Public Participatory Approach- A Democratic Tool

Prathima N

Partner: PR Architecture Studio

Architect,Urban Designer,Research Scholar

E-mail ID-
reddyprathima@gmail.com

A practicing Architect and a qualified Urban Designer.
Research Scholar from National Law School of India University (NLSIU), perusing the research on "Urban Planning and Inclusivity:A Study on Policies and Legislations of Bengaluru City".
An activist with interest on reclaiming urban commons including the water network, and an advocate of participatory democracy.

Abstract:

Cities are for living beings and human needs dominate the urban environment. Humans can participate in building the environment they live in. In the larger context, advocacy planning where people come together, initiate, facilitate and take decisions to build their environment is not a new process. However, public participation offers a scale where people can partner with the government in shaping their living environment. The paper explores public participation as a democratic tool bringing people closer to their city. To demonstrate the same, the paper conceptualises the 3Ps of public participation in the urban context: planning,problem-solving and passive surveillance.

Planning deals with spatial planning for local area plans which will set the template for formulating the master plan and resource and fund utilisation in municipal governance. Problem-solving is another area where public participation can create platforms for sharing best practices, identifying urban interventions through collective deliberation by diverse stakeholders, and building a sense of common shared spaces in the neighbourhood. As for passive surveillance, public participation can be a tool for the protection of neighbourhood and common pool resources.

The paper analyses urban projects and the urban environment in Bengaluru to deconstruct the 3Ps of public participation. The paper conclusively establishes the role of public participation as a democratic tool to build inclusive and sustainable cities.

Keywords:

Public Participation, Democracy, Urban, Planning, Problem-solving, Passive surveillance.

1. Introduction:

"Decision making of a group, polis, population, community, is politics" (Aristotle, 1908)

Public participation is a cornerstone of democracy, embodying the principles of government of, by and for the people.It enables citizens to voice their opinions, concerns, and ideas, ensuring that government decisions align with

their needs. By fostering transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, public participation enhances the decision-making process. It empowers citizens to exercise their right to influence public policy in various fields, including urban planning, governance, environmental management, and public decision-making. Public participation enhances decision quality, trust, and stakeholder cooperation. When stakeholders are meaningfully involved, informed deliberation and equitable representation lead to high-quality informed decisions (Beierle, 2002). This approach invites stakeholders to participate in planning and problem-solving, fostering passive surveillance as well. The literature on public participation is extensive and ranges from environmental policy decisions (Bickerstaff, 2004)highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics of power in civic discourse(Simmons, 2007), sustainability (Carrus et al., 2019) to health policy decision-making, and identifies key factors that can influence the success of these efforts (Streetet al., 2014). Public participation in India builds upon the tradition of democratic decision-making and community-based governance. While the formalization of public participation in city planning is relatively recent, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (CAA) of 1992 established Panchayat Raj institutions and urban local bodies (ULBs). These amendments aimed to decentralize power, strengthen local self-governance, empower citizens, promote grassroots democracy, foster social inclusion, and enhance the implementation of government programs at the local level. This legal framework facilitated public participation in city planning and decision-making through the requirement of ward committees in ULBs, serving as platforms for local-level public engagement.

Public participation variesfrom non-participation to citizen control, impacting decision-making (Arnstein, 1969) within the legal framework. Different forms of citizen engagement have pros and cons (Oughton, 2008).Effective public participation as a democratic tool requires inclusivity and accessibility for all members of society. It entails ensuring marginalized and underrepresented communities have a voice and removing barriers like language and technology. Public participation requires a supportive legal and institutional framework with clear guidelines, mechanisms, and identified atypology of interaction to ensure its effectiveness in engaging citizens in decision-making (Rowe&Frewer, 2005).

In summary, public participation is crucial for democratic governance, ensuring accountable, responsive, and inclusive government decision-making that considers citizen perspectives and needs. The paper examines urban projects in Bengaluru, India, and their impact on public participation. Civil society, NGOs, and grassroots movements play a role in addressing challenges in the city's urban environment. The study showcases the importance of public participation in creating inclusive and sustainable cities.

2. Public Participation in Urban India- the 3 P's

2.1. Planning

Planning allocates resources and focuses on urban reconstitution. Public participation is integral to city planning globally, including spatial planning,

STHALA/ISSN 2582-9491

master plans, and resource utilization. It ensures an inclusive and representative process that addresses the diverse needs of the community. Urban planning in Bengaluru involves creating a master plan and regional plan, with provisions for public participation. The Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act allows public input during the preparation of existing land use maps[1] and the draft master plan[2]. However, public participation in the draft stage is limited to suggestions and objections. Despite the population of Bengaluru, the number of objections filed was less than 1%.[3] The lack of participatory processes led to opposition to the draft master plan, prompting the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) to conduct public consultations and make revisions based on citizen feedback. The "My CityMyBudget for 2021" initiative by Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) demonstrates yet another instance of involving the public in the resource planning process(Janaagraha [APA], 2021).

The legal framework allows for public participation in planning, but institutional changes are necessary to include it at the pre-planning stage. A citizen-centric approach aligned with the 74th CAA is required, shifting from top-down to bottom-up planning. Local area plans can inform the master plan-making process, emphasizing the importance of public participation. The UDPFI guidelines recommend institutional changes in the TCP Act, but no amendments have been

made to implement the 74th CAA.[4] Subjectexperts in urban planning need to be aware of and address people's needs and aspirations. Provisions and processes for publicparticipation at the pre-planning stage need to be developed.

Decentralizing planning to local bodies enables citizen participation at the ward level. However, in interviews with the planning authority, it was observed that objections and suggestions for the draft RMP 2031 mostly came from the elite, highlighting the need for institutional changes to make planning more people-centric and inclusive. Planning deals with spatial planning for local area plans, which will set the template for formulating the master plan and resource and fund utilization in municipal governance. In the urban context, planning is an essentialtool for building inclusive and sustainable cities. Public participation can play acrucial role in planning, as it enables diverse stakeholders to participate in decision-making processes, building a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Public participation can be integrated into various stages of planning,including needs assessment, policy formulation, and implementation. Byinvolving the public in planning, local communities can ensure that their needs andaspirations are taken into account and that the resulting plans are more reflective of the community's interests.

Formal planning often overlooks the informal city and lacks public participation in municipal governance. Limited functional ward committees exist in Bengaluru, relying on citizen efforts. UN-

---

[1]Sec. 6, The Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act,1961
[2]Sec. 9 (4), The Karnataka Town and Country Planning Act, 1961
[3]Note:In the case of draft RMP 2031, it was presented in 8 zones of Bengaluru and the number of objections filed to the planning authority is app 14000 which is less than 1% of Bengaluru's population.

[4]Note: As learnt from the reply to the RTI application filed to the Bengaluru Development Authority which is the planning and development authority of Bengaluru.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATORY APPROACH- A DEMOCRATIC TOOL

HABITAT notes the informal city's exclusion from the master plan (United Nations Habitat, 2009). Planning is vital for inclusive and sustainable cities, involving spatial planning for local area plans and resource utilization. Public participation plays a crucial role in fostering ownership and shared responsibility. It can be integrated into needs assessment, policy formulation, and implementation stages. Involving the public ensures their needs are considered, resulting in plans that better reflect community interests.

2.2. Problem-Solving

Public participation is vital for addressing urban challenges like housing, transportation, and sustainability. Collaborative governance, co-creation, and participatory budgeting enable public involvement in problem- solving. Tools like ward committees and civic hackathons enable public involvement. In Bengaluru, lake[5] reclamation gains traction due to pollution and encroachment concerns. Citizen-led initiatives like "Save Bengaluru's Lakes" and civic hackathons drive government action and generate innovative solutions. Examples include the Ugly Indians (Ugly Indians [APA], n.d) group and the Whitefield Rising initiative, addressing traffic, waste, and environmental issues through community-led efforts. Civic hackathons are effective tools for public participation, bringing together citizens, designers, programmers, and stakeholders to solve urban problems. Bengaluru has hosted events like the "Bengaluru Civic Fest" and the "Bengaluru Urban Data Challenge" that

---

[5]Note: 'Lakes' refers to 'tanks' which are a part of the water network system evolved as a response to the settlements' need for collecting water.

have resulted in innovative solutions for challenges like traffic congestion, waste management, and water conservation. Public participation in problem-solving fosters the sharing of best practices and collective deliberation among diverse stakeholders, creating a sense of shared spaces in the neighbourhood. It enables the identification of urban challenges and facilitates collective action. By involving the public, solutions can better align with community needs, promoting sustainability and inclusivity. Public participation also cultivates a sense of shared responsibility, fostering increased community engagement and participation.

2.3. Passive surveillance

Public participation is a valuable tool for connecting people with their city and facilitating passive surveillance for the protection of neighbourhood resources. The garbage dumps in no man's land, unoccupied properties, and visual barriers like compound walls or street corners with high compound walls reflect the human tendency to defile what is not theirs. Passive surveillance that public participation can bring in will address these concerns and public involvement promotes a sense of shared responsibility and accountability.Eyes upon the street by natural proprietors of the street are a passive surveillance tool as discussed by Jane Jacob (Jacobs, 1993, p. 30). By engaging the public in passive surveillance, communities can safeguard common pool resources and proactively address potential threats. This involvement encourages community engagement, ownership, and accountability. Initiatives like The Citizen Action Forum (CAF) (Kumar [APA], 2018) exemplify passive

surveillance efforts in protecting Bangalore's lakes and water bodies. Utilizing technology, such as citizen science and social media, enhances communication and neighbourhood connections. Public participation in passive surveillance provides insights, identifies risks, and empowers citizens to monitor and safeguard the environment.

3. Conclusion

Public participation in planning, problem-solving, and passive surveillance is gaining momentum in Indian cities, responding tocitizen demands. The examples discussed highlight the growing significance of public participation in shaping the future of Bengaluru. Citizen engagementpromotes transparency, accountability, andresponsivenessin decision-making processes. However, challenges such as literacy, language barriers, and unequalaccess to resources hinder effective participation. Implementation often lacks political will and institutional capacity despite legal mandates. Despite legal mandates, political will and institutional capacity for implementation are often lacking. Nevertheless, public participation is increasingly recognized as essential for inclusive and sustainable development. Civil society, NGOs, and grassroots movements are key players, but conflicts among different actors and interests can arise. In conclusion, public participation is a democratic tool that fosters transparency, accountability, and cooperation, contributing to inclusive and sustainable cities. Future research and policy implications should guide urban planners, policymakers, and practitioners.

4. Acknowlwdgement

5. References

Book refrences

1. Aristotle. 1991 [1908]. *Politics.* In Jonathan Barnes (ed.) *Complete Works (Aristotle): Volume Two* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

2. Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35(4), 216-224.

3. Beierle, T. C. (2002). The quality of stakeholder-based decisions. *Risk Analysis*, 22(4), 739-749, https://doi.org/10.1111/0272-4332.00065.

4. Bickerstaff, K. (2004). Participatory sustainability and the role of environmental management. *Local Environment*, 9(6), 505-517.

5. Carrus, G., Scopelliti, M., & Lafortezza, R. (2019). Participatory urban planning for greener cities: The role of nudging and citizen participation in shaping sustainable behaviours. *Sustainability*, 11(15), 4059.

6. Jacobs, J. (1993). The death and life of great American cities. Vintage Books.

7. Oughton, D. (2008). Public Participation – Potential and Pitfalls. *Energy & Environment*, *19*(3/4), 485–496. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44397212

8. Rowe, G., & Frewer, L. J. (2005). A typology of public participation methods. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 30(2), 251-290.

9. Simmons WM. (2007). Participation and Power. Civic Discourse in Environmental Policy Decisions. New York: *State University of New York Press*.

10. Street, J., Duszynski, K., Krawczyk, S., & Braunack-Mayer, A. (2014). The use of citizens' juries in health policy decision-making: a systematic review. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 109, 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.03.005

Web refrences

1. Janaagraha. (2021), *MyCityMyBudget.* https://www.janaagraha.org/files/MyCity MyBudget-Bangalore.pdf. 22-March-2023

2. Kumar, S. Revathi. (2018, October, 12). *10 years of committed citizenry: Tracing the journey of the Citizens' Action Forum.*Citizen Matters. https://bengaluru.citizenmatters.in/citizens -action-forum-caf-bengaluru-10-years-activism-28023. 06-April- 2023

3. The Ugly Indian. (n.d.) https://theuglyindian.com/about_us.html. 20-March- 2023

4. United Nations Habitat. (2009). *Planning Sustainable Cities: Policy Direction. Global Report on Human Settlements.* United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (Abridged ed.). Retrieved April 10, 2023, from , https://www.mypsup.org/library_files/dow nloads/Planning%20Sustainable%20Cities .pdf.