FOR URBAN GOVERNANCE

Consultation in Lagos, Nigeria © Pedro De Oliveira - Groupe Huit

Cities are today faced with complex issues: rapid population growth and the hosting of new, notably migrant populations, accelerated urban sprawl, social and spatial change and fragmentation, insufficient access to essential services, in particular for the most vulnerable, environmental degradation, and increased exposure to climate change. This rapid transformation of territories, coupled with growing social demands and the concern to ensure public action has legitimacy, lead to a need to rethink urban governance.

Cities and territories, now more than ever, demand a global approach (energy, water, waste, mobility, food production, green spaces...) that is integrated in time (conception, execution and operation). Local authorities are the legitimate and appropriate actors for implementing innovating responses. Moreover they are closest to populations, therefore have to go beyond the common technical and economic framework. They need to take into account the expectations of civil society and integrate social, environmental and economic considerations into the local urban policies. The challenge of the sustainable city therefore requires local representatives to provide responses that are coordinated, work on several levels, involve all stakeholders and foster a framework of projects.

WHAT MECHANISMS FOR GOVERNANCE, FOR WHAT GOALS?

Urban governance consists in adopting partnership-based methods of action and decision-making that involve the inhabitants, particularly the most deprived among them. Urban governance is concerned with all territorial levels (local, inter-municipal, regional, national) and all aspects of development: economic (public, private, mixed), social (the needs of the users), environmental, political or cultural.

At the local level, representatives of the State, municipal technical services, civil society, the private sector, etc. are all stakeholders that need to be involved fully in the development and implementation of urban policies.

Stakeholder participation can be open to the general public, limited to certain groups, one-off or as part of an integrated project process, institutional or formal. From simply providing information to participation in decision-making processes, territorial dialogue takes many forms (information, consultation, partnership, contracting out) and should enable the actions of local authorities to (i) rest on the

local economy (public, private, mixed); (ii) respond to the needs of the users, respecting the law and local culture, and (iii) take into account the proposals of the inhabitants themselves.

Broadening the range of expertise (technical, as citizens, as users, etc.) means that cross-cutting and complementary approaches can be developed. In order to do this, the local authorities need to take on the[4] complex responsibility of finding negotiated compromises between the different stakeholders in urban development, leading them to recognise each other's legitimacy and divergent viewpoints, to cooperate, to enter into partnerships and to take responsibility. This means recognising the roles and added-value brought by the different stakeholders, which translates into the arrangements for collaboration.

Urban governance should be ensured by democratically elected local authorities. It must seek to link representative and participatory democracy in building a project that can, at the local level, closest to the realities of daily life, meet the challenges, the specificities and the demands of the different groups of stakeholders. Public policies must foster a diversification of activities, an equitable distribution of services and basic infrastructure and sustainable economic development.

FRENCH ORIENTATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Support a democratic local governance requires :

Orientation 1:
Fostering and promoting citizen inclusion and participation in the city project

Designing urban policies requires a prior diagnostic to be established, built on the information shared by all the stakeholders. Including citizens and empowering them upstream from projects enables the construction of innovating projects that are adapted to the needs of the users, actions to be prioritised according to the needs and recommendations expressed by the population. By seeking a balanced participation of all stakeholders within a territory, the local authorities are building participatory democracy.

The local authorities can use various tools for involving the inhabitants (collectives, neighbourhood councils, citizen councils, cyber-democracy, participatory budgeting, funds for inhabitant participation, referenda) and should do their best to balance them (spread according to age, gender, social class, with particular attention paid to groups that are vulnerable and removed from public decision-making). Beyond fostering stakeholder participation, these tools improve the quality of the relationship between local government and citizens.

The local authority that adopts partnership-based approaches to action and decision-making for the management and development of the city is increasing the transparency of public policies, which is a factor in the acceptance of the project over the long term. This means organising coalitions of stakeholders in order to produce local solutions, develop innovations, give concrete shape to partnerships, to ensure actions that could inform public policy are coordinated.

Orientation 2:
Ensuring transparent and effective management

Local authorities must increase the transparency in terms of management in order to strengthen citizen confidence in them and their political legitimacy. In order to ensure the effectiveness, quality and durability of public action, local authorities must manage in a way that involves:
- transparency of information,
- clarity of budgets,
- mobilisation of resources,
- public evaluation of projects.

Urban governance refers to a certain form of regulation through which local authorities can stabilise urban organisation and production, or even transform them. This regulation is expressed through institutional norms, a legal and regulatory framework, urban planning and political choices. This regulatory role may be exercised directly by the local authority, or by a specialised entity, with a right to oversight and control, as well as powers to sanction in case of breaches of the regulation applications.

Beyond this, the citizens have a right of control over the actions of the local authority. This right is exercised through at least three main components: the right to know about the actions being carried out, the right to assess their consistency and their quality and, finally, the possibility to propose alternative courses of action. In a context in which there is a surge in new technologies and innovation is permanent, new instruments can be used to achieve this transparency and effectiveness of management through e-governance. The growth of open data has enabled citizens to become better informed about local public policies and to participate in their joint production through digital open spaces and various inclusive schemes. Local authorities also need to create a legal framework to regulate the use of data in terms of transparency and protect the private lives of its citizens. Public authorities must provide a framework and mediation that ensure free access to those new usages.

Orientation 3:
Ensuring that resources and responsibilities are shared fairly between the different levels of government

By setting up institutions that are closer to the citizens, the transfer of competencies to local authorities helps to give legitimacy to public action. Decentralisation is a progressive process that occurs according to the context or the way society is organised in order to enable:

- a harmonious un deployment of public administration across the whole territory,
- the setting up of an administration that is close to its citizens,
- the promotion of local democracy and the attainment of national unity.

In order to ensure a good link up between the different levels of government, the decision-making powers at each level - from national to local authority - must be clearly defined - nature of the competencies, responsibilities, obligations, functions - by a legal and administrative framework. In a spirit of collaboration, local authorities can be supported by other administrations in the development of their local policies. Inversely, different levels of government can be called on to co-produce policies applying to the territorial level together with local authorities. In a context where deconcentration is being applied, the representatives of national administration at the local level are tasked with applying national policies in the territory according to clearly defined modalities.

In the implementation of a territorial approach, adjoining territories are led to cooperate among themselves: shared investments for large networks and equipment, sharing experiences or synergies between territories.

In this context, it is necessary to set up national training strategies (creating dedicated schools, for example), to create or overhaul the statutes on public service and to develop tools for managing human resources, in order for the local administration to carry out all its functions.

Orientation 4:
Planning urban development to provide access to essential services for all

Providing quality essential services that ensure decent living conditions for the populations requires an approach to territorial planning that both encompasses the territory as a whole, and is differentiated according to the neighbourhoods. The aim of strategic planning is to put in place a strategy that aims for the equality and continuity of public services delivered across all of the territory, whilst also being adapted to the specific needs of each neighbourhood. With a view to equity, precarious neighbourhoods should be a priority target for public policies on access to basic services. Delivery of public services for all also requires changes to land laws by taking customary practices and local rights into account, in order to ensure some sort of security of tenure for the inhabitants, as well as transparency in management.

To improve the provision of services, the local authority must develop partnerships with the public and private sectors; partnerships for which it will define the modes of coordination and management, inasmuch as national legislation allows for this: public tenders, contracting out, management of investments, tariff structures for services, setting up social intermediation... Contractual innovations

may also help lower the cost of services in order to make them accessible to all, notably the most deprived sections of the population. Contracting out of public services (through public-private partnerships or mixed-economy enterprises) can be a catalyst for investment for urban development where local authorities remain as the contracting authority. By monitoring their operations, local authorities can ensure accessibility of the services to all and safeguard against rises in tariffs that would be prejudicial to the most deprived. Also, where services users cannot support the significant investment costs involved in the development of services, the local authority must consider how the costs may sustainably be recovered (tariffs, taxes, transfers, subsidies, horizontal and vertical equalisation adjustments).

Orientation 5:

Building the institutional and technical capacities of the local authorities

In a perspective of sustainable urban development, partners in development are encouraged to give precedence to the local level for their interventions and to integrate their actions into the local policies framework defined by the local authority, which is the contracting authority for public action.

Raising awareness among stakeholders, supporting local actors tasked with developing strategies, strengthening organisational and institutional capacities are all essential for the funding and implementation of those strategies.

This capacity building also involves long term applied training courses that foster a transfer of skills to the local authority and the gradual development of local engineering that is adapted to the contexts and specific issues in a territory. Peer exchanges, as well as city-to-city collaborations are also means of fostering the transfer of expertise and building capacity. As part of this, it would be useful to consider training programmes linking actors in development with local inhabitants.