

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICES: THE CASES OF BREMEN AND GDYNIA

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is modifying how governments govern since they look for new ways to achieve sustainability in a more participatory manner by involving citizens and incorporating their thinking into the planning and implementation of policies. This new approach rethinks and reshapes traditional representative democratic modes of government and citizens relations for new, complementary and more participatory methods of interaction between governments and citizens, thus creating new democratic and participatory governance approaches for policy making. This study aims to explore and analyze public participation understanding and practices by city and government officials in an effort to complement the existing literature with empirical public participation material and provide valuable information to enhance the exercise of participation by government officials, who are planning, implementing and evaluating policies in favor of sustainable development. A qualitative research approach is employed in this study. The research is designed as a case study, involving in-depth empirical investigation of public participation as a contemporary phenomenon in specifically the German city of Bremen and the Polish city of Gdynia using interviews as primary data collection method.

This study concludes that participation should be understood as a process that allows all citizens to be deeply involved and be engaged as partners on regular basis, via democratic governance mechanisms that permit them to influence decision and policy making on matters that affect them. It also recommends deepening the understanding that participation exceeds developing quality and effective policies since it supports legitimation of government, enhances democracy, contributes to good governance principles practices and assists in the formation of social cohesion and social capital; all conditions that work in favor of sustainable development.

Additionally, for the practice of public participation, this study concludes that a fair, inclusive and democratic approach it is necessary in order to build and develop a sense of community that surpasses individual interests in favor of a common wellbeing and culture and habit of participation. Finally, it also concludes and recommends that the employment of participation taxonomies, which are useful guidelines in the practice of participation, need to be complemented with other essential dimensions that capture the human nature of the social phenomenon of participation in order to promote the emergence of participatory governance and thus sustainable development.