

Plano de Desenvolvimento do Bairro: Uma metodologia participativa

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Dialog and participation of local communities is increasingly essential in order to define intervention priorities in urban planning. According to Annick Madec and Numa Murard, the needs in some neighborhoods are often linked with residents not participating in the public and political debate. This is why public participation processes are key elements for local communities to have a saying, a place where individuals can think and freely and democratically express their opinion about the place they live in.

Currently, decentralization of power has gained increased attention and has become a key element to identify solutions for several issues related to urban life. This way, local administration should foster public participation so that they work with the communities and the latter may influence the measures to be taken locally.

Participation of local communities in lobby and advocacy activities -which allow to pressure local power - is widely spread and has had practical results. This is more evident in democratic societies, where residents and stakeholders have greatly contributed to neighborhood social, cultural and economic development.

Recently, Federação do Comércio de Bens, Serviços e Turismo (Federation for Businesses, Services and Tourism) of the State of São Paulo, Brazil (FecomercioSP) organized and launched a *methodological manual aimed at providing guidelines for the development of Neighborhood Plans*.

Plano de Desenvolvimento do Bairro: uma metodologia participativa (freely made available online by FecomercioSP) offers an empirical methodology, based on residents' (pro)active participation, essential to decide on priority interventions.

The document indicates that Neighborhood Plan documentation should include a wide range of proposals that allow the neighborhood to improve. Thus, it recommends that



proposals include town-planning, landscaping, housing and environmental elements, as well as green spaces, collective equipment, public spaces, urban furniture, accessibility, road network, transport network, sanitation, business, security, culture, among others. The Neighborhood Plan, therefore, should provide a diagnosis of the needs and concerns expressed by the community.

What is the Neighborhood Plan, though? The Neighborhood Plan is a document that defines *the path to take so as to attain the future objective*. This means that the guidelines of the Plan define a vision of the future based on projects proposed by the local community. In fact, the Plan is a tool of the district halls, in direct relation with the Master Strategic Plan and the Regional Strategic Plan. The Neighborhood Plan is, then, a document that aims to formally establish the proposals included in it.

Noteworthy is also the fact that the first challenge of the Neighborhood Plan is to define where the neighborhood starts and ends. The document uses the definition by Kazuo Nakano, urban architect, who states that the neighborhood is a place where neighborhood relations are crucial for local identity, a space where, in case there are no administrative limits established, cultural and anthropological elements provide those limits. This concept is based on definitions by other authors, such as Jean Pelletier, Charles Delfante and Robert Gifford, who describe the neighborhood as a psychological, qualitative and symbolical concept which includes material and immaterial elements that contribute to a global idea.

Regarding the structure proposed in the document for the Neighborhood Plans, it made use of ideas expressed in forums and meetings held in 2013 by FecomercioSP so as to methodologically establish the several steps of the Plans.

At the risk of oversimplifying (considering the complexity and detail of each of the steps), the Plan is divided into 12 stages: *a) Introduction; b) Background; c) Local Governance; d) The Future; e) Objectives; f) Demographics; g) Assets and Opportunities; h) Technical Diagnosis; i) Participatory Diagnosis; j) Problems and Solutions; k) Programs and Ongoing Projects; l) Activity Program /Calendar.*

Among the 12 stages in the document, only stages a), b), f) and h) do not imply that the local community must participate. All other stages include some type of direct participation by the community.

Participation by the local community is of heterogeneous nature throughout the Plan. In the stage on *The Future*, residents are fostered to debate on how their vision for the neighborhood in the near future. Participation by the local population is more complex and ambitious in the stage on *Participatory Diagnosis*, which is subdivided into six different stages: *1) Define concept design; 2) Design cognitive maps of neighborhood; 3) Design of actual map; 4) Field trip: discovering the neighborhood; 5) Design of actual map (continued); 6) Define neighborhood problems and find their solutions.* The local community should also participate in the stages on *Problems and Solutions*, *Ongoing Projects* and in defining the priority timeline in the stage on *Activity Plan/Calendar*.

The wide range of activities (a small sample of which is included here) is rather intense and ambitious, depending not only on community participation at a given time but also on this participation being continued until completion of work. This requires spaces

where participant interaction is fostered. The document suggests online platforms, forums, world café sessions, events, parties, field trips, questionnaires/surveys, among many others.

The need for such active community participation may become an obstacle to designing the Plan. Firstly, activities must continuously exist that keep the interest of the population, and the community must feel that the activities carried out are important and contribute to the ultimate objective. Individuals are not only invited to participate in events but also in extra activities such as informal and individual queries, a kind of *homework* to be shared at the following sessions. Simultaneously, and in case there are activities deemed as easily carried out, the local community should autonomously carry out these projects.

Once all documentation concerning the Plan is complete, authors suggest that a Local Pact be signed between the community and the local administration, both agreeing to implement the Plan. Only then is the Neighborhood Plan included in the Regional Strategic Plan and, subsequently, in the municipality's annual budget.

To sum up, the document written by FecomercioSP focuses on the recommendation of participatory processes, the local community being at its core. This is not completely new - considering time, geographical, cultural, social and economical differences, there are several examples in which public administration has striven to promote citizen participation in improving their neighborhoods. Examples of this are *politique de la ville* in France, *soziale stadt* in Germany and neighborhood planning in England. In Portugal, if we consider *Bairros Críticos*, it is clear that there would be much to be learned from these approaches based on open and direct dialog with the local communities.

Recent examples may be found in Brazil, some of which exactly in São Paulo, which make it evident that the Brazilian population demands to be heard by the political power. The Neighborhood Plan, developed based on the participatory methodology presented by FecomercioSP, offer an opportunity for society and public administration to come together.

In a city like São Paulo, with almost 12 million inhabitants, thinking the neighborhood acquires special relevance due to the difference in scale. The effort required to design the Neighborhood Plans is especially important when the guidelines and the path chosen by the population becomes compulsory and is taken on by local power.

The methodology put forth in *Plano de Desenvolvimento do Bairro: uma metodologia participativa* thus evidences the relevance of involving the local community in the decision-making processes, as residents best understand the needs of their own neighborhoods. This is, therefore, a multi-layered methodology that can have a positive effect on both the neighborhood residents and the city as a whole. However, as François Ascher points out, community participation should be used with prudence, as it is not an alternative to the formal top-down model but rather a way to enrich that model.

FecomercioSP. (2013). *Plano de Desenvolvimento do Bairro: Uma metodologia participativa*. São Paulo: Fischer2; [available online on 29.12.2013 <http://goo.gl/1aCHNR>]



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