Strengthening Cooperation for Spatial Planning - A Case Study on Participatory Planning in Albania

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Summary

The Albanian context still faces challenges on promoting participatory democracy in decision-making in all governmental levels. The increased activity in territorial planning over the last years, evidenced from the changes in legislation and preparation of plans at national and local level, has brought to discussion the challenges of establishing and reinforcing cooperation and participatory approaches.

This article, aims to discuss participatory planning in the Albanian context, as a model for territorial cooperation through its achievements, failures and challenges. Using as a broad conceptual framework, the Arnstein Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), the paper analyses two crucial timeframes of the Albanian planning system; a) the period 1995-2006 where bottom-up approaches were developed as a response to the institutional milieu; and b) the post 20015 period, where participation was institutionalized and structured in a multi-layered way.

The research explores the context through an historical perspective, by using the Arnstein ladder as a conceptual framework in order to generate insights and policy orientation for improving and enhancing participation in spatial planning. This contributes to the overall discussion on collaboration and stakeholders' inclusion in decision-making, which constitute the core of participatory planning.

Keywords: Participatory Planning, Arnstein Ladder, Bottom-up Approach, Collaborative Planning, Public Hearing, Co-Creation, Citizen Engagement

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Introduction

Participatory democracy,[1] as a fundamental tool/mechanism of democratic systems, puts decision-making directly in the hands of citizens. Similar to other political approaches, the way democracy is implemented throughout governmental systems, has produced varying shades of understanding. The idea of democracy as a political system has been profoundly challenged by the dissatisfaction it generates in some sectors of society, where "exclusion from public policies and low participation in decision making are rattling the fundamental principles of it…" (Riera, 2010, p. 13).

Although most democratic systems recognize citizen engagement as an integral part of democracy, even the more solid participatory democracies face real challenges integrating stakeholder participation into planning processes. Questions ranging from 'Why do we want citizens to participate?' to 'What are the responsibilities of the planner regarding citizen participation?' (Fisher, 2001), raised since the earliest models of participation in planning, are still relevant to today's contexts.

Participatory planning, as a case for participatory democracy, is indeed a paradigm that emphasizes the involvement of the entire community in the strategic and management processes of urban/territorial planning. It encourages citizens to take part in decision-making in planning aspects that affect or are of interest to them.

On the other hand, concepts such as cooperation and collaboration are frequently used among scholars and decision-makers in the framework of spatial planning (see Box 1). In essence, though these concepts are not new, they constitute the next level in the complexity of participation, which results in (or aims at) a better use of territory and resources for sustainable development.

Following the change in the political system in the early 1990s in Albania, practices of participation started to evolve. The process was neither legally binding, nor institutionalized or formalized, and emerged as a response to the challenges of urban development in the informal settlements during the period 1995-2006. This process was later turned into an institutionalized, systematic approach, integrated into the local and national planning process, in accordance with legal and institutional changes.

The planning system in Albania has paradigmatically changed in the last ten years, with a shift from the urbanism approach, to comprehensive and integrated spatial planning. This constituted an emergent need to also change the mentality of perceiving the territory as a rigid division of forms and functions. The latter was the case in the central planning approach prior to 1990, where urban and rural development was always defined at the national level, in a centralized way, and as a mere effect of economic development policies. The change in the planning system in Albania occurred in parallel to several political processes, such as government decentralization, territorial administrative reforms, and the ongoing European integration process. At the same time, there was an incremental increase in experience, knowledge, and self-awareness of local planners that the system had to change (Dhrami, 2018).

However, the challenge of changing the planning system is accompanied by the overwhelming issue of poor local capacity, both in terms of human and financial resources (Greca, et al., 2019). Relevant institutional and legal measures have been adopted to ensure some form of participation in planning processes at the national and local levels. Nevertheless, since the shift of planning processes and instruments has taken place at a relatively fast pace (and is still underway) it is almost impossible to observe and benchmark

real results from the reforms at this given moment (ibid.).

In this framework, considering the dynamic evolution of the Albanian planning system, it becomes interesting to explore and analyse the evolution and challenges of participatory approaches in planning. The latter is also the purpose of this contribution, channelled into two main timeframes. Ultimately, the following question will be addressed: How can planning approaches be improved (or changed) in favour of territorial cooperation and more participatory democracy in territorial development decision-making? In trying to achieve the aim, the conceptual framework of the Arnstein's Ladder will be used as a basis of analysis for the case studies (see Box 2).

Box 1. The Evolution of Collaborative Planning Theory

Participatory planning is considered a planning paradigm that emphasizes the involvement of the entire community in the strategic and management processes of urban planning, as an integral part of community development. (Lefèvre, et al., 2001)

The earliest ideas of participatory planning stemmed from theories of key pioneers such as Paulo Freire, Kurt Lewin , Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, etc. A fundamental inspiration for the participatory planning movement was their belief that poor and exploited people can, and should be, enabled to analyse their own reality (Fisher, 2001).
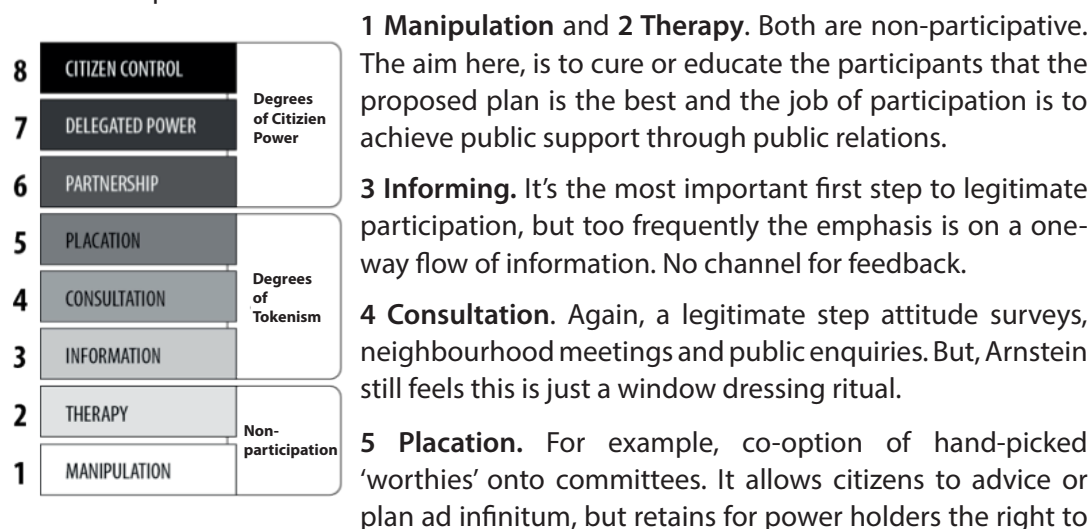
These theories have been implemented through a series of approaches and techniques since the 1970's, such as Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA), and the Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). These methodologies were first used with rural communities in the developing world and in the UK, aiming at tapping into the unique perspectives of the rural poor, helping to unlock their ideas not only on the nature and causes of the issues that affect them, but also on realistic solutions. PRA tools include a variety of ways of visualizing or representing aspects of local reality, such as social mapping, well-being ranking, network and Venn diagramming, matrix scoring, etc.

The incentive to develop these instruments came, inter alia, also from the dissatisfaction and protests of citizens towards many urban renewal projects that were designed in the post war period. The movement encouraged by Jane Jacobs attests to this. Since then, 'learning together' and 'open-ended inquiries' have become the main keywords of these participatory, action-based processes. With time, the array of instruments of participation evolved into a wider concept, that of communicative planning (or collaborative planning), which gathers stakeholders and engages them in a process to decision-making that respects the positions of all those involved. Since the 1970s, the communicative planning theory has evolved based on the notion that communication and reasoning come in diverse forms, knowledge is socially constructed (Davoudi, 2015), and people's diverse interests and preferences are formed out of their social contexts (Friedmann, 1981).

Finally, communicative planning theory advances the idea that planning happens in everyday practice and social relations, and consensus-building can be used to organize people's thoughts and move past traditional ways of knowing and decision-making.

Box 2. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

In terms of citizen participation in decision-making, Arnstein (1969) has developed a simple, yet comprehensive categorization of levels, ranked from the least to the most participatory. This concept addresses power structures in society and how they interact, in the face of important decision-making processes. Below is a short explanation of each level of the 'Participation ladder':

1 Manipulation and **2 Therapy**. Both are non-participative. The aim here, is to cure or educate the participants that the proposed plan is the best and the job of participation is to achieve public support through public relations.

3 Informing. It's the most important first step to legitimate participation, but too frequently the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information. No channel for feedback.

4 Consultation. Again, a legitimate step attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. But, Arnstein still feels this is just a window dressing ritual.

5 Placation. For example, co-option of hand-picked 'worthies' onto committees. It allows citizens to advice or plan ad infinitum, but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

6 Partnership. Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees.

7 Delegation. Citizens holding a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.

8 Citizen Control. Have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme e.g. neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

Source: (Arnstein, 1969); Adapted by authors.

Based on this conceptual framework from Arnstein the Albanian case will be analysed in two planning timeframes: 1995 – 2006 and post 2015.

The Bottom - up Approach to Participatory Planning (1995 – 2006)

The period 1995-2006 was not addressed by chance in this chapter. It coincides with the first mobilized efforts to address in a systematic way the phenomena of informality that emerged in the periphery of urban areas (and especially in Tirana) following the fall of the communist regime.

There are several factors that induced the development of informal settlements in Albania, such as: the new property relations regime that emerged (especially on agricultural land); the internal migration of the population to the urban areas; a lack of robust institutions; housing market distortion and unaffordability of housing in the centre; and the emergence of pyramid schemes and the civic turmoil that followed (Aliaj, et al., 2009)[2]. In this context, the case of

the village of Bathore in the municipality of Kamza is studied as the most representative example of both a rapidly growing informal area and of successful efforts to address informality and its development consequences through participatory urban upgrading processes.

Before the rapid urbanization that took place during the 1990s, Kamza was a small settlement[3] with a population of approximately 6,000 inhabitants and a predominantly rural character (both in terms of employment and land use). By 2001, it had transformed into a dense urban extension of Tirana, with more than 60,000 inhabitants (INSTAT, 2001) and its residents were facing severe problems in accessing main infrastructures, public services, and amenities (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The densification of the informal settlements in Bathore 1994-2001
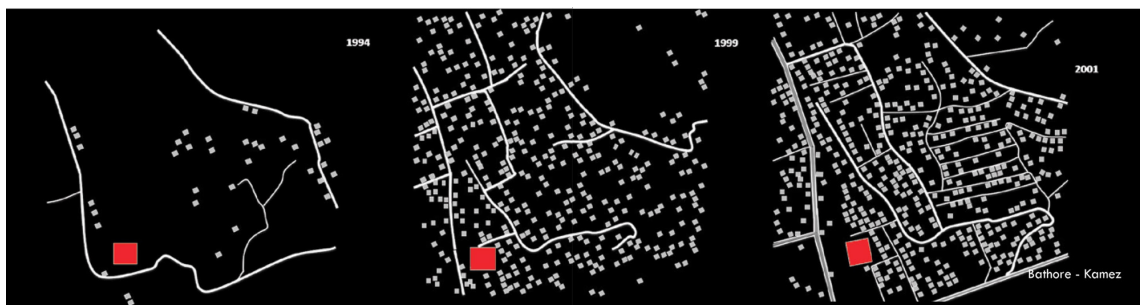
Source: Co-PLAN, Urban Land Management Project 2001

Highly disregarded at an institutional level in the beginning of the 1990s, the process of informal urbanization took off in such an aggressive scale that after 1997, the local authorities started to think about what measure to take. The first attempts were to demolish the illegally constructed houses in Bathore in 1995, but these were held off by the vivid protests of the inhabitants. In contrast to these attempts, a project was developed between 1995 and 1997 in the outskirts of Tirana to engage residents of informal areas into developing their own models of neighbourhood upgrading. In light of this practice, other means of managing informality were sought. As a result, central and local government, in cooperation with the World Bank, supported a local initiative in Bathore that created conditions for citizen engagement in participatory planning. The novelty of these cases[4] was that a local NGO facilitated and technically assisted the implementation process, in collaboration with local and national authorities (Shutina & Slootweg, 1998). This pilot project would turn into one of the most successful co-creation and collaborative experiences in planning in Albania at the neighbourhood level and replicated itself not long after in other informal settings in the country.

The citizen engagement process went through several stages: from analysing the socio-economic conditions; establishing contact with community leaders and building trust; co-designing the best option for infrastructure layout and plot partition; building relationship with the local and national authorities; developing a clear feasibility and cost analysis to be formalised in individual agreements with each settler; and facilitating registration of the final property layout in a temporary register (Shutina & Slootweg, 1998). One of the challenges addressed in the case of Bathore was that out of the total project value (16 million USD), 25% was to be contributed by the inhabitants themselves (20% for secondary infrastructure and 100% for tertiary infrastructure). Not only would the settlers need to rearrange the plot partitions

Figure 2. Images from the consultation processes in Bathore

Source: Co-PLAN archive

to accommodate the new infrastructure, but they had to contribute financially and later register their properties to eventually enter the legalization process more easily (see Figure 2) .

This intensive process of community engagement enabled the inhabitants of the area to feel secure and proactive, and allowed for a relatively smooth process of upgrading in Bathore. If we take into consideration Arnstein's ladder, the process started from Step 3 (information), and climbed to Step 6 (partnership) and partially Step 7 (delegation). The first step of information was of utmost importance because of the necessity to build trust in a context where planning as a concept was hated, due to sensitivity to past centralized planning path dependencies. The information phase included systematic encounters with community representatives to consult them on the proposed interventions of infrastructure layout in the area, and, most importantly, to share the cost of the interventions, where the community

needed to finance at least 20% of the cost. The mobilization of the community was done through a thorough process of identification of the so-called 'community leaders' during the socio-economic survey.

They were eventually engaged in a registered citizen association, which would be able to represent the needs of the neighbourhood in the planning processes carried out at the local level (Shutina & Slootweg, 1998). While this was not a permanent representation of the community at the citizen council level, it was still a successful approximation to power delegation (Step 7) in the given context. Finally, Step 6 was reached formally through an agreement between the aforementioned association and local authorities, not only for the approval of the new neighbourhood layout in Bathore, but most importantly, for the new registered status of property in the subdivided areas. This constituted a clear case of partnership between a community representation and a local authority, intermediated by an NGO, which ensured the realization of the program and the co-

financing mechanism. This was a learning process both for the community as well as for the local authority (ibid.).

Nevertheless, this process of participation was limited in scale and cases, replicated through the strategy and project in Kamza (at the time a 22 km² administrative territory) and in Këneta area in Durrës (an approximately 30 ha area). The process required a lot of time and though it was not formalised, it was structured in approach, with logical and clear steps to follow. The replication of the model attained successful results in all contexts where it was applied. Though replication did not continue after 2006, the model remains a significant policy and development action, marking two important contributions to the forthcoming participation process in Albania:

a) **A policy impact on the buildings legalization reform** initiated by the government in 2005-2006. This governmental program and the respective laws and bylaws relied on the experience of the above model.

b) **The commencement of efforts to build local government capacities in cooperating with citizens and carrying out strategic urban planning at the local level.** The municipality of Kamza was the first to adopt a Strategic Urban Development Plan in 2002 (Aliaj, et al., 2009). Based on this experience, the municipalities of Fier and Elbasan also adopted urban plans following place-based citizen-engagement processes in 2004 and 2005 respectively.

However, regardless of its policy impact in the legalization reform, the above model affected the planning approaches of the time in a limited way. In Kamza, Fier, and Elbasan the participatory planning experience was very comprehensive, well-structured, and well documented. Still, participation was conducted in smaller geographical areas compared to the current territorial size of Albanian municipalities, and was largely

based on the willingness of the respective municipalities to have civic processes and to pursue political and development strategies based on cooperation with people. Broadly speaking, participation in planning during this period (2002-2009) was not legally institutionalized. It was mainly observed in processes of strategic and local economic development planning, carried out in various municipalities with the support of donor programs, but not as a widespread practice in the preparation of urban regulatory plans.

The Integrated Approach to Participatory Planning after TAR (2015 – to date)

From 2009 to 2015, 45 local urban plans were drafted, but with limited traces of documented public hearings held for planning purposes. Between 2012 and 2013, a few small municipalities such as Kruma, Zagoria, Burreli, Bajram Curri, and Vora developed some interesting planning processes, adapted to their local contexts. These plans were jointly developed by POLIS University in Tirana and the respective local authorities. As part of the process, the teams conducted socio-economic surveys, target group consultation workshops, as well as several site visits. This approach created the opportunity for citizens and other stakeholders to be engaged in the process and offer feedback. In these municipalities too, the participatory approach was specific to the local context and fuelled by the need of the local authorities to identify, through planning, means and strategies for socio-economic development in their respective areas. On the other hand, due to lack of documentation, it is impossible to assess participatory approaches to planning in other municipalities.

Following the territorial administrative reform of 2015, with the amalgamation of municipalities/communes into larger territories and populations, the need for planning became increasingly higher. This led to the commitment of the national

government to support spatial planning for the whole urban-rural-natural territory of the municipality, based on a newly adopted law of territorial planning and development. Under the leadership of a newly formed Ministry of Urban Development, the territorial planning law[6] and its bylaws[7] were amended and, in parallel, for the first time, the National General Territorial Plan of Albania was drafted (together with two national sectorial plans – the Cross Sectorial Plan for the Economic Area Tiranë-Durrës and the Integrated Cross Sectorial Plan of the Albanian Coast (NTPA, 2019). This national planning process was carried out in consultation[8] with professionals and through public hearings. Documents were made available for public access in the official websites of National Territorial Planning Agency (NTPA), Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), and in social media.

Through donor support,[9] and MoUD open calls,[10] 31 General Local Territorial Plans (GLTP) were drafted in between 8 and 15 months. By 2019, out of 61 Municipalities, 36 of them had already approved and had started to implement their plans,[11] eight were still in the process of approval, 16 plans were being drafted and 1 Municipality had not started the process yet. During this period, as a result of legal requirements, participation in planning has become an important component of the process (Hoxha, et al., 2017). The rigid planning of the pre- and early 1990s in Albania is gradually but steadily shifting towards a comprehensive approach, combining political objectives and development visioning processes, strategic and action-led planning, and rapid implementation and concrete development projects. Stakeholder involvement and interaction is also part of the planning process, as defined by law. However, the quality of the processes and transparency and access of information are aspects of participation that need further assessment in terms of accountability and the proper functioning of a feedback mechanism for participation.

Indeed, the recently implemented Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR) has brought about challenges in the establishment of network relations and the facilitation of stakeholder interactions due to the large territorial scale in which planning now takes place. In this context, municipalities also have the responsibility to conduct at least three to four public hearings while drafting the GLTP. Yet, while municipalities have in all cases complied with the legal requirement, the concerns about participation is not so much about the number of public hearings, as it is about the quality of participation and citizen contribution during these hearings. Taking into consideration the relatively short time in which the local planning process took place and the large size and complex territory of the new municipalities (each varying from 15,000 to 800,000 inhabitants), it remains to be evaluated whether these public hearings[12] are representative enough to be considered as a basis for citizen participation.

The analysis of the 36 GLTPs (see Box 3) shows the following:

- Out of 36 GLTPs' documents, 32 contain evidence of the participatory process held during preparation (usually minutes of the meeting).

- The vast majority of the 32 municipalities have some form of evidence on three or less public hearings. Nine municipalities have documented more than 6 public hearings (including the local coordination forums).

- Nine municipalities have declared at least one meetings held with specific focus groups, or citizens in the administrative units. The rest of the hearings were held in the central municipality building, or any venue of choice in the city, without targeting any particular interest group.

- Evidences of the signed attendances shown in some of the GLTPs (in this case only 6 municipalities have provided

the signing sheets), suggest that about 30% of participants were municipal staff. The estimated average number of participants in public hearings for the municipalities is 33,13 varying from as low as 19 participants, to 60 in some cases.

• In 20 out of 36 cases, the planning documents include reflections and measures taken after the hearings, based on citizens' feedback.

• Traditional media, like television and newspapers, and social media have been used extensively in the 30 GLTPs reviewed, primarily to announce and document the process, as well as to inform any related decision-making (Figure 3).

Box 3. Methodology for participation evaluation in 36 Approved GLTPs in Albania

For the purpose of the evaluation of participation in local planning, the respective documentation of 36 Albanian municipalities was assessed. These municipalities have already approved their GLTPs and the final GLTP documents are available online in the NTPA webpage.
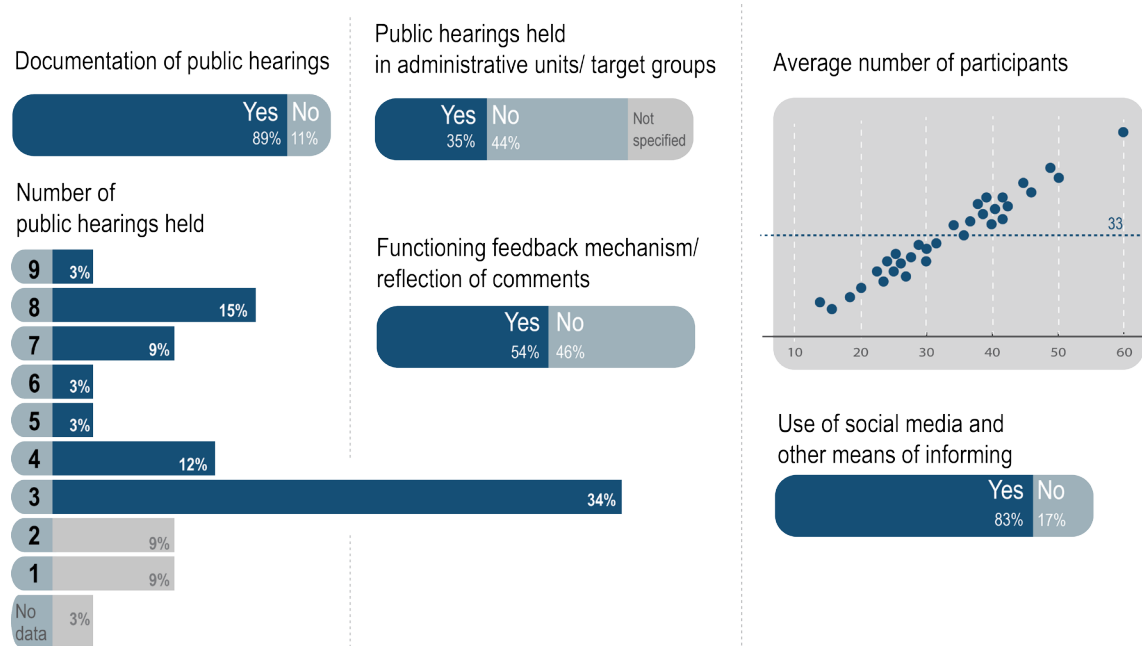
The following questions were raised and relevant data was collected through content analysis of two of the main GLTP documents for each municipality: i) The Territorial Strategy; ii) The proposed Territorial Plan.

1. Are public hearings and participatory processes documented and the information on the process made accessible and transparent to the public at large?

2. How many public hearings were held in total and how many in the administrative units of each municipality?

3. How many public hearings were held in total and how many in the administrative units of each municipality?

4. How many people attended the public hearings?

5. Is there any transcripts of questions and answers addressed during the consultations/hearings? Is there any feedback mechanism in place to ensure accountability?

6. Did the municipality make use of [social] media during the drafting of GLTPs?

Each of the abovementioned documents should provide data and information regarding participation, as stated by the law.

Next to the above review, reference is made also to a benchmarking report published in March 2019, on the implementation progress of GLTPs.[14] The benchmark report uses information that NTPA collects regularly from municipalities on institutional basis, and information generated out of focus groups and interviews conducted with the staff of the 11 municipalities that were subject to the monitoring process and the report. According to the report all surveyed municipalities confirm that the participation in public hearings was with an average of 40-60 citizens/per public hearing (while there were 5-6 cases with a higher number of participants 80-120). The report states that 5 municipalities held dedicated hearings for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process, while the other municipalities ntegrated these hearings with the GLTP ones. These results are slightly higher than those derived from the review of the planning documents (even for the same municipalities), emphasizing further the fact that a proper documentation of the participatory process is missing, and it

Figure 3. Results from the analysis carried out in 36 municipalities

Documentation of public hearings

Yes 89% | No 11%

Number of public hearings held

9	3%
8	15%
7	9%
6	3%
5	3%
4	12%
3	34%
2	9%
1	9%
No data	3%

Public hearings held in administrative units/ target groups

Yes 35% | No 44% | Not specified

Functioning feedback mechanism/ reflection of comments

Yes 54% | No 46%

Average number of participants

33

Use of social media and other means of informing

Yes 83% | No 17%

Source: Authors, based on GLTPs published in the Territorial Planning Registry, accessed and downloaded in August 2019

is possible to generate more accurate data on the participatory planning process only by talking to people involved and collecting testimonials.

Both the analysis of 36 GLTPs and the benchmark report, show that many municipalities and their technical advisers have opted for a variety of approaches to increase public participation, considering the participatory process as a milestone in the legitimization of the whole planning document. For instance, the municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra, and Lushnje, besides broad public hearings, have also organised focus groups for gaining insight on the current context needs, setting priorities, and drafting policies and actions (Hoxha, et al., 2017). The focus group is usually more content oriented and target to a particular group, promoting more in-depth discussion, and hence being more effective than public hearings. The latter tend to be usually of an informative nature, with less time dedicated to questions and answers in the end (ibid.). Moreover, a series of Local Planning Coordination Forums were organized by NTPA for horizontal and

vertical coordination of proposals between the municipality involved in planning and the neighbouring local governments. One of the major novelties in terms of organized citizen engagement in recent years has been the creation of Local Urban Forums and/or Citizen Advisory Panels (CAP).[15] These forums/panels were made very good use in terms of participatory planning, particularly in 5 municipalities, where they have organized periodical thematic meetings and have contributed to the public hearings of the GLTP-s. In other cases, the groups were less active, but still present in the public hearings (NTPA, 2019). Finally, all approved documents are published in the NTPA website. In terms of institutional effort, it seems that many positive steps are taken to 'climb' the Arnstein ladder, beyond the tokenism stage.

Finally, in terms of dissemination of information related to the planning documents and the public hearings, though the procedure is formalized, the outcome was not always as expected. In most of the cases, the materials to be consulted in the hearing, which should have been made

accessible for the public within a timeframe of 1 month before the hearing, failed to do so in due time. This is understandable to a certain degree, since the allocated time-period for GLTPs' preparation was relatively short (Hoxha, et al., 2018). In some cases the materials were made available only one day prior to the meeting, resulting in some form of manipulation and therapy and tendency for information, when referring to the Arnstein ladder. The presentations of the plans come with a huge informative luggage, in some cases very technical, making this too much to be digested by the citizens. Not having the information prior, they would come unprepared, with no structured thoughts or proposals, leading to an impulsive feedback on what is presented at that specific moment, and what they can superficially understand (Figure 3).

Social media and the municipality webpage have been used to notify citizens about the hearings date and time (and in few cases as in Tirana the uploading of the presentations), but no further outcome of these hearings is documented. In few cases, the plan was also debated in TV shows (though in the case if Tirana, most of the debate happened after the approval), which reached greater audience. It is also worth mentioning the case of the municipality of Lezhë, which can be seen as a good practice in terms of e-participation, because of the establishment of an open source GIS application made available to the public, to check and comment in real time regarding the plan (Hoxha, et al., 2017). The same was done in an open access platform for the GLTP of Tirana, but only in the very early stages of analysis. These creative ideas reduce time and mitigate territorial constrains, and help engage citizens in a more comprehensive way, closer to the 'placation' 16 step of the Arnstein ladder.

Other methods include questionnaires, which were realized by a large number of working teams, but in none of the cases the samples were representative enough, but were merely used for a rapid

assessment of deficiencies and territorial needs. Nevertheless, no institutional data is available for the hearings, making it difficult to understand and assess the scale of participation. In terms of effectiveness, only in few cases the documentation of hearings includes citizen comments and the replica given by the expert during the hearing. Thus, the real contribution of the citizens in the territorial decision-making, remains still unknown and in the shadow.

The abovementioned results, show that in all of the GLTPs considered for this study, have successfully climbed the (3) Informing Step in the Arnstein ladder. All of the Municipalities, have provided information on the GLTP content, through public hearings and forums, [social] media, and/or the Territorial Planning Integrated Register. Today, all of the approved GLTP documents are accessible online. There is still work to do in the dissemination of planning documents in timely manne
Yet, the 4th Ladder Consultation, remains a dressing window as Arnstein would say, in most of the cases analysed. Very few municipalities have held meetings with focus groups, or in their rural areas. Furthermore, the public hearing process is handled differently in different municipalities, therefore the consultation degree varies, and due to lack of proper documentation is impossible to analyse. The average number of participants in the public hearings held in the central part of the municipality, as compared to the respective municipality's population, shows that the processes were not representative enough. The feedback mechanism is present in about half of the cases, and even so, they represent remarks given in these limited occasions, and not a continuous process of participation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Analysing these two main periods of participatory planning processes in Albania reveals two relatively different contexts and approaches: 1) mobilising community

in co-creation of space, including support for local authorities, in a bottom-up but non-formalised way, and 2) implementing an entire planning process through institutionally defined mechanisms for citizen feedback. Both periods were analysed in time and scale and the following conclusions are drawn.

The experience established during the first period is very important, because it created a model, which, besides achieving place-based results, it also contributed to formation of the current territorial planning system and law. The cases are easily traceable because of being well documented and had tangible impacts on the respective communities. The planners involved in the implementation of the cases gained knowledge, which they transferred to the planning system and revised practice after 2009. However, the cases of this first period are limited in number, compared to the need for bottom-up citizen engagement in planning. Also, this bottom-up approach, though broadly recognised, it was not carried on for implementation after 2009, parallel to the institutional processes of participatory planning. In general, stakeholders in Albanian consider that resources, time and capacities to undertake bottom-up citizen engagement in planning are beyond their means. Municipalities in particular are not necessarily keen in replicating such long and intensive processes, given the multitude of pressing governance issues they have to deal with. Furthermore, the bottom-up processes may need also capacitated intermediaries, such as representatives of civil society or community-based organisations, in order to manage the negotiations and balance the interest.

Still, the case of Bathore and other cases implemented in Kamza and Këneta (in Durrës) informal areas show that that in small community/neighbourhood territorial scales, bottom-up citizen engagement in territorial planning is possible and perhaps the best mechanism to enable territorial development. The results are also sustainable because communities take ownership of the final product.

The experiences of the second period entail a large territorial scale – city and beyond, looking also at interlinkages between urban-rural-agricultural and natural sites. Besides an increase in territorial size and complexity, the second period saw also major improvements in the planning legislation and practice, starting with shifting toward strategic and comprehensive planning of the territory and preparation/approval of 36/61 plans respectively. Citizen engagement was formalised through law. This guarantees that all municipalities undertake at least a minimum of citizen participation events, even for large-scale territorial planning. However, the efficiency of the citizen engagement may not necessarily be high, or lead towards democratic solutions on territorial development. This is so due to the large scale and high complexity of the territories to plan; difficult communication between communities and local governments in some remote territorial contexts; costs of the process, which are higher the less accessible a territory is; the increasing stakeholders' diversity leading to a large variety of needs and challenges to consider through planning. Furthermore, in the specific case of Albania, it is noticed that documentation of the participatory processes is not complete and well traceable. Also, there has been a certain mismatch between time dedicated to planning, time needed for triggering citizen willingness to engage in planning and carry out participatory processes, and the role of technical assistance. As a result, effective and qualitative feedback from citizens was not always achieved.

On the other hand, municipalities, in some cases, reduce citizen participation both as a result of their lack of capacity and recognition of the importance of the process. Adding to this, the time pressure seems to having turned participation into a bureaucratic procedure in some cases, while other municipalities have designated

the necessary time to citizen involvement in planning. As such, in Albania one can observe the presence of both, effective participatory planning on one hand, and mostly bureaucratic participation to legitimize top-down decisions on the other.

As a conclusion, to guarantee citizens' participation and further promote and enhance participatory planning in Albania the following recommendations can be taken in account:

Strengthening the interest groups' capacities, to influence political power and be able to formulate and bring forward their ideas, needs, and rights is important to ensure effective participation. This is achieved through information and increased cooperation between municipalities and local actors, through the intermediation of national agencies. Local governments should encourage communities and civic society to engage in learning about planning policy cycles, instruments and decisions. Hence, planning departments should not see their role limited to technical processes only.

Local governments can do more to encourage community organized groups, such as CAPs and urban forums, and other stakeholders, to be more proactive in the planning decision-making, moving away from closed-doors policy making. This cooperation should continue beyond approval of planning documents and at any time there is planning decision-making, because planning is a continuous process.

It is important for local authorities to envisage citizens as an integral part of decision-making, supported by the inclusion of private sector interest groups and higher education institutions in a quadruple helix system.

In practice, especially now that territorial plans are approved, municipalities need to create a structure that is capable and works in negotiation processes with people for all of their territorial development needs. These can be for public and private initiatives.

In any case, the municipality should be transparent in its decision-making and the participatory/negotiation processes should be well-documented and open to the public. Furthermore, as the review of the general territorial plans is a continuous process, municipalities should take corrective action and apply mechanisms to reintegrate the community in the process and give it the proper time prior to sending the revised documents for approval. In such way, the bottom-up approach could be revived.

To a large extent planning has to discover new methods of inclusion, perhaps using more technology, especially in context of difficult access, or as a means to saving time. On the other hand, planning officials should regularly spend time on-site, talking to communities in need and boosting their involvement in planning. The good practices, reported in both periods, need to be replicated and improved further, such as: e-communication tools, focus groups, the feedback documentation systems applied by some municipalities, etc. The range of methods vary from small scale co-designing experience, to games, and recently with the advances in technology E-participation can easily take a strong emphasis. The latter goes from the use of social media in planning processes, towards more sophisticated measures of using GIS-based platforms for actively engaging the public (Conroy & Evans-Crowley, 2006).

Notes

1. Sometimes in literature could be also found as direct democracy.

2. The emergence of the informal sector in Albania is not subject of this paper, but there is significant literature that covers the phenomena, such as: Aliaj, B., 2008. "Misteri i Gjashtë: Cili është kurthi që mban peng zhvillimin dhe integrimin e ekonomisë shqiptare me botën moderne?". 1st ed. Tiranë: POLIS Press. Aliaj, B., Dhamo, S. & Shutina, D., 2009. Midis Vakumit dhe Energjisë. Tiranë:

POLIS Press. Co-PLAN, 2000: City made by people, vol 2, Tiranë; etc.

3. Until the 90's Kamza was an agricultural area, with farms and the agricultural University, focused on academic practices in a part of the agricultural area.

4. Initially, the participatory urban upgrading approach was tested in the informal neighbourhood of Breglumasi (Tirana). as a pilot project in the framework of the Urban Land Management Project in Tirana, supported by the World Bank and Dutch donor organisations. The project aimed at extending the infrastructure networks and services in the project area, as well as at developing institutional capacities in planning and land managemenet.

5. Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development

6. Referring to Law 107/2014 "On Territorial Planning and Development, amended".

7. Accordingly, DCM 671 "For the approval of the Territorial Planning Regulations" and DCM 408 "For the approval of Territorial Development Regulations".

8. Evidence on the public hearings held during these processes is documented in the NTPA official website. See http://planifikimi.gov.al/index.php?id=158&L=2.

9. Through the USAID support 5 Municipalities in Albania (Berat, Elbasan, Lushnje, Berat and Kuçovë) were the first to start (and latter approve) the GLTP process. In 2017 other 5 municipalities were able to draft and approve their plans through SDC support.

10. The first open call from MoUD was opened in 2015 for 26 Municipalities divided into 10 LOTs to 10 consortiums of local and international companies supporting local authorities to complete the GLTPs. Later in 2017 MoUD supported another seven municipalities in drafting their plans and in 2018, MIE supported the 16 remaining municipalities.

11. For update, see http://planifikimi.gov.al/index.php?id=732.

12. Article 24 of Law 107/2014, sets the legal basis of conducting at least one public hearing for each document to be approved. As such in this process, four documents should be approved: The Territorial Strategy, the Territorial Plan, the Regulations, and the Strategic Environmental Assessment.

13. This estimation takes into account either photos of public hearings in the GLTPs, or photos of the respective sign-in sheets.

14. The 'Benchmarking Report on the Monitoring of Implementation of General local plans in Albania', drafted by NTPA with the support of USAID and the technical assistance of Co-PLAN takes into consideration only 11 municipalities that, at the time of the drafting of the report (2017-2018), had started the implementation of their GLTPs since at least six months from approval date.

15. CAP-s were established by the Planning and Local Governance Project (USAID), to regularly consult with municipal officials on issues such as taxes, annual budgets and city development.

16. The placation stage means 'pleasing' citizens. It allows them to advise or plan ad infinitum but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

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