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## Percorsi di geografie letterarie, percettive, educative e dello sviluppo locale

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# The participation of local actors in the development of the upstream Ouelтана territorial municipalities, Azilal province (Morocco)\*

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## ABSTRACT

Participation has emerged as a form of development that has taken an important place in the official options of most countries. This trend has been especially reinforced with the disengagement of the State and the emergence of civil society as a development actor. The economic and social development of local communities is a major mission entrusted to them by the new charter. But the question we are asking ourselves is the following: is the community able to achieve such development on its own and without the contribution of other stakeholders? All the stakeholders *in situ*, such as local representatives, local authorities, civil servants, local population and entrepreneurs are supposed to contribute their part in order to achieve such development projects. Understanding the clauses of the participation of actors in development projects as well as the other actions carried out by the upstream municipalities of Ouelтана (Azilal province, Morocco) enables us have a deep insight into the context and framework within which actors' communication takes place. More interestingly, such understanding helps have a view about the types of relations that these actors hold among each other. In doing so, we could easily identify the scope of future mobilization and accountability actions so that they can finally follow the territorial development process.

*Keywords:* participation; development actors; economic development; social development; Morocco.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the relationship between the actor and the territory is the subject of debate within all social sciences. The actor and the territory are structurally linked. We cannot approach the question of the actor without referring to the territory since every process of objectification and socialization is part of a spatial framework. And, undoubtedly, the dynamics of the actors invent territories: any action implies an individual or collective territoriality, a meaning and a connotation to the territory (Gebrati 2018).

Understanding the implemented developing actions in the upstream Oueltana territory also implies taking into account the actors, their behavior, their logic, their strategies, their positioning, their ability to 'play'. This perspective supposes recognizing the actors in their diversity, in their roles and beyond their different dimensions, because the actor is never unequivocal: desires, interests, cognitive and affective resources characterize the actors, to which actors call upon to act (Corcuff 1999). They are endowed, according to the contexts, with the capacities to act in different temporalities, modalities and according to different intentions. The actors are therefore the keys to understand the territory, its organization and its system in general. According to Di Méo (1998, 76), the territory is associated with the actors. For him, "the territory, as a space of action, is a space woven from an interweaving of transactions, of strategies, intentionality, debates, innumerable interactions is essentially a matter of actors". In this study, we will try to highlight the types of actors involved in the local territorial dynamics of Oueltana upstream. It will thus be a question of examining their participation and their contribution in the territorial development of the study area.

In terms of field work, we adopted a semi structured interview technique to collect data for our study. In processing and analyzing the interviews, we were able to shed some lights on development projects implemented by the different communes targeted by our study in upstream Oueltana. The interviews also allowed us to grasp the different factors that can influence the participation of stakeholders in development (local elected officials, local population, municipal staff, investors, and local authorities).

## 2. PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY AREA

At the regional level, our study area belongs to the region of Beni Mellal-Khénifra; it is located in the province of Azilal which extends over an area of 9800 km<sup>2</sup>. Precisely, it is located: south of Beni Mellal and Lfqih Ben Salah provinces; north of Ouarzazate province; east of of Sraghna and Al Haouz provinces; west of Errachidia province. Our study area is close to the city of Demnate (*Fig. 1*).

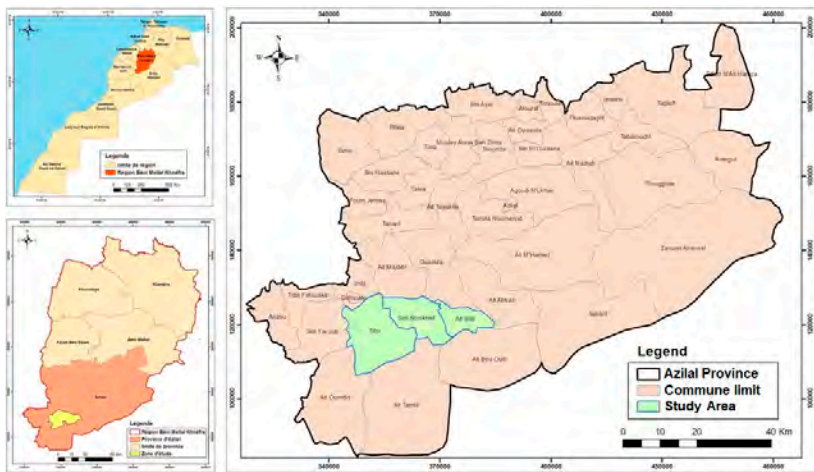


Figure 1. – Study area location map.

Source: authors' elaboration on ARCGIS software.

The studied territory depends on the command of the Ouelтана circle and the caïdats Imi Nifri and Iouariden Ait Manna, whose population belongs to the tribe of Ouelтана.

## 3. THE PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL ACTORS IN THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUELТАNA UPSTREAM

The theme of participation has largely dominated the field of development in recent years; we are witnessing the emergence of a multitude of projects, methods and approaches, called participatory, whose promoters present as a break with previous practices, even as a real scientific revo-

lution. Experiences from integrated rural development projects around the world have shown that one of the fundamental causes of their poor performance lies in the lack of participation of groups or populations. The basic premise underlying the participatory approach is “that greater involvement of the populations in the definition of local problems, in the identification of solutions and their implementation helps to give more efficiency and effectiveness sustainability to the resulting programs” (Di Méo 1998, 13). Muller and Glode (1992) specify that participation manifests itself through a demand which can go: (i) from collaboration in the achievement of a project or program, to a process of political empowerment of groups otherwise unable to assert their interests; (ii) from encouraging rural people to collaborate in programs already planned, without any prior consultation with target groups, to a process hitherto deprived of all power, applies political and economic influence; (iii) from a goal of getting people to actively engage in local projects, in order to ensure viability because the projects cannot be assisted indefinitely from the outside to an initiative facilitating the emergence of organization of populations at the local level, through which poor residents are expected to have a say in local development efforts. Meister – cited by Yansambou (2011) – represents forms of participation as the means by which we can encourage the participation of the population. These means are: manipulation; information; consultation; negotiation; risk sharing; partnership and self-management.

### *3.1. The participation of locally elected representatives in the local development of upstream Oueltana*

The role of elected officials is to represent the citizens, defend the common interests and needs of the community they belong to and participate actively in the municipal council activities; they are also supposed to prove that they are effective and efficient in problem solving. Nevertheless, field facts – based on our filed interviews with community members and groups, investors, local authorities – show that the majority of these local representatives are not even aware of laws, regulations and responsibilities they have to assume. Even among local elected representatives, some believe that their responsibility is solely limited to backing up community members get some legal documents. In the best case, they tend to adopt, during the council meeting, an opposition stand against all decisions for reasons they cannot justify. Such deeply

rooted perceptions cannot be ascribed to the widespread illiteracy that a wide range of community members still suffer from. Instead, lack in – and even absence of – training services and capacity building reveals the way that should be taken in order to enable these locally elected people acquire adequate tools and therefore properly assume and achieve their mission.

The analysis of the interviews carried out enabled us to distinguish two categories of elected officials in Oueltana upstream. Thus, we found those who consider participation as a duty for everyone. This category is represented by elected officials who are very active in the municipal council, always attend meetings and reveal initiatives for the actions of the municipality to be taken and carried out. They defend the common interests of community members. These elected officials are very motivated by their role, because they take into consideration the ideas that emanate from the local population and they follow up on the planned actions. Moreover, a category of locally elected representatives that we interviewed declared that they usually have recourse to the council's well-experimented civil servants for information and advice. The aim is to ask them for full information and recommendations related to the projects and plans that are to be implemented by the local council.

The second category of our sample believes that the participation of other local stakeholders is not necessary. They even think that the council civil servants are not qualified enough to participate in development programs. As far as community members are concerned, this category of representative think that they have neither the means nor the skills needed to take part in decision making during the council's meetings. For them, such tasks and responsibilities are reserved only to elected representatives. Thus, this category sees that the involvement and the participation of other stakeholders or community members is not worth relying on.

We believe that the first category's perception on participation is largely explained by their high educational background. They are lucky enough to get a better level of education that makes them trust the beneficial effects of participatory development. They are fully convinced that the community development is a question of collective participation. The local council cannot run and manage effectively and efficiently community projects on its own. Inspiring previous non participatory experiences has helped them adopt such an attitude. In addition to that, this category includes a group of illiterate farmers who are endowed with precocious ancestral skills based on sharing and collective participation.

Furthermore, the other category of elected officials is convinced of participatory development but does not believe in the competence of others. This is probably due to the lack of supervision and open-mindedness. This category still clings to the era during which all decisions were made up only by the council. The views and suggestions of other stakeholders aren't considered.

Elected officials participate actively and effectively in the development of municipalities. Certainly, this is not generalized for all elected officials, but most express a real motivation for the humble task entrusted to them. Indeed, elected officials participate in identifying needs, planning, decision-making and monitoring. On the other hand, with regard to the Communal Development Plan (CDP), the secretary general masters the concepts and objectives of the communal development plan due to the fact that he has attended meetings organized by the Social Development Agency (ADS). The latter asked the municipal council to help them carry out their diagnosis on the ground and, in return, they explained the importance of this program for the local development of each municipality.

3.2. *The participation of entrepreneurs in local development increases the annual budget of the upstream municipalities of Ouelтана and creates jobs for the population*

Entrepreneurs are considered as one of the best partners of local municipalities. They considerably contribute to boosting and improving municipalities' financial resources. So, their participation and involvement in local development is considered valuable and useful. The interviews that we carried out with certain entrepreneurs in the field of extraction of quarry products, sand, etc. in our study area, enabled us to observe that they actively and effectively participate in local development. This participation goes beyond simple consultation to reach concertation. The participation of investors in development is indirect. It manifests itself first of all in the taxes they pay each year, in the jobs they create and in the development of the agricultural and industrial sector that they allow from the moment when most of these entrepreneurs invest in these two sectors.

However, this kind of development actor believes that participatory development is the best way to ensure sustainability provided that they behave responsibly and act accordingly. Other investors criticize the way



in which the municipalities plan their projects. According to them, the essential problem lies in the way of thinking of elected officials who are not competent to manage the development of all the municipalities on their own. Thus, an investor reports that: “if we focus on the expenses of the municipality, we will find that the large part of the budget is invested on actions that cannot serve investors”; we notice here lack of trust between the entrepreneurs and the municipality. In the same context, our interviewed entrepreneurs wonder about the true role of the local municipality: does it act according to what it is supposed to do? They even went further to add that, instead of wasting money building shops and fitting out the municipality buildings, the municipality should invest on infrastructures that are going to be useful and beneficial to the community. These kinds of criticizing views are more likely to widen the gap between entrepreneurs and the local council and therefore hinder attempts towards any collaboration between them.

According to our analysis, the participatory role that investors play for the development of each municipality is very important. By considering their participation in the annual budget of the municipalities and also the jobs they create for the population, investors can only contribute to the economic and social development of the upstream municipalities of Oueltana. On the other hand, investors criticize the development strategies of the municipal councils because some of the actions of the municipalities cannot serve them directly. This makes it easy to understand the conflicts of interest that intervene between the two parts. It is therefore up to each municipality in the studied territory to implement a strategy to overcome these problems. On the other hand, an effort of these investors in the search for partnership with the municipality is not felt at their level. For them, this responsibility falls to the municipality. However, it is essential for them to have a strategy of communication with the outside, for the image of the company (external communication of the company). However, this is not the case.

### *3.3. The local authorities bring a unique added value to development processes*

The local authority ensures the supervision over the local communities, it attends all the meetings of the municipal councils. From its role, we will be able to qualify the local authority as a main participant in the development of each municipality. Unfortunately, we did not have

the opportunity to speak with the officials of the authorities, but we will thus be able to analyze the participation of this development actor from the point of view of the elected representatives and the staff of the municipalities we interviewed during our field work.

According to the statements of elected officials, the participation of the local authority in development manifests itself in the form of an agreement for any action of the municipality. So, the participation of local authorities in the local development of municipalities is already defined by law. Thus, consultation is the dominant level of participation.

From our analysis, we can deduce that the new municipal charter clearly defines the role of local authorities. However, we consider that this role, which boils down to decision-making and execution, is an important participation even if the local authorities do not participate in the planning. On the other hand, this participation can sometimes, contrary to its objective, constitute an obstacle to development.

#### *3.4. The participation of the population in its own development remains very limited*

Local populations are widely considered to be the main contributing stakeholder in their municipality development. Having taken this for granted, it is therefore necessary to take into account their participation in any local development projects. Thus, the other development stakeholders (associations, local elected officials, external services and investors) we interviewed have declared that most of the population considers the municipality like any other administration. In doing so, they explicitly show that they really ignore its real role and scope of action.

At the level of the upstream municipalities of Ouelтана, the participation of the population is still very limited, and through our interviews mainly with the external services (100% of these interviewees expressed criteria for this categorization), we distinguished three categories:

- The first category is the one who does not even understand the meaning of participation and who does not believe in participation. According to more than half of the interviewees, this type of community members considers that development within the municipality is the responsibility of the municipal council and its executives and officials. The population should only judge the results of the work of the municipal council and vote during the next elections. Based on our data analysis, we got to the idea that this category of the local

population refuses to participate because they strongly believe that elected members get engaged only in the pursuit of their own personal interests.

- Even with no previous experience, a second category of the population is strongly convinced of the necessity of participation in the municipality development plans. They explain their lack of participation as follows: (i) they have neither financial assets nor adequate skills; (ii) they don't trust the other participants. Nevertheless, we have to underline that this category remains relatively passive in terms of participation. The interviewees stress the fact that this category has lost motivation and got used to staying away from getting involved in the municipality implemented projects. In doing so, they don't their responsibility by letting down the local council work on their own.
- A third most distinguished category is the one that believes that participation is a duty. They get involved and participate whenever it is necessary. The projects they participate in are limited only to fitting out existing non tarmacked mountain roads. To carry out such collective initiatives, this category relies on their own equipments. When their resources run out, they sometimes have recourse to the municipality aids. They ask their representative to back them up benefit from financial or logistic help from the local municipality. This category is largely made up of members of local agencies that are already involved in some kind of small developing projects. Their contribution goes even further. They make suggestions and proposals even if they don't have the right to take part in decision making

From another point of view, the population of upstream Ouelтана does not generally participate in any action taken by the municipal councils; indeed, citizens do not want to participate and cannot because they are used to not doing so. Furthermore, in the region, farmers have not been well supervised to get used to sharing and they still expect state intervention in development. In the light of the comments made by a municipal official: "people of the region have the means to participate even financially, but they do not want to do so because they think that they should without contributing". Moreover, and according to the officials and executives of the municipalities interviewed, it turned out that the participation of the population in the process of local development is desired, but it remains difficult to achieve. The majority of the citizens of upstream Ouelтана hold a false representation on the role of their municipalities. They think that the municipality is a difficult administration to face. In addition, officials find problems with them because

they get in touch with elected representatives only when they need some official documents or when they need some kind of administrative help or information.

By analyzing what was mentioned above by the various interviewees, we can say that the participation of the population in local development is strongly desired by the various stakeholders, even if only a minority ignores its impact on development. Currently, the participants of the local population in the development of the upstream municipalities of Ouelтана represent a small minority. This participation does not go beyond the scope of small-scale contribution. We have come up with the fact that the participation of local population is still limited. It can be reduced to those simple exchanges on the identification of needs and the suggestions of some recommendations. In such cases, decision making is out of reach. This is probably due to the non-responsibility of the stakeholders, to the lack of confidence in oneself and in others, and to lack of awareness among the population *vis-à-vis* their real needs and to the development problems of the communes of Ouelтана upstream.

Our field investigation has shown us that previous experiences have influenced and shaped the attitudes of the population. The result is non-participation. One of the main factors of the participation deficit is lack of organization among the population. As far as upstream Ouelтана is concerned, we have only a few functional associations. Indeed, the absence of NGOs which can supervise and sensitize the population is a great obstacle for participation. Another factor that negatively influences the participation of the population is the individualistic spirit of most of the citizens of the upstream municipalities of Ouelтана. The common interest remains very far to be achieved within these conditions. Even the associations that have been created have failed because of individualism.

### *3.5. The participation of associations in local development suffers from the absence of coordination and poor management*

These associations have a very large role in the local development of Ouelтана upstream. Their actions mainly target agricultural development in the first place and then rural development in general. The participation of these local agencies takes the form of actions meant to improve the municipalities' infrastructure (installation of canals, digging wells, etc.), and supervision of farmers to improve their production. According to the interviews that we carried out during this study with

the representatives of these associations, we first noted that coordination between the latter and the municipal councils is practically non-existent.

The Committee on Agriculture brings together these two major development leaders. The only objective of this commission is to solve the irrigation problems for farmers. Apart from that, development plans are implemented by municipalities without involving these local agencies. The collaboration of these two entities is also manifested by the technical support (technical advice) that the executives and technicians of the communes can provide to the associations if necessary.

Most local agencies suffer from a variety of problems. The majority of their members still need serious and deep in training service in terms of proposal drafting as well as legal procedures that go with. Such needs account for their failure in achieving their goals. As all the secretary generals of the three municipalities confirm, most local agency member act in total ignorance of the laws governing the constitution and role of such local agencies. To make matters worse, most members suffer from a low educational background or heavy family obligations. These obstacles hinder local agencies from assuming their full responsibility in contributing to local development projects.

To find a way out, the Moroccan government implemented a series of capacity-building in training service. The aim was to enable local agency members to acquire more legal notions and useful skills that could help them run their agencies in an appropriate and efficient way. Nonetheless, most of the target members proved to be unmotivated (*Fig. 2*). If we take the municipality of Sidi Boulkhalf, the general secretary was the only person to attend these in training services.

We personally think that the participatory role of the association in the development of the municipalities of upstream Ouelтана can be achieved only if the conflicts between the farmers and the association is solved. This problem can only be overcome by the municipalities since the elected representatives represent the farmers and it is up to them to negotiate and find a solution in coordination with the representatives of the association. In addition, the problems linked to the failure of associations highlight the need for training and empowerment of these local agencies.

Confronted with a variety of obstacles and a diversity of stakeholders' perceptions in the implementation of development projects, a shared strategic vision is necessary for a successful achievement of fruitful community plans. Involved actors are supposed to mutually share information and respect each other differences and constraint if any project is to meet success. After that, stakeholders should tackle the next stage which

consists in taking into consideration all factors that are likely to hinder the implementation of any given development programs. These hindering factors can be summarized in the human factor as well as administrative, legal and financial constraints. Once a development project presents an innovative dimension, the fears related to collective risk-taking will be overcome. A synergy between local authorities and other actors of the territory makes it possible to gain in credibility and to collectively exceed the benefits drawn from an individual realization of the projects, with the objective of producing a benefit for the community.

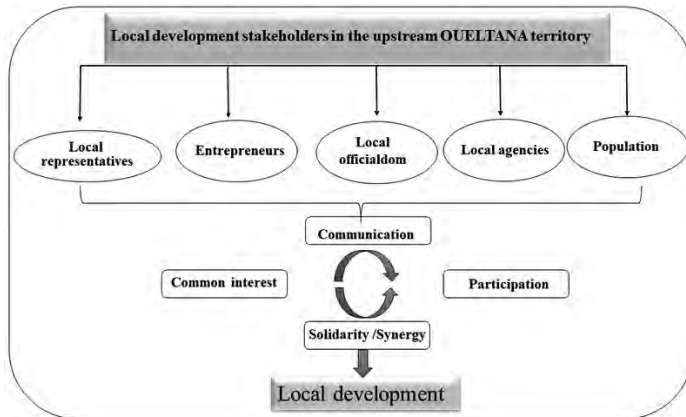


Figure 2. – The organizational chart shows the multiplicity of actors in the upstream Oueltana territory. Thus, there would never be participation without an organization that would be responsible for the management, maintenance, sustainability and replication of the achievements of a project.  
Source: authors' elaboration.

To help create synergies among stakeholders involved in development project, it is very useful to set arrangements at the early stage. That is, when the project or the program is being drafted. At the moment, all the actors are meeting to define all the aspects necessary for the establishment of an effective synergy as well as the roles of each one and the possible modes of partnerships. The nascent projects will then be grafted onto the main program through possible partnerships on activities similar to those of existing projects. However, to improve synergy within the studied territory, we are proposing to strengthen the consultation and partnership mechanism with all the implementing agencies on the various projects and their content (this consultation will involve meetings

for sharing, and discussion workshops on points of similarity between projects with identical targets) and a better popularization of procedures and predefined roles.

Despite the large budgets devoted to projects, the theoretical discourse on participatory development has had little impact on the ground. This discourse is used for various purposes by development actors, and poses the problem of the real scope of participation and its limits. As a matter of fact, participation is not only a question of being limited to new differentiated procedures and methodologies. Instead, it is also a matter of focalizing on the recognition that “those whom public policy on development targets should from now on become the agents of their own development” (Blackburn, Chambers and Gaventa 2000).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Collaboration between municipalities and other stakeholders is made possible as long as they recognize the importance of each other as is shown through the interviews we conducted. Local stakeholders, in particular, private investors and the experimented civil servants of the municipality admit that it is so helpful to collaborate with the local council that, in their turn, acknowledges the utility of their expertise.

However, local officialdom considerably interferes and takes part in decision making through some kind of formal recommendations before the implementation of any development program. In addition to that, local agencies and cooperatives hold a limited collaboration with the local council. The former still need to build and reinforce their capacities. They also require supervision and empowerment from state institutions since the municipality is not sufficiently contributing to make up for such needs.

Generally speaking, the municipality is still held by the major stakeholder in charge of municipal planification. One of its main tasks is to design a communication plan related to all the implemented projects. As matter of fact, the shortcomings noted in terms of communication such as the training of elected officials, the population and associations and the permanent availability of information may be at the root of the inadequacies slowing down the participation of actors and the convergence of institutions. However, ADS training actions for local actors should reduce these gaps. It should also be noted that the local elected repre-

sentatives trained to support the PCDs are no longer in the municipal councils after the last elections. Consequently, the gaps at the municipal level are even more accentuated. It is therefore imperative in the following stages of training to take into account newly elected members to help them build their own capacities and acquire more necessary skills.

The implementation of local development programs is achieved through the mobilization of resources. Human potential and assets are also there to use in order to make them play their part to the community development. A participatory process is the act of mobilizing actors and involving them in all or certain projects. This mobilization and participation are theoretically feasible even if they present many challenges when setting up a community based participatory development initiative.

Participation is therefore a long-term process that requires considerable efforts on the part of developers and target populations. It therefore admits objective limits which are likely to prevent or delay the achievement of the expected objectives. These limits are either moral (conscientization), structural (coordination, decentralization, deconcentration), socio-political (exclusion) or budgetary (financial restrictions).

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