



Assessing Public Participation in U.S. Cities

Xiaohu Wang

Public Performance & Management Review, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Jun., 2001), pp. 322-336.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1530-9576%28200106%2924%3A4%3C322%3AAPPUC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>

Public Performance & Management Review is currently published by M.E. Sharpe, Inc..

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/mes.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ASSESSING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN U.S. CITIES

XIAOHU WANG

University of Central Florida

Public participation is advocated to reduce citizen cynicism toward government, build stakeholder consensus in government, and enhance administrative decision making (Creighton, 1981; King & Stivers, 1998; Langton, 1978a; Sanoff, 2000). Participation theories have been presented and examined in research. Case descriptions or stories in individual governmental agencies are often used to support theoretical assertions. Empirical evidence is needed about participation in government as a whole. Studies involving larger samples of governments can generate more holistic and systematic evidence.

Using survey data, this study focused on three research questions: How much public participation occurs in U.S. municipal governments? What are the possible causes of participation? What are the possible impacts of participation on governmental agencies? This research provides useful information about potential obstacles to participation and ways to enhance participation and performance in government. The Framework section presents relevant definitions and theories.

Framework

WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?

Public participation is defined as citizen involvement in making service delivery and management decisions (Langton, 1978b). Participation occurs when citizens and public officials have participation needs and when participation mechanisms exist (King, Feltey, & Susel, 1998). Traditional participation mechanisms include public hearings, citizen forums, community or neighborhood meetings, community outreaches, citizen advisory groups, and individual citizen representation. Citizen surveys and focus groups, the Internet, and e-mail are also used.

There are two levels of participation. Participation is “pseudo” (Sanoff, 2000) when the purposes of participation are to inform citizens about decisions, placate their complaints, and manipulate their opinions. Genuine participation occurs only when the

Author's Note. I would like to thank Professors Jerry Gianakis and Ronnie Korosec at the University of Central Florida and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on an early draft of this article.

Public Performance & Management Review, Vol. 24 No. 4, June 2001 322-336
© 2001 Sage Publications, Inc.

public is involved in administrative decision making, and citizens are the owners of government and the coproducers of public goods (King et al., 1998; Sanoff, 2000). In genuine participation, citizens are dominant discussants and decision makers, and government's supplementary role is to set goals, provide incentives, monitor processes, and provide information (Gray and Chapin, 1998; Plein, Green, & Williams, 1998).

The participation literature has emphasized two aspects of participation. First, participation appears in various public service functions such as economic development, environmental protection, education, public health, and public safety (Aryani, Garrett, & Alsbrook 2000; Foley, 1998; Iglitzin, 1995; Kovalick & Kelly, 1998; Morgan, 1987; Sanoff, 2000), as well as in management functions such as budgeting (O'Toole and Marshall, 1988; Preisser 1997; Simonsen & Robbins, 2000). Second, participation also occurs in policy making or decision making. In this aspect of participation, the public is involved in goal setting, strategy, policy, capacity determination, and implementation evaluation (Walters, Aydelotte, & Miller, 2000). Participation in decision making is seen as evidence of "genuine" or "meaningful" participation in the literature because it is how "public beliefs and values" can be realized (Lando, 1999; Yankelovich, 1991).

WHY PARTICIPATION?

The public becomes involved in government for various reasons, including external pressures from stakeholders and internal demands from administrators. The size of bureaucracy is associated with public demand for participation. Citizens want to participate more in large governments because they are afraid of losing "personal contact" and control to a large bureaucracy (Creighton, 1981). Political divisiveness among different groups motivates government to involve citizens in decision making to reduce potentially unpopular or questionable decisions (Langton, 1978a, pp. 6-8). Media attitudes influence public participation by making more people aware of problems associated with government (Langton, 1978a, pp. 6-8).

The tension between participation and administration is well-established in the research literature (DeSario & Langton, 1987; Kweit & Kweit, 1987; Simonsen & Robbins, 2000). Evidently, participation is facilitated in an open and accountable administrative system. Public involvement is encouraged by public employees who are willing to be accountable for their operations, efforts, and performance. Sufficient funding and technical assistance are necessary due to the need for personnel and infrastructure to support participation (Cohen, 1995). Organizations that develop agendas that interest the public should have fewer difficulties in initiating and sustaining the momentum for participation.

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF PARTICIPATION?

Three impacts of participation on government are anticipated (Creighton, 1981, pp. 11-12; Langton, 1978b, pp. 13-24). First, participation leads to satisfying the needs of the public. The argument is that public needs are not automatically served by a bureaucracy whose main motivation is the maximization of its financial inputs (Niskanen, 1971). The design of representative democracy allows special interest

groups with large financial leverages to influence governmental decision making, and the needs of the general public are further compromised (Kaufman, 1969; Lowi, 1969). Public participation provides guidance for bureaucratic production and a balance to the influence of powerful interest groups. The idea is that public participation enhances the communication between the public and government, which allows government to understand what the public wants (Creighton, 1981, pp. 11-12). Consistent citizen involvement also provides government with an opportunity to effectively monitor and respond to the changes in public needs. A good understanding of and prompt responses to public needs result in citizen satisfaction. These arguments are furthered by recent assertions that there is a need to create a market for public service production, which is designed to satisfy the needs of citizens who are also customers (Osborne & Plastrik, 1997; Swiss, 1999).

Second, participation helps build consensus on organizational goals, service priorities, good performance, and fiscal commitment. Stakeholder demands of government vary. As a result, many governmental agencies have multiple and sometimes contradictory goals. Participation allows the public to voice its needs, which provides legitimacy for government to develop publicly supported goals, missions, and service priorities (Langton, 1978b, pp. 13-24). In addition, because there are often no standards for good performance in the public sector due to the lack of market evaluation and the nature of public goods, involving the public in decision making provides a mechanism with which to develop standards and expectations for performance. Participation leads to stakeholder acceptance of organizational goals, performance standards, and decisions (Pateman, 1970).

One enduring task in public management is to resolve the tension between public demands and management reality (DeSario & Langton, 1987). Political conflict, resource availability, management complexity, and impact uncertainty limit governments' capacities to fulfill all public demands. Participation allows the public to reevaluate its demands and better understand these management limitations. It is expected that consensus is built on a mutual understanding between the public and government.

Finally, participation improves public trust of governmental decision making. There has been continuous criticism that government is ineffective in service production, dishonest in decision making, and unfair in service delivery. One reason for this mistrust is the lack of mechanisms with which the public can monitor governmental operations. Consequently, the public becomes alienated. Cases of government mismanagement and efforts to cover it up only aggravate public concerns. Public participation may reduce this sense of alienation. A more open and accountable decision-making process may result in a better understanding of government and improved public trust of government (Creighton, 1981, pp. 11-12).

Method

A NATIONAL SURVEY

A survey was sent to all chief administrative officers in U.S. cities with populations greater than 50,000 in the late 1990s and early 2000. The list of cities' addresses was

obtained from the National League of Cities. The names and addresses were also verified with the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) (1998) *Municipal Yearbook*. Two hundred forty-nine of 541 surveyed cities returned the survey (a response rate of 46%). Sixty-four percent of respondents were city managers (or chief administrators) or assistant city managers. Fifteen percent were chief finance or budget officers (finance directors or budget directors). Other respondents (21.5%) included senior management analysts, directors of administrations, directors of planning, and other high-level city officials.

To check the nonresponse bias, I examined the population distribution, the form of government, and sample questions of responding cities. First, the population distribution of responding cities was compared with the population distribution of the cities in the ICMA's (1998) *Yearbook*. Except for cities with populations greater than 1 million, of which 7 of 8 responded to the survey (an 87.5% response rate), cities in other population categories exhibited similar response rates: 47.0% for cities with populations ranging from 500,000 to 1 million, 48.7% for cities with populations ranging from 250,000 to 499,999, 51.1% for cities with populations ranging from 100,000 to 249,999, and 41.6% for cities with populations ranging from 50,000 to 99,999. Second, I examined the form of government of the responding and nonresponding cities. Of the cities reporting such information, 179 had a council-manager form of government (52.7% of the 340 council-manager cities in the sample). The response rates for other categories of governmental form were significantly lower (28.7%, 12.5%, and 20.0% for the mayor-council form, the commission form, and the township form, respectively), suggesting that this sample was more representative of the council-manager form of government. Third, telephone surveys were conducted with more than 50 randomly selected city officials who did not respond to the survey (about 20% of nonrespondents). These officials were asked two selected survey questions that included 32 survey items. Their answers were then compared with the respondents' answers. No respondent bias was found by this process. To ensure the validity of the responses, I also conducted follow-up telephone interviews in which respondents were asked to verify their responses through specific examples in their organizations. Few changes were made as a result of these phone interviews.

Several in-depth interviews were also conducted to gain insights about participation practices in governments. The interviewees were survey respondents who had scored high on participation indexes (discussed below). The interviewees were asked about their participation practices and impacts. They were also asked to give specific examples to elaborate their points. The results of these interviews were used to further explore the findings of the mailed survey.

MEASUREMENT OF VARIABLES

In accordance with the definition of participation outlined above, three dimensions of public participation were measured: the use of participation mechanisms, citizen involvement in service or management functions, and citizen involvement in administrative decision making. First, the use of participation mechanisms was measured. Respondents were asked to assess on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) whether their administrations used

selected public participation mechanisms (the eight items listed in Table 1). These mechanisms are frequently cited in the participation literature (Creighton, 1981, Lindstrom & Nie, 2000, Sanoff, 2000). They include traditional means such as public hearings and citizen advisory boards as well as new mechanisms such as citizen telephone hotlines and the Internet. The Participation Mechanism Index was constructed to include all eight items. The index had a mean of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 0.65. A reliability statistic showed that this index was relatively reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78).

Second, citizen involvement in service or management functions was measured. This dimension concerns the extent of participation in city functions. Survey respondents were asked to identify participation in nine important service or management functions, including policing and public safety, code enforcement, zoning and planning, parks and recreation, transportation and street maintenance, solid waste and garbage collection, budgeting, personnel management, and procurement management (see Table 2). In the survey, respondents were asked to assess on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) whether citizens or citizen activists in their cities were involved in these functions. An index was then constructed to average the values of all nine items (functions). Because this index measured participation in governmental functions, it was called the Function Participation Index. This index had a mean of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 0.56, and was relatively reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79).

Third, citizen involvement in strategic processes of administrative decision making was also measured. Nine survey items (listed in Table 3) were developed to measure public involvement in goal setting, strategy determination, policy and capacity development, process monitoring, and evaluation. The selection of these items was based on the decision-making and strategic management literature (Bryson, 1995; Thompson & Strickland, 1992). A 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) was used for these survey items. An index consisting of all these items was created. Because it measured participation in decision making, it was called the Decision-Making Participation Index. The index had a mean of 2.56 and a standard deviation of 0.73. Cronbach's alpha (0.91) for this index shows that its reliability is high.

Survey items were also developed to measure the possible causes and impacts of participation. The items used to measure the causes of participation are listed in Table 4. They include five items measuring external pressures and six items measuring internal demands and capacities. Respondents were requested to grade these items on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*).

To measure participation impacts, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*) whether their administrations could identify, assess, or satisfy public need. Four items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.60) were used to measure the identification of public need, including "Our administration can define customers or client needs" and "Our administration can provide services that the public needs." Two items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) measured the assessment of public need, including "Our administration frequently modifies goals to respond public demands." Five items (Cronbach's alpha =

Table 1. Use of Participation Mechanisms

<i>Participation Mechanism</i>	<i>Strongly Agree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Neutral (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Public hearings (<i>n</i> = 247)	65.6	31.3	1.2	1.6	0.4	4.60	0.64
Citizen advisory boards (<i>n</i> = 245)	40.4	41.2	10.2	5.7	2.4	4.11	0.97
Community or neighborhood meetings (<i>n</i> = 246)	43.9	43.5	7.3	2.8	2.4	4.24	0.89
Individual citizen representatives (<i>n</i> = 237)	18.1	33.3	27.0	16.9	4.6	3.43	1.11
Citizen surveys (<i>n</i> = 238)	23.1	29.8	23.9	18.1	5.0	3.48	1.76
Citizen focus groups (<i>n</i> = 241)	18.3	38.2	21.2	17.4	5.0	3.47	1.26
Citizen telephone hotline (<i>n</i> = 237)	24.9	28.3	22.8	17.7	6.3	3.47	1.22
Internet (<i>n</i> = 244)	39.8	41.8	10.7	7.0	0.8	4.13	0.92
Participation Mechanism Index						3.85	0.65
Cronbach's alpha = 0.78							

Note. Respondents indicated whether their administrations used these participation mechanisms on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). Numbers in parentheses are sample sizes. The index was created by averaging the values of all above items.

Table 2. How Much Function Participation? ("In our city, citizens or citizen activists are involved in the following city functions.")

<i>Function</i>	<i>Strongly Agree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Neutral (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree (%)</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Management functions							
Budgeting (<i>n</i> = 247)	15.4	30.8	23.1	25.9	4.9	3.26	1.15
Personnel (<i>n</i> = 247)	1.2	5.3	8.5	47.0	38.1	1.85	0.88
Procurement (<i>n</i> = 246)	0.8	0.8	11.4	56.5	30.5	1.85	0.71
Service functions							
Zoning and planning (<i>n</i> = 247)	29.1	64.8	5.7	0.0	0.4	4.22	0.58
Parks and recreation (<i>n</i> = 242)	23.1	64.0	9.5	2.5	0.8	4.06	0.71
Policing and public safety (<i>n</i> = 247)	16.2	56.3	15.4	10.5	1.6	3.75	0.91
Code enforcement (<i>n</i> = 245)	9.0	45.7	24.9	16.7	3.7	3.40	0.99
Transportation and street maintenance (<i>n</i> = 246)	5.3	32.1	26.8	28.5	7.3	3.00	1.06
Solid waste and garbage collection (<i>n</i> = 234)	5.6	24.4	26.5	34.2	9.4	2.82	1.08
Function Participation Index						3.14	0.56
Cronbach's alpha = 0.79							

Note. Numbers in parentheses are sample sizes. The index was created by averaging the values of all above items.

0.76) measured the satisfaction of public need, including "Our administration can achieve high citizen satisfaction for public services."

Another participation impact, consensus building, was classified into four dimensions, including consensus building in goals or missions (four items, Cronbach's alpha =

Table 3. How Much Decision-Making Participation? ("In our city, citizens or citizen activists are involved in the following processes.")

	<i>Strongly Agree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Neutral (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree (%)</i>	M	SD
Goal setting							
Identifying agency or program goals and objectives (<i>n</i> = 245)	4.9	29.0	25.3	33.1	7.8	2.90	1.06
Determination of strategies, policies, and capacities							
Developing strategies to achieve agency or program goals (<i>n</i> = 245)	4.5	23.7	29.4	35.1	7.3	2.83	1.02
Developing policy or program alternatives (<i>n</i> = 244)	2.9	27.9	29.9	31.6	7.8	2.87	1.00
Negotiation of agency budgets (<i>n</i> = 245)	0.0	7.3	18.0	54.7	20.0	2.13	0.81
Determining city executive budgets (<i>n</i> = 243)	0.8	4.1	16.5	56.4	22.2	2.05	0.79
Monitoring and evaluating							
Monitoring service delivery process (<i>n</i> = 245)	2.0	20.8	26.5	38.0	12.7	2.62	1.02
Assessing service delivery process (<i>n</i> = 244)	2.0	26.6	25.8	32.4	13.1	2.72	1.06
Auditing service or program achievements (<i>n</i> = 243)	1.2	10.3	20.2	51.4	16.9	2.28	0.91
Evaluating policy or program achievements (<i>n</i> = 245)	1.6	23.7	27.3	37.1	10.2	2.69	0.99
Decision-Making Participation Index						2.56	0.73
Cronbach's alpha = 0.91							

Note. Numbers in parentheses are sample sizes. The index was created by averaging the values of all above items.

0.87), service priority (one item), expected performance (one item), and fiscal commitment (three items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.68). Respondents were asked to assess the following statements: "Our administration has developed clear goals and objectives for service delivery" (consensus building in goals), "Our administration can achieve consensus on service priorities" (consensus building in service priorities), and "Our administration can increase taxes without strong resistance" (consensus building in fiscal commitments). All assessments were measured using the same 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). Finally, to measure public trust of decision making, respondents were asked to assess citizen perceptions about administrative competency (one item), honesty (two items, Cronbach's alpha = 0.80), and fairness (one item) in their cities.

Findings

HOW MUCH PARTICIPATION?

Cities use a variety of participation mechanisms. Traditional participation mechanisms such as public hearings, citizen advisory boards, and community or neighbor-

Table 4. Why Participation?

<i>Association With</i>	<i>Participation Mechanisms</i>	<i>Function Participation</i>	<i>Decision-Making Participation</i>
External pressures			
Size of government (number of full-time employees)	0.070	0.131**	0.111*
Much political competition among different groups	0.091	0.100	0.138**
Critical elected officials	-0.036	0.060	0.171**
Cynical media	-0.005	0.104	0.118*
Critical business community	-0.073	0.095	0.134**
Internal demands and capabilities			
Managers' willingness to be accountable	0.222**	0.165**	0.175**
Employees' willingness to be accountable	0.145**	0.210**	0.130*
High ethics among employees	0.160**	0.171**	0.094
Cynical employees	-0.118*	-0.081	-0.004
Budgetary surpluses for new ideas	0.127*	0.013	0.047
Interesting agenda to attract public attention	0.333**	0.153**	0.230**

Note. Except for size of government, which was measured by the number of full-time employees, all variables were measured on a 5-point scale (5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*). Respondents were asked to use this scale to assess relevant survey items. The measure of association is Kendall's tau-c, which estimates the association between ordinal variables. The statistic ranges from -1 (a perfectly negative association) to 1 (a perfectly positive association).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

hood meetings are widely used (see Table 1). Relatively fewer governments use citizen surveys, citizen focus groups, citizen hotlines, and individual citizen representatives. It is surprising that 81.6% of cities (39.8% + 41.8%) use the Internet to communicate with citizens. In the interview portion of this study, one city manager indicated that the residents in her city (Hollywood, Florida) used the Internet to sign up for "civic associations, civic boards, and community groups."

Public participation seldom appears in central management functions (see Table 2). Only a handful of respondents (16 of 247) agreed or strongly agreed that the public was involved in personnel issues such as employee hiring and firing in their cities. Even fewer respondents (4 of 246) reported that their cities involved the public in procurement management. Even in budgeting management, where 46.2% (15.4% + 30.8%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the public was involved, few indicated that the public was involved in the negotiation of agency budgets (7.3%) or the determination of city executive budgets (4.9%). On the other hand, participation in service functions was prominent, especially in zoning and planning, parks and recreation, and policing and public safety. More than 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their cities involved the public in these functions. High participation in these areas is not surprising because citizens are the consumers of these services and also pay for them.

Public participation was very limited in decision making (see Table 3). Although about one third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their cities involved the public in "identifying agency/program goals and objectives," fewer than 30% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public involvement took place while devel-

oping strategies to achieve these goals. Even fewer respondents reported that the public was involved in "monitoring service delivery" (22.8%) and "evaluating policy/program achievements" (25.3%). Respondents scored 2.56 on the Decision-Making Participation Index, significantly lower than their score on the Function Participation Index (3.14; $t = 14.85$, $p < .001$ for a paired sample t test).

This study found that city location is not associated with public participation. Cities in the southern United States scored 3.96 on the Participation Mechanism Index, compared with 3.84 for northeastern cities, 3.75 for north central cities, and 3.82 for western cities.¹ These differences were not statistically significant ($F = 1.05$, $p = .371$ for a one-way analysis of variance test). Cities in the western United States scored slightly higher on the Function Participation Index (3.20) than northeastern cities (2.99), north central cities (3.12), and southern (3.12). However, these differences were also not statistically significant ($F = .948$, $p = .418$ for a one-way analysis of variance test). In addition, southern cities scored 2.62 on the Decision-Making Participation Index, compared with 2.56 for northeastern cities, 2.49 for north central cities, and 2.55 for western cities. Again, no significant differences were found ($F = .335$, $p = .800$ for a one-way analysis of variance test).

This study also found that the form of government did not influence public participation. Council-manager governments scored 3.90 on the Participation Mechanism Index, compared with 3.66 for mayor-council governments and 3.91 for other forms of government. Again, these differences were not statistically significant ($F = 1.78$, $p = .134$ for a one-way analysis of variance test). Also, council-manager governments scored 3.12 on the Function Participation Index, compared with 3.16 for mayor-council governments and 3.20 for other forms of government. Again, these differences were not statistically significant ($F = .310$, $p = .871$ for a one-way analysis of variance test). Finally, council-manager governments scored 2.52 on the Decision-Making Participation Index, compared with 2.62 for mayor-council governments and 2.73 for other forms of government. No significant differences were found ($F = .940$, $p = .442$ for a one-way analysis of variance test).

WHY PARTICIPATION?

The results shown in Table 4 support the theory that the size of government influences participation. In this study, the size of government was measured by the number of full-time employees (the median was 939 in this sample). The results shown in Table 4 indicate that larger governments tend to have higher participation in service or management functions and decision making. In fact, governments with 939 or more full-time employees scored 3.24 on the Function Participation Index, significantly higher than governments with fewer than 939 full-time employees (3.01; $t = 3.106$, $p < .01$ for a t test of the mean difference). Also, governments with 939 or more full-time employees scored 2.69 on the Decision-Making Participation Index, compared with 2.41 for governments with fewer than 939 full-time employees ($t = 2.86$, $p < .01$ for a t test of the mean difference). This result is subject to different explanations. First, it may indicate that the public tends to participate more in large governments because citizens fear losing personal contact or being alienated by the complexity of large

bureaucratic operations. Or, it could indicate that large governments have more resources and capacities that can be used to enhance participation.

It appears that the pressures of political competition and stakeholder criticism lead to more public participation in decision making. For example, cities with “much political competition among different groups” ($n = 112$) scored 2.68 on the Decision-Making Participation Index, compared with a score of 2.45 for cities with less competition ($n = 122$). In other words, much political competition may increase participation in decision making by 9.4% ($2.68 / 2.45 - 100\%$) without consideration of other factors. Similarly, “critical elected officials” may increase participation in decision making by 10.4% and “cynical media” by 5.6% without consideration of other factors. This result supports the argument that political divisiveness motivates governments to involve citizens in decision making to legitimize governmental decisions.

The results in Table 4 also suggest that government workers’ willingness to submit to accountability increases participation. In the study, respondents were asked to assess their managers’ and employees’ willingness to expose their activities and job performance to public scrutiny. Cities with “managers willing to expose their activities/performance to public scrutiny” ($n = 112$) scored 3.98 on the Participation Mechanism Index, 7.6% higher than the other cities (index score = 3.7, $n = 107$). This willingness may also increase function participation by 5.9% and participation in decision making by 13.8% without consideration of other factors.

The existence of an interesting agenda is also an important variable in public participation. In this study, about two thirds of the respondents (61.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that their administrations had “developed an agenda that interests the public.” In these administrations, the scores on the Function Participation Index, the Decision-Making Participation Index, and the Participation Mechanism Index were 3.21, 2.71, and 4.02, respectively, compared with 3.01, 2.32, and 3.52, respectively, for administrations without such agendas. In a follow-up interview, one city manager indicated that his city (Lakewood, Colorado) puts 25 residents through a citizen police academy twice a year. This smaller version of the real police academy allows citizens to “get a flavor of what is like to become a cop and what some of public safety issues are to deal with. . . . These residents in the Citizen Police Academy turn around and become enthusiastic participants [in government].”

PARTICIPATION IMPACTS

Table 5 shows that the use of participation mechanisms is perceived as effective in meeting public needs, building consensus, and improving public trust. The use of participation mechanisms is significantly associated with all participation impacts. For example, 89.7% of cities using citizen surveys ($n = 126$) agreed or strongly agreed that they could “achieve high citizen satisfaction for public services,” compared with 70.5% of cities not using citizen surveys ($n = 112$). In other words, cities using citizen surveys were 27.2% more likely to perceive high citizen satisfaction for public services than cities not using citizen surveys ($89.7\% / 70.5\% - 100\%$). Also, 84.6% of cities using citizen focus groups agreed or strongly agreed that they could achieve consensus on organizational goals or objectives, compared with 71.4% of cities not using

Table 5. Impacts of Participation

<i>Association With</i>	<i>Participation Mechanisms</i>	<i>Function Participation</i>	<i>Decision-Making Participation</i>
Meeting public needs			
Need identification	0.377**	0.202**	0.174**
Need assessment	0.305**	0.133*	0.154**
Need satisfaction	0.254**	0.121*	0.079
Consensus building			
Goals and missions	0.319**	0.129*	0.213**
Service priority	0.246**	0.087	0.146**
Expected performance	0.245**	0.100	0.196**
Fiscal commitment	0.063	0.006	0.042
Public trust of administration			
Competency	0.182**	0.085	0.066
Honesty	0.194**	0.098	0.041
Fairness	0.181**	0.079	0.063

Note. The measure of association was Kendall's tau-c.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

this mechanism. It appears that the use of participation mechanisms is a preliminary and necessary condition to achieve participation goals in meeting public needs, building consensus, and improving public trust.

Table 5 shows that function participation is positively associated with meeting public needs. Governments with public involvement in more services and management functions are more able to identify, assess, and satisfy public needs. For example, 70.0% of cities with public involvement in the budgeting function agreed or strongly agreed that they could "define customers or clients and their needs," compared with 59.4% of cities without such involvement. In other words, cities with such involvement were 17.9% more likely ($70\% / 59.4\% - 100\%$) to "define customers or clients and their needs" than cities without such involvement. Cities with public participation in at least five of the nine city functions listed in the survey (73.2% of the total sample) were 21.0% more likely to "understand citizen needs" than cities with public involvement in fewer than five functions. In sum, it seems that participation advances public needs.

Participation in decision making appears to have significant influence on consensus building (see Table 5). Public involvement in goal setting, strategy or policy development, budget determination, and evaluation seems to increase the chance to reach stakeholder agreement on organizational goals, service priorities, and performance expectations. For example, 90.4% of cities involving the public in "identifying agency/program goals/objectives" agreed or strongly agreed that they had "reached consensus on goals and objectives for service delivery," compared with only 72.8% of cities without such involvement. In other words, cities with such involvement were 24.2% more likely ($90.4\% / 72.8\% - 100\%$) to "reach consensus on goals and objectives for service delivery" than cities without such involvement. Also, cities involving the public in "developing policy/program alternatives" were 20.4% more likely to "achieve consensus on service priority" than cities without such involvement. Cities involving the public in "evaluating policy/program achievement" were 16.8% more

likely to “achieve consensus on good service performance” than cities without such involvement. Thus, participation is perceived to build consensus.

However, fiscal commitment is not a result of participation (see Table 5). No significant relationship was found between participation and a government’s capacities in taxation, debt, and budget appropriations. Enhanced public participation does not lead to public willingness to pay for public services. Governments should not expect improved fiscal conditions as a return on participation. Fiscal commitment is influenced by factors other than participation. In fact, only a small number of cities in this sample could raise taxes (12%) and debts (32%) without strong resistance. In the follow-up interviews, several managers described the citizen resistance to any tax measures in their cities.

Participation in functions and decision making does not lead to public trust (see Table 5). This study measured perceived citizen assessment of administrative competency, honesty, and fairness. No significant relationship was found between either function or decision-making participation and perceived citizen assessment on these administrative attributes. Public attitudes toward government may not be a result of participation. This result is surprising given that improved public trust is a goal of many participation efforts. Participation may not improve public trust.

Conclusion

This study found that cities use a variety of participation mechanisms to involve the public in a wide range of public services. However, the depth of involvement in administrative decision making is limited. The public is not involved in making some critical management and service delivery decisions. The study also found that participation is associated with stakeholder pressure and public employee willingness to submit to accountability. In addition, an interesting agenda also attracts public attention to participation. Finally, the existence of participation mechanisms appears to be a preliminary and necessary condition to achieve participation goals in the satisfaction of public needs, consensus building, and public trust. Participation in decision making leads to better understanding and satisfaction of public needs and the building of consensus on service goals, priorities, and performance expectations.

This study found that participation is limited in two areas. The first is in central management functions (budgeting, personnel, and procurement) where expertise, information, and knowledge are needed. This finding indicates a more important role played by professional managers in these areas, and citizens may not always be interested in the technical issues of management. The second limitation to participation is in decision making. Participation is limited in setting service goals and strategies and in implementing policies. The lack of participation depth in decision making suggests that public involvement in many cities is superficial or “conventional” (King et al., 1998). Participation in these cities remains at the level of offering involvement opportunities and tools. The “authentic” or genuine pattern suggested by the literature is not characteristic of the participation in these cities. Decisions are “administrative”, not “public,” in these governments.

How is participation enhanced? An interesting agenda attracts the public to participation. In local governments, the issues that concern the well-being and livelihood of

the public often include public safety, zoning and planning, and code enforcement. This research found a greater involvement of the public in these areas. Participation is greater in cities with stronger political divisiveness, suggesting that cities are bringing in the public as a force to offset other political influences and legitimize their decisions. Finally, public servants' willingness to be accountable appears to encourage participation. This finding suggests that efforts should be made to educate public servants about the necessities and benefits of participation. Reducing public employees' fear of losing power and control through participation should enhance public involvement.

What can be expected from participation? Participation may lead to the identification of public needs and consensus building on service goals and performance priorities. However, participation in administrative decision making may not lead to public trust toward administrations. Cynical stakeholders may not change their skeptical views toward governments because of participation. This result also implies that public perception of government is a complex variable that could be influenced by numerous political and socioeconomic factors as well as government performance. Simply involving the public in decision making does not do the trick.

In addition, this research found that participation may not lead to fiscal commitment from citizens. The public is not more willing to pay for services simply because it participates more. Governments that expect an improvement in resident fiscal commitment and financial conditions as a result of participation may be disappointed. After all, financial conditions are more a function of economy and financial performance than of participation efforts.

Finally, it is necessary to discuss a limitation of this study. This study surveyed public managers. It measured public managers' perceptions about public participation. It looked at public participation efforts and impacts through managers' eyes. There may be a difference between these perceptions and the reality of public participation that can be determined by surveying managers and the public itself.

Note

1. Cities were classified according to the states in which they were located. The International City/County Management Association's (1999) classification system was used. Northeastern states include Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. North central states include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Western states include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. South states contained 30.9% of the cities in the study, western states contained 35.4%, northeastern states contained 10.8%, and north central states contained 22.9%.

References

- Aryani, G. A., Garrett, T. D., & Alsabrook, C. L. (2000). The citizen police academy: Success through community partnership. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 69(5), 16-21.
- Bryson, J. M. (1995). *Strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Cohen, N. (1995). Technical assistance for citizen participation: A case study of New York City's environmental planning process. *American Review of Public Administration*, 25(2), 119-135.
- Creighton, J. L. (1981). *The public involvement manual*. Cambridge, MA: Abt.
- DeSario, J., & Langton, S. (1987). Citizen participation and technocracy. In J. DeSario & S. Langton (Eds.), *Citizen participation in public decision making* (pp. 3-17). New York: Greenwood.
- Foley, D. (1998). We want your input: Dilemmas of citizen participation. In C. S. King & C. Stivers (Eds.), *Government is us* (pp. 140-157). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gray, J. E., & Chapin, L. W. (1998). Targeted community initiative: "Putting citizens first." In C. S. King & C. Stivers (Eds.), *Government is us* (pp. 175-194). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Iglitzin, L. B. (1995, Winter). The Seattle commons: A case study in the politics and planning of an urban village. *Policy Studies Journal*, 23, 620-635.
- International City/County Management Association. (1998). *The municipal yearbook, 1998*. Washington, DC: Author.
- International City/County Management Association. (1999). *The municipal yearbook, 1999*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Kaufman, H. (1969). Administrative decentralization and political power. *Public Administration Review*, 29(1), 3-15.
- King, C. S., Feltey, K. M., & Susel, B. O. (1998). The question of participation toward authentic public participation in public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 58(4), 317-326.
- King, C. S., & Stivers, C. (1998). Introduction: The anti-government era. In C. S. King & C. Stivers (Eds.), *Government is us* (pp. 3-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kovalick, W. W., Jr., & Kelly, M. M. (1998). The EPA seeks voice and role with citizens: Evolutionary engagement. In C. S. King & C. Stivers (Eds.), *Government is us* (pp. 122-139). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kweit, M. G., & Kweit, R. W. (1987). The politics of policy analysis: The role of citizen participation in analytic decision making. In J. DeSario & S. Langton (Eds.), *Citizen participation in public decision making* (pp. 19-37). New York: Greenwood.
- Lando, T. (1999). Public participation in local government. *National Civic Review*, 88(2), 109-122.
- Langton, S. (1978a). Citizen participation in America: Current reflections on the state of the art. In S. Langton (Ed.), *Citizen participation in America* (pp. 1-12). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Langton, S. (1978b). What is citizen participation? In S. Langton (Ed.), *Citizen participation in America* (pp. 13-24). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Lindstrom, M., & Nie, M. (2000, Spring). Public participation in agency planning. *The Public Manager*, 33-36.
- Lowi, T. J. (1969). *The end of liberalism*. New York: Norton.
- Morgan, E. P. (1987). Technocratic versus democratic options for educational policy. In J. DeSario & S. Langton (Eds.), *Citizen participation in public decision making* (pp. 177-201). New York: Greenwood.
- Niskanen, W. A., Jr. (1971). *Bureaucracy and representative government*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Osborne, D., & Plastrik, P. (1997). *Banishing bureaucracy: The five strategies for reinventing government*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- O'Toole, D. E., & Marshall, J. (1988). Citizen participation through budgeting. *The Bureaucrat*, 17(2), 51-55.
- Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press.
- Plein, L. C., Green, K. E., & Williams, D. G. (1998). Organic planning: A new approach to public participation in local government. *The Social Science Journal*, 35(4), 509-523.
- Preisser, V. (1997, May). Citizen-based budgeting: The Redding, California, experiment. *Public Management*, 18-21.
- Sanoff, H. (2000). *Community participation methods in design and planning*. New York: Wiley.
- Simonsen, W., & Robbins, M. D. (2000). *Citizen participation in resource allocation*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Swiss, J. E. (1999). Adopting total quality management to government. In R. C. Kearney & E. M. Berman (Eds.), *Public sector performance: Management, motivation, and measurement*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Thompson, A. A., Jr., & Strickland, A. J., III. (1992). *Strategic management* (6th ed.). Boston: Irwin.

Walters, L. C., Aydelotte, J., & Miller, J. (2000). Putting more public in policy analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 60(4), 349-359.

Yankelovich, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgment*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

XiaoHu Wang is an assistant professor in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Central Florida. His research and teaching interests include public financial management and performance management. His works appear in Public Administration Review, Public Productivity & Management Review, Public Budgeting & Finance, the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, and many other public administration journals. Contact: xwang@mail.ucf.edu

LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 1 of 1 -



You have printed the following article:

Assessing Public Participation in U.S. Cities

Xiaohu Wang

Public Performance & Management Review, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Jun., 2001), pp. 322-336.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=1530-9576%28200106%2924%3A4%3C322%3AAPPIUC%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>

This article references the following linked citations. If you are trying to access articles from an off-campus location, you may be required to first logon via your library web site to access JSTOR. Please visit your library's website or contact a librarian to learn about options for remote access to JSTOR.

References

Administrative Decentralization and Political Power

Herbert Kaufman

Public Administration Review, Vol. 29, No. 1. (Jan. - Feb., 1969), pp. 3-15.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0033-3352%28199801%2F02%2929%3A1%3C3%3AADAPP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-1>

The Question of Participation: Toward Authentic Public Participation in Public Administration

Cheryl Simrell King; Kathryn M. Feltey; Bridget O'Neill Susel

Public Administration Review, Vol. 58, No. 4. (Jul. - Aug., 1998), pp. 317-326.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0033-3352%28199807%2F08%2958%3A4%3C317%3ATQOPTA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-L>

Putting More Public in Policy Analysis

Lawrence C. Walters; James Aydelotte; Jessica Miller

Public Administration Review, Vol. 60, No. 4. (Jul. - Aug., 2000), pp. 349-359.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0033-3352%28200007%2F08%2960%3A4%3C349%3APMPIPA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M>