

Why is it important to achieve a representative participation in the debate of our cities?

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Do technicians, politicians and citizens have the same model of city? And if not, can we, without the public participation, be certain that our cities reflect the aspirations of all?

Using semi-structured interviews we cross-examined our target sample (politicians, citizens and technicians that participate in the urban rehabilitation of Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal). Questions focused on the importance of the public participation in urban planning and if people got involved in planning issues in general. The answer to the 1st question tended to be – ‘yes’ and to the 2nd question tended to be – “no”.

In a second stage we asked about the importance of different indicators of urban quality (politicians’ and technicians’ point of view, from a quantitative approach) and the concept of ideal city (politicians, technicians and citizens, from a qualitative approach).

In the quantitative methodology, politicians and technicians are inclined to answer within a theoretical model, stating that public transports, environmental quality, green spaces, or even security feelings are much more important than proximity or sociability.

However, when confronted with quantitative questions about urban quality both technicians and politicians stress the importance of factors such as proximity (home – work, home - equipments of support, home – commercial places) or other components like sociability and sense of neighborhood, i.e., parameters that assume great importance for our citizens’ panel, which allow us to consider that this could be a more urban friendly model and to confirm why it is so important to improve the discussion within the public sphere.

Keywords: Public participation; urban planning; urban quality; city model