
EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION IN PREPARATION OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN GUJARAT: VADODARA AS A CASE

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Abstract: Participatory planning is a process wherein the local community is involved with urban planners to decide about the developmental needs. They work together to produce plans and these plans have greater chances of effective implementation as stakes are evolved and conflict find resolution during the interactive planning process itself. Involvement of the people in planning process is advocated for successful implementation of the determined plans. This paper is an attempt to review the current process of preparation of Development Plan and involvement of citizens in the whole process.

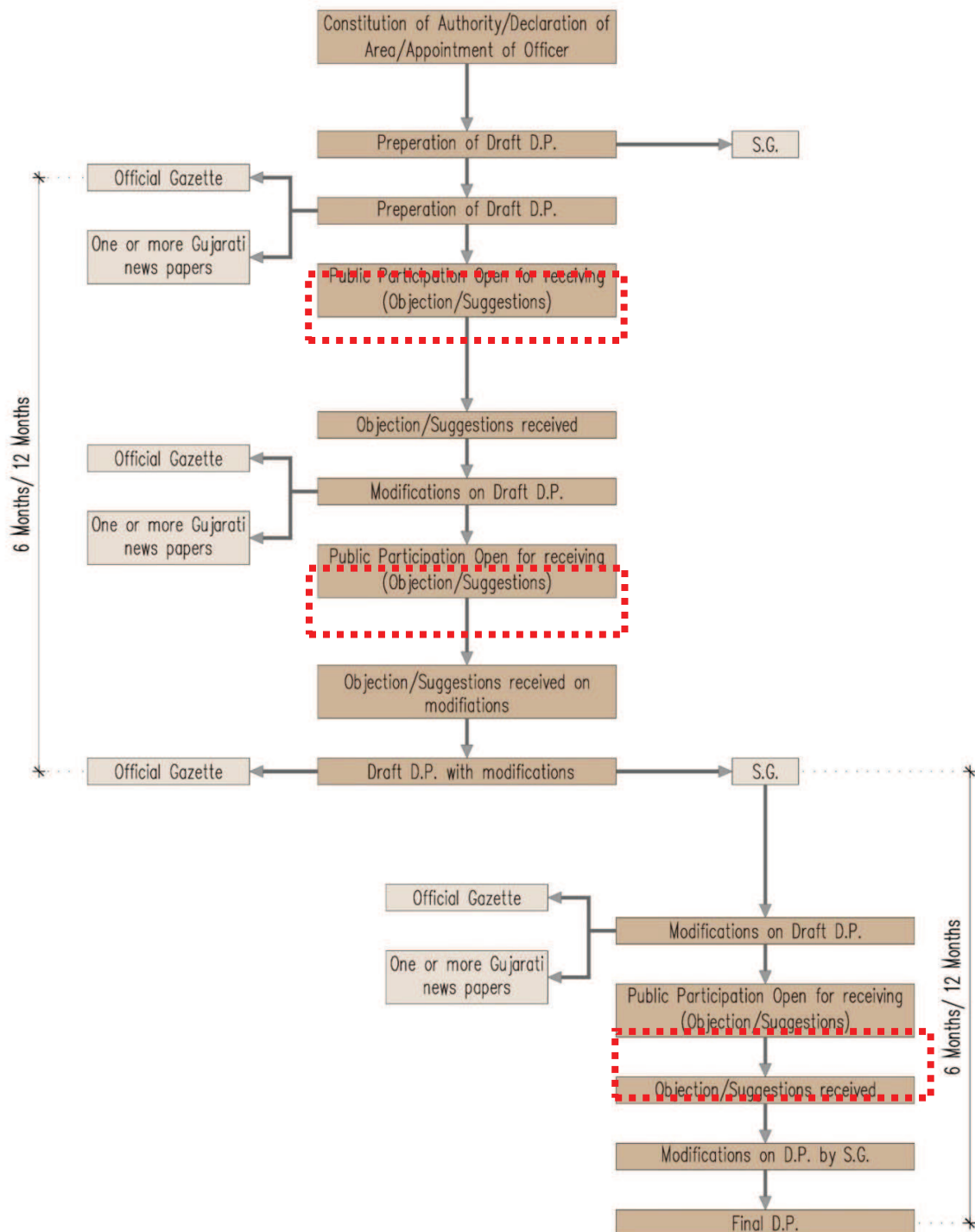
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Introduction: The key principle of public participation in urban planning is the effective interaction between government and citizens. If we look back in history, public participation gained importance during Emperor Akbar's rule that shows evidence in the form of 'Diwan-e-aam' where people participated in decision making. Today, the CPL or Nagar Raj Bill aims to provide more involvement with local wards by constituting Area Sabhas that prioritise projects based upon recommendations and outcome of the meetings in the area. These prioritised projects are then sent to the Ward committees encompassing many wards of the area.

Public participation is also about creating a sense of social responsibility. This is held to be a basic human right and the fundamental principle of democracy. The true essence of people's participation is to have their direct participation, and not through their representatives.

In Urban planning terms, *Participation* is the act of sharing in the formulation of policies and proposals and therefore, providing information by the planning authority, and an opportunity to comment on that information, forms a major part in the process of participation. Participation involves discussing in addition to doing, and full participation can happen only by active involvement throughout the plan making process. The term *Public* refers to the entire community inhabiting an area for which the plan is proposed.

Public participation in Urban Planning: For urban planning development in Gujarat, the Gujarat Town Planning and Urban Development Act came into force in 1976. Urban planning in Gujarat has a two step process; one is to prepare a Development Plan for the entire city or development area and the second is to prepare Town Planning Schemes for smaller portions of the development area. In the entire process certain stages are provided to include citizens in the entire process.

Stages of Public Participation in Development Plan as per GTPUD Act, 1976:

Public Participation in Second Revised Development Plan prepared by VUDA: The process has been started by VUDA in 2004, for the Second Revised Development Plan. The process as a whole was carried out as mentioned in the GTPUD Act 1976. In the due process, public participation was carried out only twice. The participation was carried out in accordance with the legal requirements of the GTPUD Act 1976.

By studying the public involvement in the whole planning process, it is clear that:

- Public objections and suggestions received at both the stages are 0.05% and 0.004% which is negligible.
- Major comments pertain to individual level. These comments only addressed grievances. The citizens only raised objections and did not give any suggestions.
- The primary notification is put up on the notice board at the VUDA office only. Thus, normal citizens, who do not visit VUDA, remain unaware of the notification.
- As the size of column is not defined in The GTPUD Act, 1976, the notice published in Gujarati news papers is a column of small size which the normal citizen does not consider as an important notice. Even the legislative language is not understood by the normal citizen.

This makes the people's participation only a token participation without empowering the public to make decisions regarding how the development in their urban centers should take place. No attention is given to specific *participatory techniques* required to attain objectives such as informing citizens, educating citizens, generating support among citizens or utilizing citizen input in the decision making process. The biggest gap in the participatory process is the '*unawareness about the planning process*' and their '*role as a citizen in the process*'. The attitude should be not only to inform people but to take their inputs as people are the primary unit of the city, and their opinions should be considered in decisions that directly affect them.

International Case Studies for Involvement of People in the Planning Process:

Geraldton, Australia: The citizens are motivated and voluntarily educate other citizens to participate in the Comprehensive Plan process. Radio and news papers take the initiative to make citizens aware. Surveys, town hall meetings and small group discussion were held and academia took initiative to educate people. Citizens and authority together made it their goal to develop their city as a sustainable city and successful implementations became possible because of participatory decisions.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh is comparable to Vadodara in terms of population density and area. In Pittsburgh, the department of city planning is preparing the Comprehensive Plan. The different features are divided into 12 *different components* like open space, traffic, heritage conservation, education, housing, water supply, electricity, solid waste management etc. Stakeholders get involved in the component concerning them and give suggestions accordingly. All the components get integrated and make the final plan. Mobile talks are arranged. *Focus groups, surveys and public meetings* are held.

Taking a cue from both the cases, varied methods may be used for awareness generation for Vadodara. The contents of Development Plan or Town Planning Scheme should be explained to stakeholders to comment on the content in which they are interested. Objections can be raised and suggestions invited for heritage conservation, Vishvamitri River conservation, development etc. By comparing the organizational chart of Pittsburgh with VUDA, it becomes clear that for effective public participation, advanced technologies and adequate staff is most important. The interrelation between the departments also becomes very important.

Pulse polio model in India is a very successful model that made people aware about a public health initiative. The Government of India continues to create awareness to achieve the 100% success. Door to door awareness campaigns and celebrity involvement have been used to generate awareness.

Outcomes:

1. Development plan should be properly published and advertised through media, hoardings, social networking sites etc.
2. Public notices should be put up at various public places and all the ward offices other than news papers alone.
3. The views of different associations, NGO's and professional bodies should be considered while preparing the Development Plan.
4. Seminars, Public forums, Charrettes should be arranged area and ward wise to educate and make people aware that they must be a part of decision making.

5. People should be aware about all the physical, environmental and socio-economical-contents of DP.
6. View of professionals involved in heritage, art and environment should be considered.
7. The academia plays an important role in awareness generation and educating people. Their views should be taken into consideration.
8. The marginalised groups like slum dwellers, street vendors and hawkers should be involved in the participatory process.
9. Coordination between development authority and local body is important. Representation of objections and suggestions should not be restricted to VUDA office alone but provision should be made to collect them at ward level also.

Recommendations: The Development Plan is prepared with a Vision for the next 20 years and it is revised at 10 year intervals. But planning is a continuous process. There is a need therefore, to create a Department that will interact and involve the community for every new project or proposal. Planning should be reactive and that can only be achieved if all the separate branches (community development departments) take the responsibility to work with the public and deal with their issues. The Urban Development authority should also put in place mechanisms to disseminate advance information and use participatory techniques for consultation in order to involve people in the planning process.

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