Authors:

Aseem DEUSKAR (POLITO), deuskaraseeeem@gmail.com
Ketevan KHOZREVANIDZE (UMERSIN), qeti.xozrevanidze.97@mail.ru
Zeynep OZEREN (POLITO), s298840@studenti.polito.it
Iga PARADOWSKA (ULODZ), ul0221854@edu.uni.lodz.pl

# Dialog with the community in the planning process. How to use the participatory approach as a planning tool for the community benefit?

## Case Study Analysis and Policy Recommendations

## Abstract

The main objective for the case study and for the planning is to develop a community that safeguards common values and good living conditions for all groups, within the framework of sustainable development. Participation process and transparency in urban policies and spatial planning have adverse effects on the legitimacy of decision-making processes for the wellbeing of every member of the community. Good and effective facilitation of public participation in planning is vital in securing well-functioning and efficient planning processes. However, it is also crucial that public participation is a constant and recurring process since it is a complex organisation that not only requires time and resources but as well as the willingness of the actors. Therefore, the management and sustainability of the participation process requires power, communication, and management skills in the urban planning activities.

The case study acknowledges that the proposed municipal masterplan (PDM) for Baleal Beach resulted in conflicts and disputes in between the stakeholders where the lack of communication is observed severely. In this report the authors suggest that the implementation of a participatory approach in the spatial and urban planning processes which are guarded by the municipality as a solution for the analysed problems in Baleal Beach.

The report starts with the analysis of the case study in Baleal which includes the site visit and the stakeholders meeting and the literature review for deepening the knowledge about participation and community. Therefore, it is followed by the stakeholder analysis to understand the qualities of the actors involved in the process. Moreover, a swot analysis of the implementation of the participation process that is leaded by the municipality is conducted to examine the consequences. Conclusively, actionable policies such as public consultation, grievance redressal, accessible disciplinary and scientific information, and creating minor

design interventions in public spaces to get the conversation started are suggested for an effective and transparent participation process as a planning tool where the municipality is the key leader and the responsible actor.

Keywords: Citizen Participation, Transparency, Social Sustainability, Spatial Planning, Tourism Destination.

# Theoretical and methodological framework

## Aim of the report

Lack of governance transparency and public participation in the decision-making process is the primary impediment for implementation of effective planning proposals. According to Jorge et al. (2022), in Portugal there is a law that ensures the public participation as a principle in public administrative actions and policies in terms of land, urbanism, and spatial planning. The practice of the principle of citizen participation in inter municipal programs and Municipal Master Plan is fulfilled by periodic binding public discussions on the proposed plans and programs and the citizen involvement is included during the elaboration, modification, alteration, and evaluation steps (Jorge et al., 2022). However, in Baleal, the reaction to the plan by the citizens exhibits that the current instruments and policies for participation in planning procedure have either not been implemented or have not produced the expected results. This report aims to make an inquiry and provide recommendations that can help the state machinery understand the importance of participation. Indeed, stakeholder participation is fundamental in planning service delivery and infrastructure investment with minimal conflict. The inquiry and recommendations proposed have been supported by literature review of current, and best, practices, field study, stakeholder analysis and SWOT analysis.

## Literature review

Two words at the heart of the analysis carried out and instrumental in the policy recommendations are: participation and community.

Participation is key because it is found lacking in the process of spatial planning but also something that is desired and recommended by international observer bodies (Jackson et al., 2010). Community is key because of the conflict it has with the state. It is, more importantly, the one who must live with the consequences of state actions. The state is sovereign and thus the final authority who gets to make the decision to implement an agenda whether conceptualised by itself or by bodies that give legitimacy to the state.

Participation has been defined as an action, where there is a sense of sharing or association. It has also been defined as an intervention or an instrument to take part in democratic process of the state (Van Cauwenbergh et al., 2018). It is an indication that representative democracy is functioning with the consent of those who elect the representatives. In the case of planning, we can also find examples of people bringing to surface the internal contradiction in the word participation ("part takers") and step away from a process that is deceptive in its conception (Kaika, 2017).

Community on the other hand is the unit through which individuals can claim the liberties that are guaranteed to us in the state framework in which they live (Nancy, 1986). It is necessary for the community

to recognize itself beyond the individual and as the subject of the state. It is necessary because through this self-realisation the community can act as an agent of change and affect state policy.

Portuguese law requires public participation in principle. Further, it recommends it on the municipal level for evaluation and revision of planning documents (Jorge et al., 2022). There also exists an educational instrument at the national level which works to inform various stakeholders about planning proposals and mobilise them to action to evaluate development programs. There is intent in the Portuguese law that both participation and community be active in the process of governance. There also exists a state portal where people can access policy documents and plans related to specific development proposals.

Participatory planning has also been recommended as a necessary planning tool by international observer bodies. The Local Agenda 21 affirmed that the state must involve the community in decision-making process to ensure sustainable development (Jackson et al., 2010). While the processes of "consensus building" and "community" as mentioned in the UN document have been problematized by various authors the fundamental conceit has not been questioned (Jackson et al., 2010; Kaika, 2017). The idea of community with respect to territory has been problematized to question if the community can be recognized in territory. This can then be used to question if businesses operate within geographical space or economic space while also raising questions related to effectiveness of administrative jurisdictions (Jackson et al., 2010). The issues raised pertain to the language used in planning documents as well as academic literature that analyses them. The chief issue being that of communication. The inability of the state to communicate with constituents as well as disciplinary professionals to communicate with people with highly specific knowledge but in disciplines other than planning.

The solutions to these problems are better standards of communication as well as creation and accessibility of appendices to planning literature which can help people from different areas of knowledge understand each other. The challenge is for literature and the planning process itself to become simple for the understanding of all (Weston et al., 2013). There also exist other means through which communities have intervened in the planning process. This has happened through collective action and organised and an educated citizen cadre. Citizens have participated in the planning process by refusing to participate in it. Thereby creating a contradiction for the state to resolve. People, in other cases, have come together to rethink the legitimacy that they bestow upon the state. Elsewhere, people have chosen to collectively become large stakeholders in the state apparatus by buying state resources and becoming investors in the state (Kaika, 2017).

Documented cases of participatory approach to planning can be found in Spain where stakeholder workshops were conducted based on stakeholder interest-power dynamic to facilitate a water management project. It resulted in creation of working groups of stakeholders who would be directly or indirectly affected by the programme (Cauwenbergh et al., 2018). Recommendations have been made for creation of a indicator system that can assess the health of the community and help state actors understand concepts like belonging and "social cohesion" (Erdiaw-Kwasie & Basson, 2018). Mapping studies in Zimbabwe and Sweden have been conducted to assess a subjects perception of a particular space to help planners in a consolatory manner forming real links between state and subject (Preto et al., 2016).

In conclusion, participatory planning has a legal and principled grounding in Portuguese law. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that it can be used and evolved to work in multiple contexts. In addition, there are examples where people themselves have been able to create planning instruments in the absence of state action.

## Methods

Many research methods were used in the report, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis. The first and the main method used for the research was case study analysis. Crowe et al. (2011) say: "Case studies analysis can be used to explain, describe or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur". This method was used for identification of the main issue of the area.

Second method was literature review. This method is used to broaden the knowledge and understanding of a given issue. It also specifies which methods can be used in the case and helps to identify, select, and analyse information's (Kallet, 2004).

Field visit is a method which requires travelling to the place of the analysis. In this method it is important to take pictures, speak with residents to understand from first-hand experience the site of study (Eden, 2019). During the survey, photographic documentation was collected, which allowed us to prepare a map for the study area.

"Local's talking" session took place on 10th of May 2022, and was a meeting with local citizens. This helped to better identify the problems and learn more about the area from the citizens' perspective and led to formulation of main problems.

Stakeholder analysis is a type of method that leads to the choosing of key stakeholders. Stakeholders are people who will be affected or are going to affect others. There is a need to identify them and categorise them. One of the research tools in the mapping of the stakeholders is power versus interest grids. It helps to understand the underlying power dynamic between the state, people and internal contradictions in these groups (Bryson, 2004).

SWOT analysis is a method where you need to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threads. Strong and weak points are identified by examining things in the environment when the opportunities and threats comes from the outside of the environment (Gurel,2017).

These methods were instrumental for the authors to make policy recommendations. Policy recommendation is a written advice for authority or people who are currently seen to be having significant influence and power (CARDI, 2012).

## Case study analysis

## Case study area

Peniche is a tourism destination in the west part of Portugal with 27,753 inhabitants and an area of 77.55 km². It has become a popular location for surfing activities in recent years. There was also a growth in foreign population from 3.1% to 6.7% in 11 years.

The focus of our case study is Baleal Beach, which is part of the Peniche municipality area (Figure 1). It is a unique place with a beautiful view and, as a local resident said, a good place for people who are learning to surf. The tourism sector is a fundamental economic activity for the generation of wealth and employment in Portugal, contributing to the growth and development of many territories, either on the coast, associated with sun and sea tourism, city breaks and golf tourism, or in the interior with nature tourism, cultural and

gastronomic tourism. Local inhabitants are content about the fact of tourism growth, but they are not interested in mass tourism. What they want to do is to have high quality, sustainable tourism, where you can also enjoy virgin nature. A lot of people are coming to the Baleal Beach in caravans and in the holiday season it can lead to serious congestion in town.  There are also many problems in spatial development of public spaces.
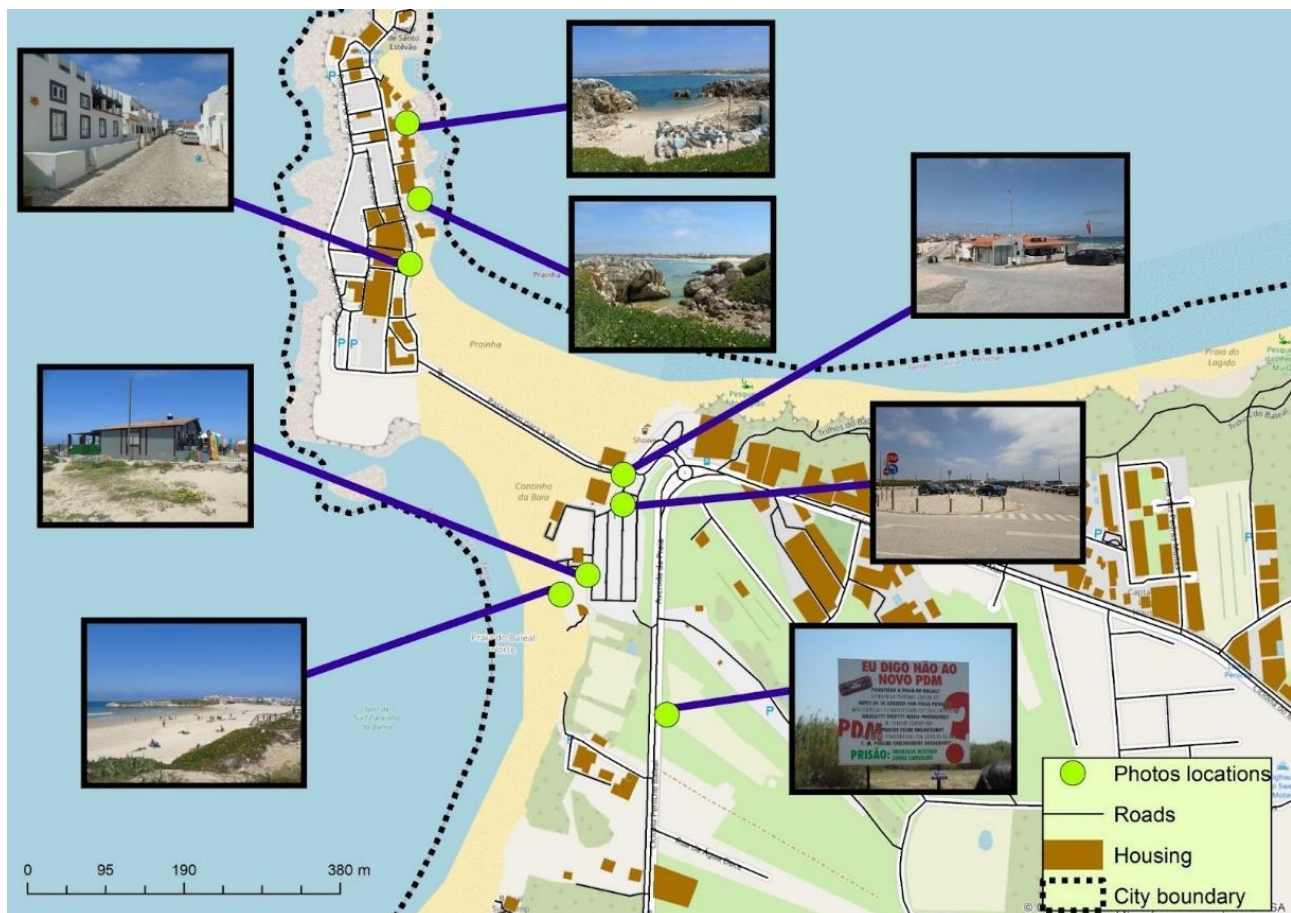


Figure 1: Photo locations in the area of Baleal Beach.

Source: Open Street Map with changes from the authors.

The main identified problem in the Baleal Beach area is the lack of communication between the municipality and the inhabitants. Residents want to be heard by the authorities and involved in the development process of their town, but to unite them, they need to find a way that will interest them in this process. As the inhabitants said in the "Local's talking" session – "it's hard to get everyone talking to everyone". This applies to the both relationships: first - between the municipality and its residents and second - between residents themself. There is also a problem with the organisation of spatial planning and transparency of decisions. The flashpoint of the conflict was the new Municipal Master Plan, which was launched in 2012. The residents only found out about the planned solutions after the plan was announced and they were not asked about any proposals that they would like to include in the city space. The space should be given to the inhabitants, and they should mostly decide how their surroundings should look like. Social participation in this area does not run properly, which creates many misunderstandings (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Manifestation poster.

Source: From the authors, photo taken during the study visit.

Taking into consideration proposed plan for Baleal beach and Ferrel parish we have also identified four following issues for this area:

- Conflict related to proposed land use with relocation of the restaurants and parking space by the beach;
- Assignment of land near the beach for development of hotels and private beaches under their jurisdiction;
- Issues with management of tourists during the high season such as lack of infrastructure facilities for example parking and transportation problems between Ferrel and Baleal;

- Fear of inhabitants that the inadequacy of current facilities will put pressure on environmental resources which is the major selling point for this place.

## Stakeholder analysis

In the case study of Baleal, a broad range of stakeholders are defined, and they are classified into four categories which are investors, government, inhabitants, and civil society. Furthermore, these categories are divided into subcategories for a better understanding of their power-influence and interest levels in a scale of 1-10. The scores are assigned based on socio-economic analysis considering the various groups involved. The scores consider the following factors:

- Rights – Participatory planning approach requires for there to exist legislative instruments[f] that can facilitate such a process. In the absence of these instruments, they ought to be created at a national level and structured into the various levels of planning governance. The score, here, depends on the availability of such rights and its implementation in planning governance. The citizen's willingness and know-how to able to intervene in planning governance affects how much the different stakeholders identified are "interested" in plan implementation.
- Capital – Real and fictious[g] capital affects both the conception of the master plan as well as its implementation. The score considers how much the interest of the stakeholders can be translated into power in absence of power not being legally defined.
- Knowledge – To be able to make interventions in any process the actor must also have a working knowledge of the myriad intricacies of the process itself. Without knowing how one can affect a process the ability to intervene is significantly reduced. Planning, like other disciplines, has its own vocabulary which can range from simple to esoteric. It is necessary for actors to be acquainted with it or it must require for some education on a community level.
- Culture – The ability of citizens to organize and engage with governance is dependent on cultural attributes of the group in question. The score is affected by the question, "what is community". If there are available concise answers to this question it is likely that the community will be able to translate its high interest into ability to affect state policy. The community must be able to organise and create methods of communication in response to state action which will determine their power to interact with the state.

Taking into consideration the above parameters we have classified stakeholders into categories of Investors, Government, Inhabitants, and Civil society. The grades given to each member of the category class reflect our perception of the power they hold and the interest they may have in a planning exercise conducted by the state. These conform to the considerations made above.

Table 1: Stakeholder analysis.

| Category | Stakeholder | Characteristics | Power (1-10) | Interest (1-10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Investors | Landowners | Agricultural land | 5 | 10 |
| | | Second homes | 5 | 7 |
| | Local business owners | Hotels | 6 | 10 |
| | | Bars | 5 | 9 |
| | | Surfing businesses | 7 | 10 |
| | | Supermarkets | 5 | 9 |

| Category | Stakeholder | Characteristics | Power (1-10) | Interest (1-10) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Restaurants | 5 | 9 |
| | | Tourism related | 7 | 10 |
| | | Shops (other) | 4 | 8 |
| | | Real estate | 7 | 10 |
| | Factories | | 6 | 7 |
| | Fishing | | 4 | 5 |
| Government | Municipality | | 10 | 10 |
| | Regional | | 10 | 8 |
| | National | | 10 | 6 |
| Inhabitants | Permanent residents | Workers | 3 | 9 |
| | Floating population | Second homeowners | 3 | 4 |
| | | Home rentals (long-term tourists) | 2 | 3 |
| | | Tourists | 1 | 5 |
| Civil society | Community organisations (local) | | 6 | 8 |
| | Community organisations (national / subnational) | | 7 | 5 |
| | Community organisations (international) | | 7 | 5 |
| | NGOs | | 7 | 8 |
| | Academia | Polytechnic of Leiria | 8 | 9 |

Source: from the authors based on stakeholder analysis.

In addition, the scoring results are shown in the graph and categorised into 4 groups where every category is represented with a colour. The colour red is used for representing the stakeholders in Investors category, blue for representing the stakeholders in Government category, yellow for representing the stakeholders in Inhabitants category and green is for representing the stakeholders in Civil society category in the matrix.
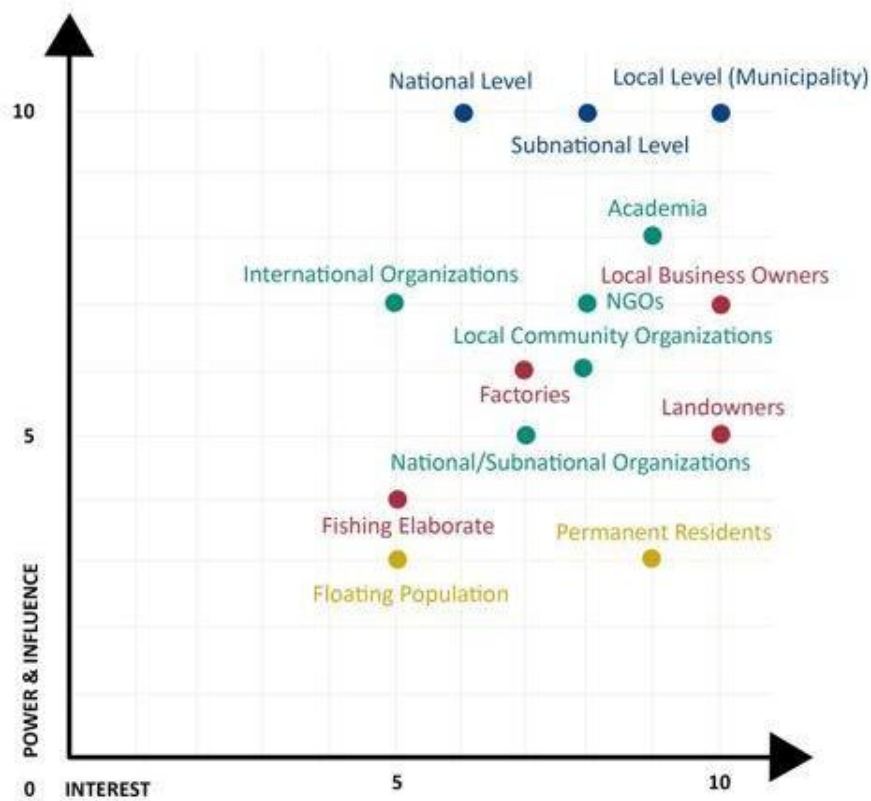
Figure 3: Stakeholder analysis graph.

Source: From the authors based on stakeholders analysis.

As seen on Figure 4, most of the identified stakeholders are located on the Manage Closely group where the stakeholders in The Government category which are shown in blue takes the highest scores for both interest and power. On the other hand, the rest of the stakeholders are mostly located on the Keep Informed group where the stakeholders in Inhabitants category which are represented in yellow score the highest interest with lowest power.

Results of the matrix indicated that Inhabitants and the Government are the key stakeholders for the case study and proposed solutions. Therefore, a broader analysis of these key stakeholders depicted that the score of the power and interest also vary in between those categories too. Permanent residents from inhabitants and the Municipality form the government are identified as the final key stakeholder as the result of the analysis. Lastly the analysis showed that although these two groups share a similar interest in the proposed project, they have a quiet gap in between in terms of the power.
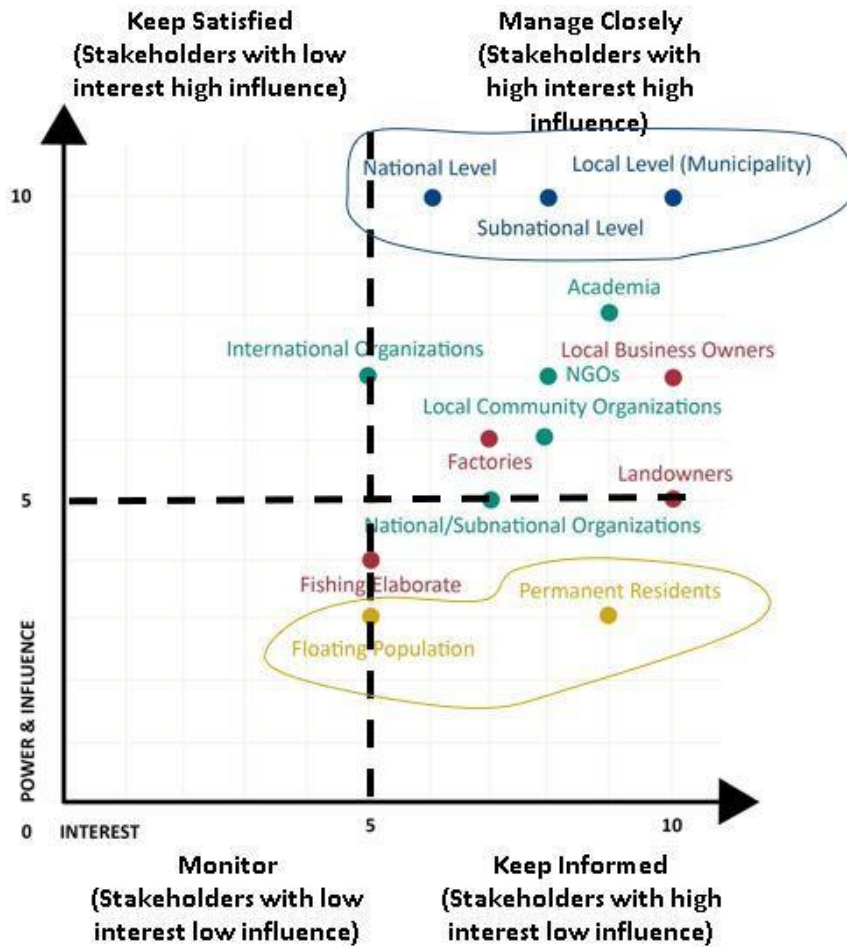
Figure 4: Stakeholder analysis matrix.

Source: From the authors based on stakeholders analysis.

## SWOT analysis

Stakeholder analysis showed that focusing on the power dynamics between the key stakeholders is the key for the proposed solution and therefore the municipality which is the most powerful key stakeholder is suggested to take the responsibility of implementation of the participation process to overcome the current conflicts between the stakeholders. Moreover, implementation of the participation process as a main strategy in the agenda of local government for diversifying the power share is seen as the key solution.

To understand benefits and the possible consequences of this strategy for the municipality, the SWOT analysis method is used.

Table 2: SWOT analysis of the participation process for municipality.

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| • A good way of showing that municipality care for the citizens<br>• Democratic way of decision-making<br>• Foreseeing tool for conflicts between the stakeholders<br>• Involvement of different perspectives (citizen's perspective)<br>• Strengthening the trust between the authority actors and citizens with collaboration | • A complex organisation<br>• Requires more resources and funding<br>• Requires local authority to share its power |
| Threats | Opportunities |
| • Being a reference / example municipality in Portugal<br>• Funding opportunities for the projects from European Union<br>• Effective tool for implementing social sustainability for the area | • Challenges of changing the current long-term strategies (national / regional)<br>• The opposition could exploit the opportunity to reduce political consensus to the local government |

Source: from the authors.

According to the analysis, there are various strengths of taking responsibility for leading an effective participation process. Firstly, it is a good way to show that the electors care for the citizens. It is an indicator of democratic strategic decision-making, and it can be used as a foreseeing tool for the conflicts between the stakeholders. It is a useful way for the involvement of different perspectives. Lastly, it is a powerful tool to build trust between the authorities and citizens if the process also involves transparency.

However, there are also multiple weaknesses. It is a complex organisation. The number of the actors and the ideas that need to be negotiated increase. Therefore, the process requires more resources such as time and funding and the success of the participation process depends on the willingness of the municipality to share the power.

There are also appealing opportunities of taking the responsibility of the participation process for the municipality too. It has the potential to affect the prestige of the municipality in a positive manner and lead to becoming a reference municipality in Portugal. Therefore, the opportunities of fundings from the European Union will increase and it can be used as the implementation of social sustainability for the future for the area.

Lastly, there are also threats that can be analysed which are the challenges of changing the current strategies which are long term documents and the exploitation of the opposite to reduce the political consensus to the local government.

SWOT analysis pointed out that municipalities claiming to implement the participation process in the urban planning will not only be beneficial for the community but also for their own success in the governing process too.

## Policy recommendations

Stakeholder consultation revealed that the most prominent issue was a disconnect with the process of planning and its implementation. Stakeholders spoke of the municipality being absent from public discussion and having no space or forum to negotiate or discuss the plan. Considering these issues, we make the following recommendations addressing Municipality:

- Create working group with the involvement of stakeholders to create an action plan that considers the interests of all – This provides a way for the municipality to set up a line of dialog with the constituents (i.e., voters) and creates a path to transparency in the planning process. It will also help the elected officials to be able to identify stakeholders with joint or mutual interests. It will help the municipality to get in touch with willing investors and other private interests. The working group consultation will allow the Municipality to moderate the discussion.

- The working group composition should accommodate members of civil society, women, and members from socially and politically marginalised communities – It is necessary that working groups include people who have held public office in the past such that they are recognised as community leaders but also navigate through the bureaucracy. There should be adequate representation of voices that are not heard or are silenced due various social factors. They could also include people who are regular but temporary residents like second homeowners and surfers who visit during summers.

- Budgeting concerns for a proposal like this could be met with a PPP model or tie-ups with local businesses – Since the proposal requires funds to cover the expenses the municipality will incur it will be beneficial to investigate Public Private partnership models that can help local businesses and start-ups to use it as a platform to advertise themselves. This will also attract attention from European bureaucrats since it will count as resource investment in the local community.

- Impact assessment studies (Social and environmental) must be made accessible to the public on the local government website rather than having to retrieve it from the APA website – While conducting these studies is mandatory and it is important to incorporate their findings in development proposals, they must also be made available to the public. They will create a level of trust among the people about the scientific process but also provide evidence to support the planning proposal. It will help investors to make decisions regarding their investments in a particular component of the proposal. The reliability of informed decision making reduces risks for investors.

- Provide glossary and/or information on terms, concepts, acronyms, regulations that may not be common public knowledge outside disciplinary practitioners – This step will help not only the constituents but also help the public officials who are otherwise not required to know various terms in planning discipline. It will help the readers engage with the document without having to worry about being able to make sense of it.

- Assure the accessibility of information as well as grievance registration procedure to avoid exclusion of people with physical or psychological impairments – The more people that are able to engage with the municipality and the development process the more likely they would be to be active voters and responsible citizens. Accessibility creates, beyond a sense of trust, a sense of empathy.

- Discussions and comments by stakeholders should be addressed and commented upon. Same goes for objections raised against the proposal – It is necessary for constituents to feel that their comments are being received by authorities and addressed regularly. This will also help the state to engage with possible investors and stakeholders who may not have the same level of influence as others.

- Create minor design interventions in public spaces to get the conversation started. Via small issues to bigger structural issues – While this creates a situation for spending funds, it can also serve to attract sponsors and investors who might see opportunities to enter the conversation through this medium. These interventions can serve as points were stakeholders with different levels of influence and interests can meet and engage in conversations that is more social and less official.



Figure 5: The proposed form of invitation to public consultations.

Source: From the authors based on the photo (Figure 2) taken during the study visit.

After analysing all the problems occurring in the studied area and after creating some recommendations, it can be concluded that participation will play a major role in solving many problems. The authorities must take steps to unite the entire community without excluding anyone. The recommendations are addressed to

the authorities because their role is to create a space for residents where they can freely exchange their ideas. They also need to encourage people to become more interested in the surrounding space therefore it is proposed to place temporary installations that will spark public discussion about changes.

## Glossary of terms and phrases

- PDM: Municipal masterplan which is a legal document which regulates land-use and planning strategy at the municipal level. The document must translate national and regional planning objectives at the municipal level but make room for specific needs of the city for which it is being made (https://www.direitosedeveres.pt/q/o-cidadao-o-estado-e-as-instituicoes-internacionais/urbanismo-e-edificacoes/qual-a-finalidade-do-plano-director-municipal-pdm).
- Spatial Planning: In the European Union spatial planning has been defined as "the methods used largely by the public sector to influence the future distribution of activities in space" (https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/Spatial-planning-new-urban-agenda.pdf).
- Participa: is a portal created by the Portuguese government (https://participa.pt/).
- Sustainable Development: in this case the United Nations, the document referred is Agenda 21 (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf), chapter 28.
- Legislative instruments: are those part of the law which enable office holders to perform the actions as elaborated in the law.
- Real Capital: is the money that is actually available or being spent in order for an action to take place, while fictitious capital is instruments like equity the value of which is dependent on future actions that may or may not be currently conceivable.

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