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Community Mapping

- [Mapping Neighborhoods](#)

Community Multiplicity

- [Community Diversity](#)

Community Participation

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Synonyms

[Citizen oversight](#); [Citizen participation and bottom-up planning](#); [Civil society](#); [Collaboration](#); [Community deliberation](#); [Community development](#); [Community empowerment](#); [Deliberative democracy](#); [Democracy](#); [Open government](#); [Public participation](#); [Public policy](#)

Definition

Community participation involves both theory and practice related to the direct involvement of citizens or ► [citizen action groups](#) potentially affected by or interested in a decision or action. Community is conceptualized as involving a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality (often referred to as community of place) or sharing a common heritage or set of values, for example with a common cultural identity or with political bonds (often referred to as community of interest). Participation is the act of engaging in and contributing to the activities, processes, and outcomes of a group. The general tenet of community participation holds that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved or have some degree of influence over any process and outcome related to its legislation, execution and adjudication. Community participation may be regarded as a vital part of democratic ► [governance](#) through the empowerment of citizens.

Description

Community participation has been described as an integral component of many disciplines, fields, and subfields including sociology, political

science, public policy, and public administration. The historical antecedents of community participation have conceptual and applied roots in literature dating to the ancient Greeks. Much of the earliest thinking about the possible nature and forms of participation emerges from a somewhat wider collection of thought, namely, that focused on ► [civil society](#) and how societies organize and sustain themselves. One recurrent theme in the civil society literature examines why and how citizens participate in the organization and maintenance of institutions of society. Although we find some of the earliest democratic practices emerging in ancient Greece, much of the literature of that era is less explicit about potential forms and rationales. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were, each for their own reasons, critical of governance by the people. Instead, much of this early literature establishes the foundations for participation in a different way, namely, by exploring two related sets of tensions. One tension is between that which is legal versus that which is moral and a second tension between placing an emphasis on the social versus the individual. For example, the Stoics, belonging to a school of philosophy founded in Athens in the early third century BC, saw morality, reason, and natural law as conjoined and intertwined. Consistent with the Stoics' thinking, Cicero argued, "true law, or right reason, which is in accordance with nature, applies to all men and is unchangeable and eternal" (Seligman, 1992: 17). This recognition of the place of natural reason among all men, and not just elites, is a critical step toward a shift in political theory, without which, participation would be nearly unthinkable – namely, popular sovereignty. The explicit move by social contract theorists, especially John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), to locate sovereignty outside the state, and with the people, makes possible the increasingly liberal, diverse, and inclusive forms of participation in democratic practices that we see today.

Community participation has a distinctly public connotation and linked to terms such as ► [communitarianism](#), civil society, ► [collectivism](#), and civic republicanism. The term res

publica, or "public thing" refers to the public realm or common world that according to Arendt (1958:52) "gathers us together." In the context of the United States, the active role of citizens in political process and popular control was central to US President Thomas Jefferson's (1743–1826) civic republican argument of a shared sense of citizen duty and responsibility. ► [Collective responsibility](#) was a necessary feature of self-governance for Jefferson who in 1816 wrote, "My most earnest wish is to see the republican element of popular control pushed to the maximum of its practicable exercise" (Hartmann, 2004: 193). Alex de Tocqueville (1805–1859) equated public participation with liberty and argued that strong communities foster civic mindedness, while atomization of the population causes apathy and facilitates oppression. Tocqueville recognized that Americans were practicing not idealistic selflessness nor complete self-interest but rather self-interest rightly understood.

Community participation is related to civic republicanism which is defined as a constellation of beliefs centering around (1) the existence and legitimacy of public values and the common good, (2) the use of citizen deliberation as the principal democratic decision-making tool, and (3) the state's legitimate role in fostering civic virtue among its citizens (Poisner, 1996). Civic republicans believe citizens create common good through discourse, that a common good is created and not discovered, and that the use of deliberation as a process leads to creativity that in turn shapes preferences, and leads to civic virtues and ultimately to competent political participation. Community participation as framed under these tenets posits responsibility toward citizen action but also in providing opportunities for citizens to be public and act.

The tensions related to community participation are often framed as negative and positive ► [liberty](#) or between freedom from interference by other people and the power and resources to act to fulfill one's own potential (Berlin, 1958). Others argue that responsibilities associated with civic interaction may rely less on formal civic education and more on opportunities for

empowerment (Barber, 1984). Citizens participating only in a consultative role but without some form of delegated power have been referred to as merely a gesture of tokenism (Arnstein, 1969). For some, participation is seen to be sufficient when expressed by casting a ballot, providing testimony at a hearing, or filling out a survey. Active engagement and citizen-to-citizen relationships is seen to be constitutive of life in democratic societies (Ostrom, 1997). Moreover, providing only opportunities for passive forms of participation is seen as insufficient sufficient, with calls for establishing and encouraging conditions for substantive and authentic expressions of citizenship (Williams & Matheny, 1995; King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). These conditions include a well-educated populace, citizens who share a responsibility and are motivated by community, and a noncoercive environment in which to participate. The responsibility of any individual to participate in public matters may ultimately lead to more civil, trustworthy, and collectively caring communities (Kemmis, 1990).

Community participation is also allied to various democratic theories including deliberative democracy. Since the term was first coined nearly a half century ago, political theorists have searched for an inclusive definition to explain theory and practice (Bessette, 1994). Deliberative forms of ► **democracy** include three essential characteristics: (1) they are public and open where citizens offer public reasons for their preferences, (2) they meet the condition of non-tyranny whereby discussion and agreements function uncoerced, and (3) they meet the standard of political equality whereby basic procedural and substantive inequalities are eliminated (Conover, Searing, & Crewe, 2002). This act of participation involves both a public and private dimension emphasizing the need for a polity that is able to engage and hone internal reflection skills (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003).

Forms of community participation through deliberation can be based on rhetoric, argument, testimony, storytelling, and greetings if used to induce reflection in a noncoercive manner to accommodate differences between citizens

(Dryzek, 2000). The emancipatory power of public communication is also described as attainable through “communicative rationality” motivated by a sincere desire for consensus through mutual understanding, cooperation, and a common vision of community (Habermas, 1981). Deliberative forms of governance date back at least to Pericles (c.490–429 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC) continuing with the emancipatory conceptions of individual sovereignty and ► **liberalism** through Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) who in *The Social Contract* deemed public discourse essential to the formation of a “general will” (Book IV, Ch. 2.). John Stewart Mill (1806–1873) in *On Liberty* reflected on the importance of public discourse and outlined a philosophical rationale for “government by discussion” as a means of limiting human fallibility. A deliberative approach can take many forms and includes open, inclusive, and direct citizen interaction or more indirect methods, such as deliberative polling and citizen juries that seek to combine representative and participatory forms of deliberative democracy (Fishkin, 1993).

From a more sociological perspective, a relational approach to community participation emerges within central tenets of social capital and social movement theory. Social capital involves features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social ► **trust** that facilitate coordination, cooperation, and participation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995). Community participation is influenced by and in turn influences social capital in a community. Social movement theory is an interdisciplinary study within the social sciences to explain why social mobilization occurs, the forms under which it manifests, and potential social, cultural, and political consequences. Community participation is integral to social movement theory through the many progressive changes including the abolitionist, suffragette, and civil rights movements. Crossing political and cultural lines, contemporary community participation movements have involved globalization and ► **solidarity** issues.

The theme of common-pool resources and common property is also associated with community participation with its focus on social

arrangements that regulate the preservation, maintenance, and ► **consumption** of various public resources. Examples abound showing that common resources can be successfully managed without government regulation or privatization and involving a variety of cultural norms and spatial and temporal scales (Ostrom, 1990).

Examples and Best Practices

As a tangible example, the United States Constitution was established to provide for and protect certain inalienable rights, among them the right to peaceably assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. Legal scholars posit that public participation and related issues of representation and accountability exist through an electoral system and check and balance by the separation of powers (Coggin, 1998). In the United States, case law supports the notion that abdication of legally sanctioned authority (termed subdelegation), federal statutes included, is inviolate (Barker et al., 2003). However, engaging diverse publics in ways that promote community participation does not necessarily have to move legal accountability for decisions away from government agencies to a more diffuse public entity. At the US federal level, the Federal Advisory Committee Act structurally limits the degree to which deliberative advisory groups influence federal agencies because of concerns of agency capture. However, agencies dealing with urban, education, environmental, and other policy areas have developed deliberative and participatory practices that often oriented around communities of interest. At a global scale, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, which holds freedom of association and freedom of assembly as central tenets, is an example of more universally recognized rights related to community participation.

Effective community participation requires certain necessary conditions or elements present. However, best practices for community participation are neither standardized nor relevant in every context. There are some underlying themes that do describe the potential for practicing community participation in an efficient and effective manner. For example, principles of good

governance can encourage community participation through: (1) legitimacy and voice, whereby all citizens can influence decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention; (2) direction, whereby leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on human development along with a sense of what is needed for such development; (3) performance, whereby institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders with processes and institutions that make the best use of resources; (4) accountability and transparency, whereby decision-makers in government, the private sector, and civil society organizations are answerable to the public with a free flow of information that is directly accessible; and (5) fairness, whereby all citizens have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being through legal frameworks that are just and enforced impartially (Graham, Amos, & Plumtre, 2003).

Enhancing public involvement in community planning and development efforts has been promulgated on developing and acquiring “buy-in” which signifies the support, involvement, or commitment of interested or affected parties to a proposal, plan, strategy, or decision. The term ownership or sense of ownership is increasingly cited as a critical element in determining the potential for buy-in and consequently public involvement in community planning and development efforts (Lachapelle, 2008). The term is characterized in organizational and management disciplines as psychological ownership involving feelings of responsibility and influence over processes and the resulting pride and identity invested in outcomes and purported to be a critical component of team building and collective action (Druskat & Pescosolido, 2002; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2003).

Threats to Effective Implementation

Threats to effective community participation are also described to be present and growing. Warnings of apathy in terms of civic responsibilities are not new and were forewarned by Tocqueville who predicted modernity, defined in part by administrations that discouraged ground level

self-government, would result in the atomization of the citizenry and would eventually lead to apathy and oppression. Henry Thoreau (1817–1862) also recognized pernicious qualities associated with public apathy and related contempt toward nature.

While technology and expert opinion are vital in social and political policy processes, criticism is growing of social and political initiatives that over-rely on experts at the expense of citizen engagement. The political shift in the United States, from the civic republic to what Poisner (1996) terms the procedural republic with an overemphasis on technocratic and bureaucratic institutions, has led in some cases to alienation, disconnectedness, and anonymity. Essayist-editor Walter Lippmann (1889–1974) described the public as a “bewildered herd” and “ignorant and meddling outsiders” who are incapable and disinterested in public affairs and argued for an elite class of insiders who are better able to analyze problems and propose solutions. Lippmann felt the “manufacture of consent” was necessary to address social ills since problems were too complex for most citizens to comprehend or address. Thus, citizens were to be governed by a specialized class composed of experts, specialists, and bureaucrats, a notion that continues to influence contemporary mass media, the public relations industry, and many social and political institutions (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The use of technology and science to inform policy making and educate citizens in community participation processes is vital. However, allegiance to “scientism” and the belief that science is inherently capable of solving almost all human problems serves as a mechanism of control as to whose voice is heard and considered legitimate, often at the expense of ordinary citizens who wish to participate in policy debates (Caldwell, 1990). Increasingly, citizens are apathetic and disengaged from the day-to-day business of governance and from myriad civic and social activities, particularly in the last half century (Putnam, 2000). Community participation is likely to be greatly affected by modern communications and information technology changes. Technology will,

including new e-government initiatives, prove to further influence in myriad ways, community participation process, and outcome at various scales.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Citizen Action Groups](#)
- ▶ [Civil Society](#)
- ▶ [Collective Responsibility](#)
- ▶ [Collectivism](#)
- ▶ [Communitarianism](#)
- ▶ [Community](#)
- ▶ [Consumption](#)
- ▶ [Democracy](#)
- ▶ [Freedom](#)
- ▶ [Governance](#)
- ▶ [Liberalism](#)
- ▶ [Liberty](#)
- ▶ [Solidarity](#)
- ▶ [Trust](#)

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Community Participatory Action Research

► [Action Research](#)

Community Perceptions

► [Neighborhood Perceptions](#)

Community Perceptions in Durban, South Africa

► [Durban \(South Africa\), Quality of Life](#)

Community Planning

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Synonyms

[City planning \(USA\)](#); [Spatial planning \(Europe\)](#); [Town planning \(UK\)](#); [Urban and regional planning](#)

Definition

Community planning is a form of urban and regional planning that incorporates social, economic, and environmental considerations to guide future development at the scale of neighborhoods, towns, cities, and regions.

The term community planning emerged from Canadian World War II reconstruction plans, as the federal government explored concepts for better community living in addition to the more traditional physical planning concerns incorporated in town planning (UK), city planning (USA), and urbanisme (France). “Community”