

## **Public participation in urban planning as a way to achieve urban life quality**

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The democracy concept, hallmark of modern societies, implies the obligation of listening to popular will. Due to this the call for citizen participation in decision-making is one of the strategies of European Union policies since the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), to the recent Green Paper of Territorial Cohesion (2008). In the meantime the debate on public participation is extremely important, among other reasons because we know that planning is not neutral. Due to this we asked our sample (politicians, citizens and technicians that participated in a urban Program in Vila Nova de Gaia) how important is a set of urban life quality parameters and how should be the ideal city. In a second stage we asked how important is public participation, and if it really matters. More than answers our results appoint questions, to which we should give an urgent reply: How to achieved urban life quality if we don't hear people voices? What are the consequences to our cities if we ignore people needs? Is public participation a familiar concept to the different actors involved in urban planning? Is public participation encouraged by who decide? Which are the reasons that lead to people absence? For the moment, people alienation from the current debate suggests that our cities do not reflect the aspirations of all citizens, so the city is not for all. How can we achieve urban life quality without a widespread participation? In other words, how to achieved territorial cohesion if we don't have social cohesion?

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