peace programs, women's organizations, environmental organizations, victims' organizations, political and social movements, political parties, trade union centers and organizations, universities and research centers, grassroots organizations, trade unions, and organizations of the business sector.

According to this same document, the 1st National Forum commissioned to the National University and the United Nations System (December 17, 18, and 19, 2012) was attended by 1,314 citizens representing 522 organizations, where the Comprehensive Agrarian Development Policy was discussed.

In the 2nd National Forum (commissioned by the same entities and held between April 28, 29, and 30, 2013), 1,525 citizens participated in the representation of 480 organizations. In the 3rd National Forum (organized by the same entities in two stages, the first in Bogotá between September 24 and 26, 2013, and the second in San José del Guaviare between October 1 and 3, 2013), the topic of political participation was discussed. This forum reunited 1,040 citizens; they represented 559 organizations in the first stage and 301 people in the second one, where the topic of illicit drugs was discussed.

The infographic says that regional roundtables were also held to provide democratic spaces for the exchange of ideas and discussion between different social sectors, this time convened by the Peace Commissions of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The United Nations System organized the

roundtables. The first round was held between October and November 2012 on agrarian policy, comprehensive political participation, and the solution to the problem of illicit drugs; 2,990 people and 1,333 organizations participated, and 4,000 proposals were received.

Then, a second round was held between June and July 2013 on reparation to victims, victims' rights, truth, justice, reconciliation, transformation, and forgiveness. In this round, 3,000 victims of the conflict participated, 4,000 proposals were heard, and 269 proposals were collected from mailboxes.

The booklet *Proceso de Paz: acuerdo sobre las víctimas del conflicto* (*Peace Process: Agreement on Victims of the Conflict*), published by the workshop of the High Commissioner for Peace, provides more information on citizen participation. This document on victims' voices states that 27,000 contributions were received by March 2016, that more than 3,000 victims participated, and that 60 of them traveled to Havana to give testimony and offer their recommendations directly to the Conversations Office.

Does all of this presentation allow us to say that the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC had a high level of citizen participation? The conclusion reached by Rivera (2017) is that there were not high levels of citizen participation and that, in the case of the peace process between the FARC and the Colombian government, it is not possible to talk about citizen participation since there was only pseudo-participation.

Evaluation of Citizen Participation

Shery Arnstein (1969) proposed a series of categories to identify participatory exercises through a ladder that goes from nonparticipation to citizen control at the top of the ladder. This ladder was adapted to the Brazilian and even the Latin American context by Souza (2006), classifying participation into categories, which can range from coercion itself to the highest level that would be self-management, and with the possibility of locating an initiative in other intermediate categories, such as manipulation, information, consultation, co-optation, alliances, and delegation of power (see Figure 1)

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Figure 1

Ladder of citizen participation
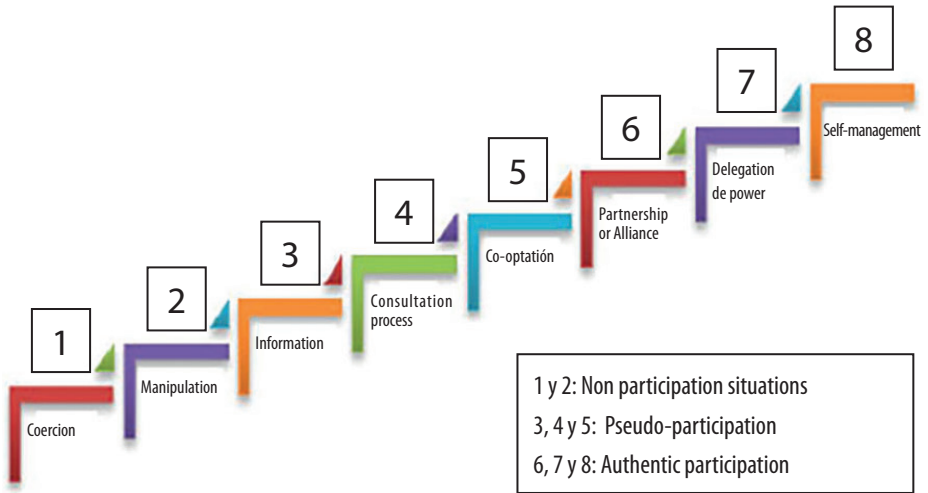
Note: Prepared by the author based on Souza (2002, p. 207).

The eight levels outlined by Souza (2006) are the following:

1. **Coercion:** corresponds to situations of extreme heteronomy and maximum restriction of individual and collective autonomy, where, frequently, not even appearances are disguised (...).

2. **Manipulation:** (...) here, the affected population is, so to speak, deceived and induced, through the continued use of propaganda or other documents, to accept interventions that, in other circumstances, with full knowledge of the facts, it would certainly not accept. By not even informing the population correctly, it is evident that the State does not have the slightest intention of establishing an actual dialog with the citizens directly involved, much less creating or valuing channels of participation (...).

3. **Information:** as the name suggests, the State makes available information on planned interventions, which, depending on the degree of transparency of the political game and the nature of the political culture, will be less or more complete and reliable. It is subtly differentiated from manipulation, which is also based on the dissemination of information. The difference is that the former

has strong intentionality of influence, where the information may correspond to a democratic-representative context of a rather "dry" type, which does not even give a sample of participation in the scene.

4. **The consultation process:** if in a purely informational scheme, the State barely informs those who are affected or are (supposed) beneficiaries of an intervention, with a consultative process the population is heard. In itself, this is not a problem, as the consultative process can be, if well organized, useful for the guidance of the planning activity. The "detail" is that, in a merely consultative referendum scheme, there is no guarantee (...) that the opinions of the population will be respected and incorporated by the decision makers (...).

5. **Co-optation:** a participatory scheme can be understood as intrinsically designed for the co-optation of a community, if it is not very transparent or partially deliberative; thus, it is halfway between a purely consultative process and a strongly deliberative and very transparent scheme. The risk of co-optation will be, in this case, very high and often begins with the "capture" of individuals (key people, such as "community" leaders and other activists), invited to join positions in the administration, and extends to entire organizations and groups, which adhere to a problematic and flawed participatory instance or channel, letting themselves be "tamed" by the illusion of sharing decision-making power (...).

6. *Partnership* or **Alliance:** corresponds to a level of participation authentically associated with a sharing of decision-making power, still characterized by high transparency. Here the State apparatus and organized civil society interact in an environment of dialog and transparency to implement a public policy, organize and make feasible a management scheme, or conduct a specific intervention.

7. **Delegation of power:** it goes beyond the partnership or alliance because, in it, the State renounces several spheres of administration, co-interfering decisively or even using the right of veto, by transferring a whole range of attributions to instances and participatory channels in which civil society has the last word (...). The elements of direct democracy, already very evident in the partnership, are even more numerous and genuine in the delegation of power, even if the general frameworks remain those of representative democracy.

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8. **Self-management:** regarding formal participatory channels instituted by the State, the delegation of power is the highest level that can be desired. Going further by implementing policies and strategies in a self-managing manner, without the presence of a power instance "separated" from the rest of society (State) deciding how much, when, and how power can be transferred, presupposes an autonomous social macro-context, very different from capitalism + representative democracy binomial. (...).

Of all the categories outlined above, only in the last three (partnership, delegation of power, and self-management) would there be political-institutional frameworks with the expectation that planning and management solutions could be found in a reasonably democratic way (partnership), strongly democratic, even if imperfect (delegation of power), or genuinely democratic in a radical sense (self-management) (...). (Souza, 2006, pp. 415-418, italics and translation by the author)

Based on this powerful instrument, it can be said with certainty that the peace process between the Colombian Government and the FARC moved between information and consultation since the State provided information on what was happening in Havana, and the dynamics were very much based on the dissemination of information.

The process had much to do with consultation since it was conducted in a purely informational scheme, where the State informed the victims or (supposed) beneficiaries of the intervention, and through several mechanisms, the population was heard.

According to Souza (2006), the problem with this is that, in a purely consultative scheme, there is no guarantee that the opinions of the population will be respected and incorporated by decision-makers. No one could guarantee that the citizen's proposals would be considered in the agreements; in fact, no study or report to date shows how these proposals were included in the agreement.

In the peace process, at no time we went beyond consultation, that is, beyond pseudo-participation, since at the negotiating table, the civilian population had no permanent voice, not even the right to vote. The agreement was built with spokespersons from two parties: the Colombian government and the FARC. At no time was decision-making power shared with the citizenry; much less was the power to be delegated. So it is an exaggeration on the part of the

Government to speak of citizen participation in the peace process since there was never actual participation there.

This last fact also weakened the approval process of the agreement in the referendum, as it did not allow the empowerment of the citizenry, which probably did not feel represented in the proposals included in the agreement. On the contrary, they felt disappointed or deceived by the Government and the FARC.

From the beginning, the peace process was nothing more than what Souza (2006) defined as "consultative participation" (or opinative). It was a fragile type of participation that, being rigorous, was nothing more than a mere illusion of participation installed at the place of deliberative democracy where one can discuss and deliberate and, of course, make decisions.

Rivera (2017) makes it clear that, in the case of the Colombian referendum, there was no possibility of deliberation, as the exercise was simply limited to the approval or rejection of the agreement signed between the government and the FARC. Sometimes, representatives of civil society, such as victims, were allowed to attend the dialogue roundtables, but it cannot be said that it was an exercise with a high level of participation since this presence was no more than a simple consultation with this type of population.

Usually, in the search for legitimacy and acceptance of interventions in planning, some sectors of the citizenry are invited to the decision-making bodies through participatory planning, but the room for action is very limited due to the scarce presence of authentic participation processes. "That is, despite the participation of users or other social segments involved in the locus, public actions are the result of plans still imposed in a top-down sense (...)" (Simonian, 2018, p. 129, author's translation).

Discussion

It is known that authentic citizen participation is involved when decision-making power is shared with communities in a moderately broad and transparent manner in planning and public management exercises or in the execution of "development" projects through cooperation agencies. Citizen participation is a means to achieve a better redistribution of state resources, as Arnstein (1969) points out; therefore, it is vital to carry it out with vitality and consistency.

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> It is the redistribution of power that allows dispossessed citizens, currently excluded from political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the dispossessed come together to determine how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits such as contracts and sponsorship are distributed. In short, it is the means by which they can induce a meaningful social reform that allows them to share in the benefits of the opulent society. (p. 216, author's translation)

On the other hand, it is very important to clarify that, for authentic citizen participation to take place, the political will of senior government officials, a people invested with high levels of autonomy, an environment of dialog and transparency, formal channels of participation, and people willing to assert their rights as citizens in public spaces endowed with a high level of vitality and density must be aligned (Rivera, 2018).

Regarding the role of the government, it should be pointed out that, when planning and public management exercises are developed, technical staff, researchers, public sector officials, or experts should not assume the privilege of defining the content of government interventions in planning and public management (Souza, 2002). Since, as this author states, their function is to be people consultants — to advise in order to deliberate — with a critical sense, but without imagining themselves floating above other citizens.

Planning and management are political issues; they are not technical or scientific ones. "Scientificity" is not, in itself, a guarantee of the ethical legitimacy of an intervention proposal (Souza, 2002). For him, in order to be entirely legitimate, any proposal needs to be subject to the scrutiny and deliberation of those who will suffer the effects of its implementation.

According to Souza, the cornerstone of autonomist thinking "(...) lies in the conviction that the user of a product, and not the expert who designed or manufactured it, is the best and most legitimate judge of its qualities" (2002, p. 180, author's translation).

The way of judging interventions should be very similar to that of business administration, especially the way related to customer service. The beneficiary of the product or service (the customer), wherever he/she is, knows the characteristics or attributes it must have in order to be acquired. This needs to be assimilated by the members of the government and by the citizens themselves, who need to make this demand to be able to participate in planning and management through actual participation.

Final Considerations

Given a hegemonic version of citizen participation successfully imposed in Latin America, which is nothing more than a consultation, it is necessary to learn to identify when people are facing authentic participatory exercises.

For this goal, Arnstein's (1969) and Souza's (2006 and 2002) works are essential, jointly with the help of an evaluation ladder that identifies different steps of authenticity, ranging from non-participation through pseudo-participation to authentic participation. In this way, each particular case of participation can be evaluated, and the situation being faced can be identified, as well as the main requirements needed in the process to achieve authentic participation.

Authentic citizen participation is known to exist only when decision-making power is shared with communities, which rarely happens, as Rivera and Simonian (2019) found in a diagnosis of a national natural park overlapping with indigenous territories in Colombia. This requires the alignment of several variables, some of which are under the control of the government, and others are under popular control.

The government's role initially implies a strong willingness to share decision-making power, allocate enough resources, and create channels of participation to operate independently and transparently. Communities need people willing to assert their rights as citizens in public spaces with a high level of vitality and density.

It is necessary for people to react and seek greater decision-making power and not let others decide, by casting lots, the future of all men and women (Matus, 1996). This work is an invitation to take a stand with arguments, vindicating the rights of the citizenry through the use of tools that allow the construction of an autonomous society. It is an invitation to break with conformism and for citizens to become true protagonists of the necessary change.

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