REVISTA DEL CLAD REFORMA Y DEMOCRACIA

EDICIÓN ESPECIAL 2025-1 | e-ISSN 2443-4620 https://doi.org/10.69733/clad.ryd.nee1.a451

Participation and collaborative Governance[1]

Participación y gobernanza colaborativa

Participação e governança colaborativa

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Abstract

Democracy implies participation and gains legitimacy by adding collaborative governance. This enhances trust in all three stages of participation: informing, consulting, and engaging. However, cultures of participation and collaboration matter in the interactions of citizens, politics, and administrations. A special focus is needed for situations of crises. A general focus is needed at the micro, the meso, and the macro level to ensure resilience.

Keywords: Participation, collaboration, governance, democracy, informing, consulting, engaging

Resumen

La democracia implica participación y gana legitimidad al añadir gobernanza colaborativa. Esto mejora la confianza en las tres etapas de participación: informar, consultar y comprometerse. Sin embargo, las culturas de participación y colaboración son importantes en las interacciones de

1 This essay is based on a presentation and lecture at the XXIX Congreso Internacional del CLAD on 'La Reforma del Estado y de la Administración Pública' which took place in Brasilia, Brasil in November 2024. The presentation is based on my research agenda and publications on public sector reform in combination with the OECD's databases on reform and trust.

los ciudadanos, la política y las administraciones. Se requiere un enfoque especial en situaciones de crisis. Se requiere un enfoque general a nivel micro, meso y macro para garantizar la resiliencia.

Palabras clave: Participación, colaboración, gobernanza, democracia, información, consulta, involucramiento

Resumo

Democracia implica participação e ganha legitimidade ao adicionar governança colaborativa. Isso aumenta a confiança em todos os três estágios de participação: informação, consulta e engajamento. No entanto, culturas de participação e colaboração são importantes nas interações entre cidadãos, política e administrações. É necessário um foco especial em situações de crise. É necessário um foco geral nos níveis micro, meso e macro para garantir a resiliência.

Palavras-chave: Participação, colaboração, governança, democracia, informação, consultoria, engajamento

Introduction

This essay explores the connection between 'participation' and 'collaborative governance'. In line with the dynamics and trajectories of public sector reform, the shift away from a classical bureaucracy moved towards 'markets' as major drivers for governing the public sector. The New Public Management was a strong expression of this shift, which was ideologically driven, theoretically grounded in economic neo-institutionalist theory, and practically implemented by consultants and political advisors.

However, the initial pure model of NPM lost its attractiveness when Sustainable Development Goals on People, Planet, and Prosperity also required strong local communities (SDG11), strong institutions, peace, and justice (SDG16), and strong partnerships (SDG17), vertically, between all levels of government, and horizontally, between public, private for-profit, and private non-profit. Markets had to be complemented by networks which were developed in the New Public Governance Model.

The emergence of major crises, and ultimately the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated that markets and networks are necessary but insufficient to 'solve' or 'contain' these crises and systemic turbulence. The State was back and proved that public sector organizations,

framed democratic and rule-of-law-based hierarchies, were necessary to regulate markets and networks, and occupy a hybrid governance space based on hierarchies, markets, and networks.

To keep the State legitimate, democratic and trustworthy, it was essential to define its hierarchy as open, transparent, and inclusive of citizens. Therefore, participation is not just an instrument, a tool or a technique, it becomes an essential element of a Strategic Development Goal (SDG17). This is not only because there is an operational need to mobilize resources to realize SDGs, but also to strengthen the resilience of the system. Partnerships require active participation, which depends on trust between the involved actors. This results in the need to 'inform', 'consult', and 'engage' citizens, non-profit and for-profit organizations, all levels of government as partners. This should not only happen in the design and decision-making stage, but also, and perhaps even more, in the implementation and evaluation stage, which constitutes collaborative governance.

If this is a convincing trajectory and a 'promised rose garden', then why is it not happening, or so difficult to achieve? Genuine participation is difficult to realize. Informing is difficult but easier than consulting. Consulting is difficult but easier than engaging citizens. Engaging can be tricky. There is distrust, unwillingness to participate, underrepresentation in participation, diverging motivations behind participation, resistance from administrations and their professional bureaucratic structures.

Nevertheless, the alternative is a system devoid of participation, which can lead to populism, illiberalism, or authoritarian leadership.

This essay argues for participation and collaborative governance as a system that is more trustworthy, legitimate, resilient, democratic, constitutionally grounded in the rule of law, and effective for all citizens.

Setting the broad governance agenda for the future

Examining reform histories as complex trajectories and as public sector reform policies, a range of literature becomes relevant to understanding the past, and even more so to anticipating the (possible) futures of these trajectories and reforms. Different types of crises and turbulence demonstrate that the future cannot be a repetition of the past or an extrapolation of current trends. There is a need for serious reflection on how changing circumstances affect reforms to avoid providing past solutions which do not fit the current and future problems (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

New complexities should be recognized in reshaping public systems through the reform policy cycle which includes reform design, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. This implies that the reform design is not merely one problem that has one solution, with a linear and causal link between the problem and the solution. The level of wickedness of problems implies not just risks but even more uncertainties about components, interactions, and levels of activities. However, there is also wickedness in solutions, which includes not only the ultimate objectives and goals, within changing societal values, but the shifting complexity of actors in their deliberation and decision making processes to define shared objectives, goals and (ideological) choices of instruments to realize visions for a consolidated Whole of Society (WoS) or Whole of Government (WoG).

A pessimistic version of reality

In an ideal liberal democracy, based on fair and transparent elections, a parliament is chosen that assembles a majority for a government. This government acts within a constitutional legal framework and with related administrative law to run a bureaucracy which interacts with citizens and society (Figure 1).

This ideal picture is under pressure in several countries due to factors that result in shaking and disconnected systems and societies. Polarized societies are influenced by social media, which further polarize, sometimes under populist leaderships. The legislative branch becomes fragmented and polarized. Countries with majoritarian election systems experience fragile majorities that are unwilling to compromise. Countries with proportional systems are face fragmentation of the political center, and rising extremism to the left and to the right. Governments in several countries try to reduce the independence of the judicial branch by politicizing judicial appointments. The three branches do not provide adequate checks and balances anymore.

Many administrations, especially in neo-liberal regimes, have undergone serious budget cuts, and have lost capacity to govern effectively. There is serious pressure on the representativeness and on how merit determines the functioning of bureaucracies. This results in further weakening of the administrative culminating in efforts to deconstruct this administrative state. Policies and service delivery face budget cuts and to ideological focus resulting in a general feeling of exclusion of segments of society. This perception of exclusion fuels further polarization, which manifests in the next elections.

Adding to this picture, major crises are becoming more frequent and more intense,

threatening to destabilize the system itself—as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, where lockdowns of society resulted in a systemic shock (Bouckaert and Galego, 2024).

From this experience of handling the pandemic, it became clear that relying only on market mechanisms, as is promoted by NPM, and only networks, as in New Public Governance models, is not able to contain a major turbulence.

Some lessons learned from the pandemic and from other crises are that hierarchies, as well organized public organizations within an administrative legal framework, remain indispensable for governing the public sector and its WoG, but also for steering the WoS.

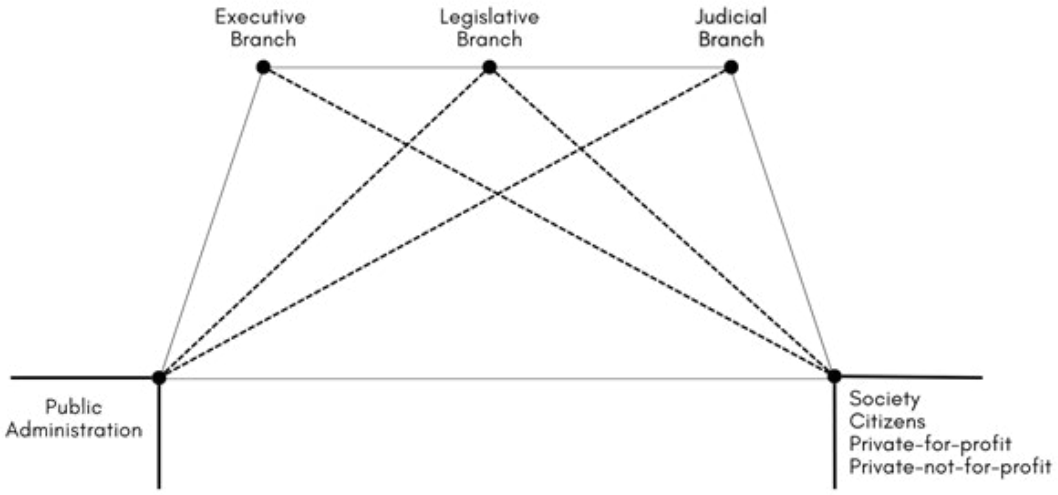
Markets remain useful; however, they are not equally functional in all policy fields. Market-type-mechanisms, which create quasi-markets (through vouchers, benchmarks, tenders) can be organized for certain production functions, but their effectiveness depends on the structure of supply and demand, and their interaction. These markets and quasi-markets also require robust regulation. There are many examples where self-regulation proved inconsistent with public values and the collective interest, necessitating a revised regulation 2.0 frame (Lodge, 2025).

Networks, both digital and social, remain useful and indispensable. However, ensuring their functionality requires clear mechanisms for monitoring, organization, and evaluation. Additionally, digital networks must be effectively regulated.

An explicit reform policy is required to coordinate hierarchy, markets, and networks within a governance space, and to implement an aligned set of mechanisms, tools, and techniques. With New Public Management (NPM) as a market driven governance space, and New Public Governance (NPG) as a network driven space, the Neo-Weberian State model is a hierarchy driven public governance space, embedded in a democratic and a rule-of-law based constitutional system, with a functional, open, and diverse bureaucracy (Bouckaert, 2023).

The State and its legally based hierarchy remain a crucial driver for functionally integrating administration with markets and networks. The Neo-Weberian State model could be a model for the future since this model has the capacity, within a democratic and rule-of-law based framework, to deliver services and policies, to contain major crises, and to trigger innovations that combine service delivery with crisis governance. Participation becomes a crucial concept redefining our systems and developing collaborative state governance.

Figure 1. *Participation and State Governance*



An optimistic version for the future

For a long time, public trust research assumed that levels of trust— and changing levels of trust— of society in 'government' depended on the 'ability' to deliver, the perceived 'benevolence' of the authorities, and the 'integrity' of those in charge in the politico-administrative system.

The OECD trust surveys have added another dimension to establishing trustworthiness in society: the conviction and feeling of being taken into account, of being included (OECD, 2022). The 2024 survey states that "(f)or trust in local government, one variable stands out as a focus for increasing trust: Individuals who find it more likely that local government would give them an opportunity to voice their opinion when taking a decision affecting their community are 6.1 percentage points more likely to have high or moderately high trust in the local government" (OECD, 2024, p. 146).

The feeling of being excluded seems to trigger systemic dominoes to fall and for distrust to become entrenched. This becomes a downward spiral and logic of disconnecting and distrusting.

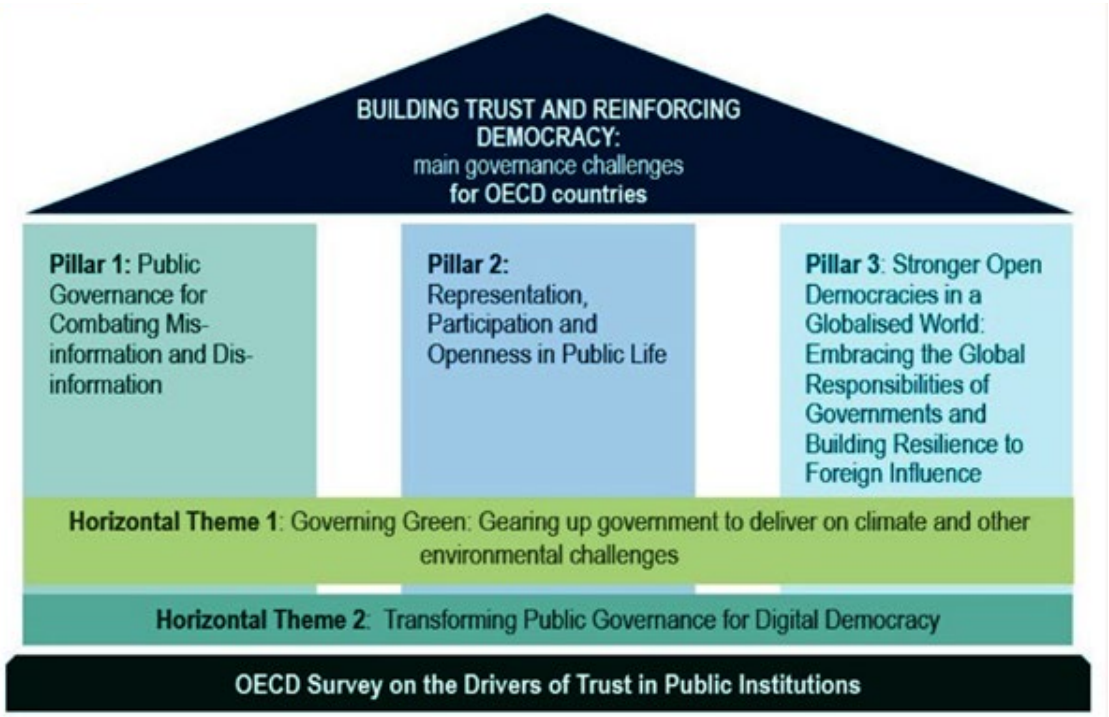
To reverse from a logic and practice of disconnecting into a logic and practice of connecting and trusting starts with efforts to include people in an active way. By linking participation (as informing, consulting, and engaging citizens) to trust, this becomes again

a fundamental societal mechanism not only for ensuring sustainable communities, but also for building effective and sustainable systems, and ultimately the State (OECD, 2024).

A fundamental bottom-line for connecting and including people is a trusting environment. Individual and institutional relationships are about dividing labor, sharing responsibility and accountability, agreeing on and sharing power to facilitate action, and above all, about trusting both individuals and, even more, institutions.

According to the OECD (2022), three pillars constitute trust in institutions which support democracy as an institution (figure 2): public governance for combating misinformation and disinformation; representation, participation and openness in public life, and stronger open democracies in a globalized world (global responsibilities and building resilience). These pillars refer to including more citizens and society, enhancing the inclusion of citizens and society, and creating a culture of openness and active participation.

Figure 2. *Governance pillars for building trust and re-inforcing democracy.*



Source: OECD (2022).

Unpacking Participation and Collaborative Governance Complexity: Clarifying participation terminology

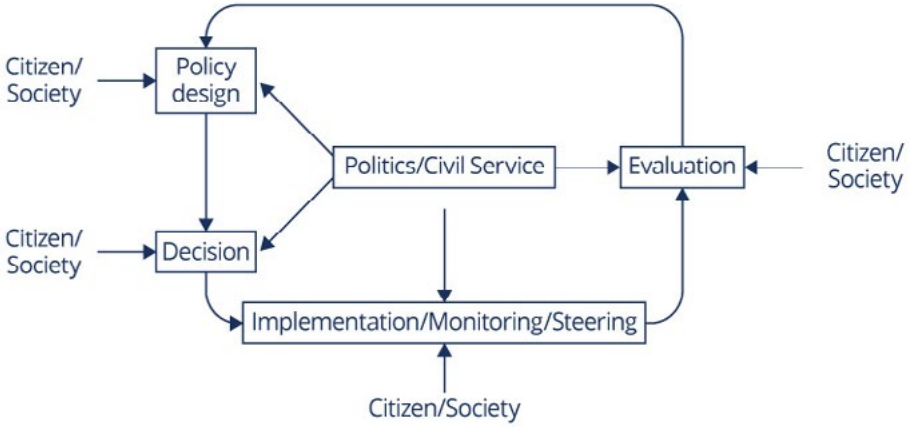
Participation, as a fundamental societal mechanism for ensuring sustainable and resilient communities, has multiple dimensions and components. There is a range of terms that have different histories and different origins, such as 'inform', 'consult', 'engage', 'deliberate', 'involve', 'include', 'collaborate', or 'participate'. It is unclear whether these English words translate effectively to all languages and cultures.

Deliberation includes dialogue and debate. It could be a process that leads to consensus. It could also be a type of democratic system that not only broadens forms within an open, empowered sphere, but is also responsible and accountable (Owen & Smith, 2015).

According to the OECD (2020), stakeholder 'participation' involves the whole policy cycle and includes 'information', 'consultation', and 'engagement'. 'Information', as an initial level of participation, is a one-way dissemination process. 'Consultation' is more advanced, as it involves a two-way communication with a feedback function. 'Engagement' enables resource-supported collaboration during all phases of the policy cycle.

Collaborative governance (figure 3) is about 'information', 'consultation', and 'engagement' of citizens and various societal actors, in all stages of the policy cycle within policy fields and participating public sector organizations: from design to co-design, from decide to co-decide, from implement to co-implement, from evaluate to co-evaluate. The full size of collaborative governance is about co-co-co-co.

Figure 3. *Collaborative governance: shifting from a closed to an open policy cycle*



In shifting from a 'closed' system where the politico-administrative system controls the policy cycle through design, decision, implementation, and evaluation, to an 'open' system, the key question is what the 'right' proportions and shares of engagement are (Table 1).

The subsequent discussion is how to increase or decrease engagement, and how to align these 'three' stake actors: politicians, civil servants, and citizens/society (see also Svara, 2001).

Table 1

Stakeholder proportionality in collaborative governance: politicians, civil servants, and citizens/society

Levels of engagement by stakeholders	Design	Decide	Implement	Evaluate
Politicians	X	A	U	Q
Civil servants	Y	B	V	R
Citizens/society	Z	C	W	S
	100	100	100	100

It is clear that focusing on one part of the policy cycle is not enough. Each element has its own necessary and sufficient conditions. Involving citizens and society in design is essential since sufficient evidence shows that co-design enhances ownership of decisions (OECD, 2024, p. 147). Thus, co-design is necessary but not sufficient, it should impact decisions, ideally by involving citizens and society in the decision-making stage.

Citizens and society will feel excluded when the logic of the decision is not followed by its implementation. This requires political will and an administrative culture of openness to 'walk the talk', and not only to 'listen', but also to 'learn' and possibly adjust implementation. In some cases, co-implementation, or co-creation, or co-production could be the missing link to keep ownership of decision taken. Finally, this co-implementation state could be necessary but not sufficient, while evaluation should include co-evaluation or participatory evaluation.

At the macro level, this collaborative governance is logically embedded in 'deliberative and participatory democracy' (table 2). The purpose of this contribution is not to elaborate and develop this macro level. However, it is useful to demonstrate the key differences (OECD, 2020, p. 12). Whereas participatory democracy has a longer history with social and activist movements in a context of reversing discrimination (Pateman, 2012), deliberative democracy is more recent and responds to the pressure on representative democracy (Owen & Smith, 2015).

Table 2

Key differences between deliberative and participatory democracy

	Number of participants	Type of participation	Participant selection method
Deliberative democracy	Small and representative	Deliberation, based on information, from different perspectives with a public judgement	Civic lottery: random selection with stratification
Participatory democracy	Large, ideally everyone	More participation; focus on diversity	Self-selected participation

Source: OECD (2020, p. 12).

One of the missing links in literature and in practice is the disconnect between deliberative democracy (as promoted by the European Commission), and collaborative governance. While allowing citizens to participate in the design and decision stage of the policy cycle, its implementation should follow the same logic. However, the administrative culture could lead to resistance during the implementation. One way to 'address' this is through implementation governance that is based on collaboration and participation (Barandarian et al., 2023). The acid test for a functioning deliberative democracy will be whether collaborative governance becomes a perceived and tangible reality (Blockmans & Russack, 2020; Alonso et al., 2007).

One of the reality checks will be the distribution of the capacity of different parts of society to effectively engage and collaborate, and how this matches a culture of openness of the politico-administrative system. Shifting from 'information' to 'consultation' to 'engagement' will determine the level of trustworthiness of collaborative governance.

Unpacking Participation and Collaborative Governance Complexity: "I never promised you a rose garden"

Culture matters

Culture matters, particularly for determining levels and types of engagement. Hofstede's cultural dimensions could guide a discussion on how these dimensions affect levels and types of engagement in society.

Hypothetically, one could state that higher power distance, one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, could reduce the level of engagement, since it discourages active partici-

pation, contribution, or speaking up. However, the pressure for participation could also challenge this power distance. One could also assume that higher levels of individualism reduce the willingness to participate, deliberate, or collaborate, and feel responsible for the common good. Conversely, achievement-oriented cultures may foster greater engagement. On the other hand, high levels of uncertainty avoidance could discourage engagement with uncertain outcomes. Finally, a longer-term orientation could promote engagement as a long-term strategy.

Figure 4 illustrates the differences in these five cultural dimensions for Brazil, Mexico, and Spain. The conclusion is that different cultures of engagement are likely related to these differences in the dimensions of culture itself. As a consequence, copying and pasting 'solutions' from 'other' cultures is not a guarantee for what will work. Also, sharing 'good practices' remains essential to check the compatibility with one's cultural features, and to start a debate of what approaches are matching your cultural or professional features.

Figure 4. *Comparing Hofstede's cultural dimensions for Brazil, Mexico, and Spain.*

Source: https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

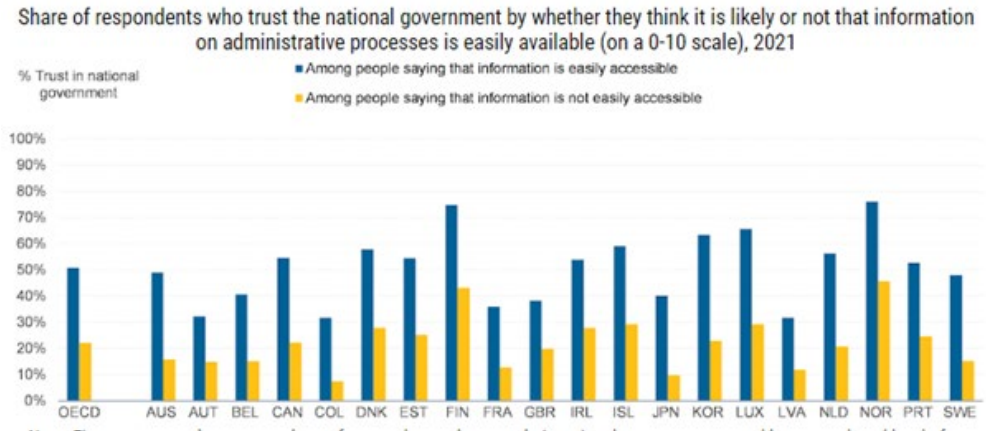
Walk the talk: walk fully the entire talk

Engaging society in the entire policy cycle is not obvious and is not always taken for granted by the population across all policy fields. Historically, 'information' as a one-way, top-down type of communication is generally accepted and common practice. The next stage of 'consultation' as a two-way exchange of information also resulted in developing

citizen and customer surveys to gauge perceptions and expectations, levels of satisfaction, and even trust in specific service delivery. When this active 'listening' results in 'learning' and adjusting administrative behaviour and interactions, consultations have an impact. The next stage in engagement is co-production and co-creation, leading to collaborative governance. This is not obvious to many citizens and their organizations. Finally, there is the evaluation part of active listening to citizens. The condition for impactful evaluations is if and when they affect the next cycle in its design, decision, implementation, and evaluation. This feed-forward approach in 'walking the talk' should be well perceived as convincing.

There is evidence in OECD countries that all levels of engagement (information, consultation, participation) contribute to trustworthiness and trust levels (OECD, 2021). Figure 5 (OECD, 2021) demonstrates that when people are convinced "that information on administrative processes is easily available," their level of trust in national government is significantly higher. On the other hand, people who are not convinced of this have a lower level of trust. Even the 'easy' part of participation and engagement, such as sharing information, has a positive impact on trust. We assume here that people trust the information they can obtain. That is why investing in a perception of trustworthy information and combating disinformation and misinformation is crucial.

Figure 5. *'Informing' as a first stage of 'participation' enhances trust in national government.*

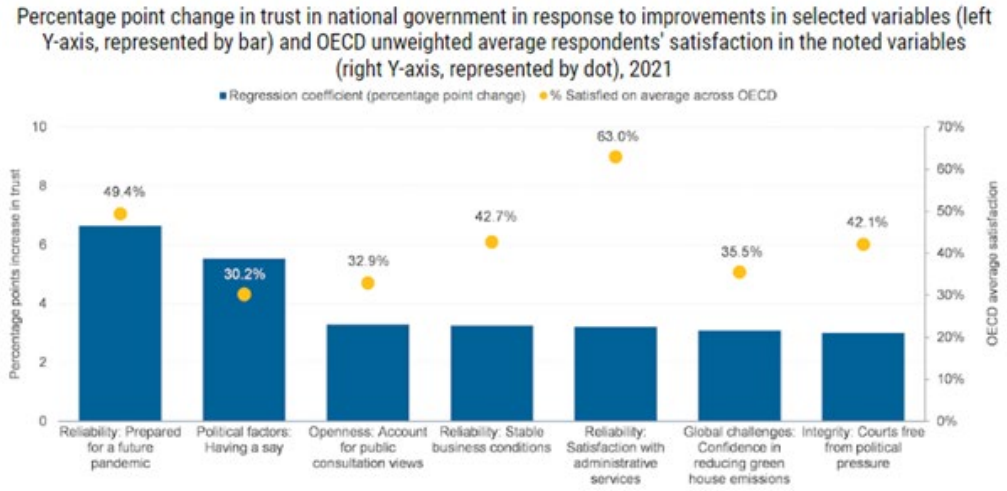


Source: OECD (2021).

Beyond 'informing' as the first stage of participation, 'consultation' also positively impacts trust levels (OECD, 2021). A perception and feeling of 'having a say', and therefore having an experience of being included, and being taken into account, at central and at local government level, is essential.

Figure 6 demonstrates that the 'having a say' in politics, and that openness practiced as taking public consultations into account, have a significant impact on trust (and also on satisfaction) (OECD, 2021).

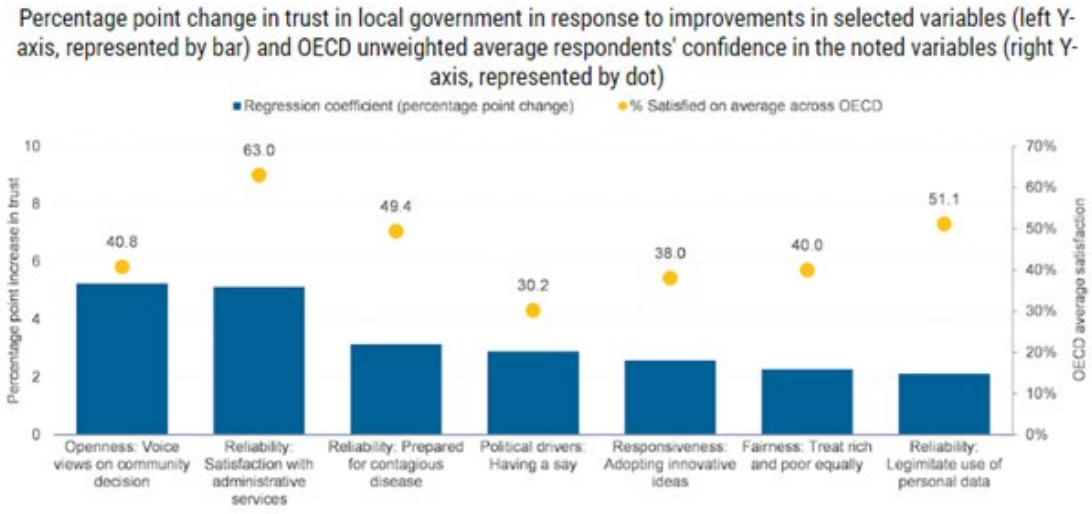
Figure 6. *'Consultation' as a second stage of participation.*



Source: OECD (2021).

'Engagement', the third stage of participation, also impacts trust, especially at the local government level, where the interactions between citizens, politics, and administration are the closest and most direct. Given that in general, in liberal democracies, trust levels in local government are higher than in central government, a primary driver at local government levels are 'voice views on community decision' in a context of engaged openness (Figure 7).

Figure 7. *'Engagement' as a third stage of participation.*



Source: OECD (2021).

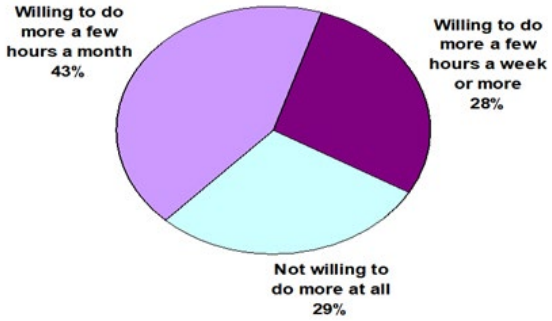
For all three levels of participation (inform, consult, engage), there is a positive impact on the trusting levels in local government by its citizens.

It needs (at least) two to tango: citizens and government

Participation of citizens requires a willingness to participate among citizens. However, not all citizens are willing to engage in all policy fields at all times, across all stages of the policy cycle. There is not much empirical evidence on the willingness of citizens to engage in public service, even when there is a reality of volunteers and solidarity within communities, and even when there is evidence of 'public service motivation' outside the public sector.

According to Löffler et al. (2008), in a survey on the willingness to contribute to public service, almost one-third is not willing to engage (more), and nearly one-third is willing to do a bit more (figure 8).

Figure 8. *Participation: the future role of citizens' willingness to participate.*



Source: Löffler et al. (2008).

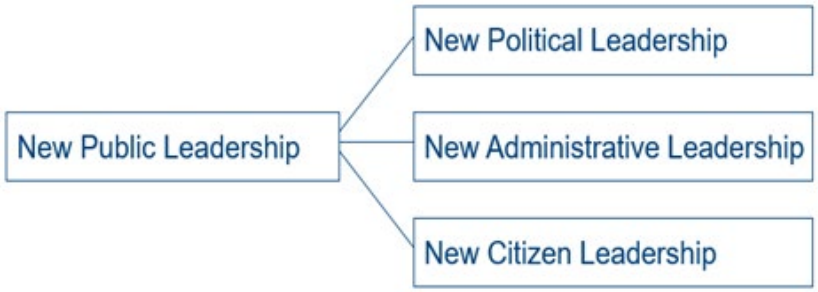
In a similar survey by a Dutch agency on the changing willingness and profile of volunteers between 2019 and 2021, there was a 7.8% decrease in the number of citizens who declared conducting work as a volunteer. It is unclear to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this, especially since volunteers and their networks were essential and crucial in combating the pandemic within local networks and communities. On the profile of these volunteers, there are also some indications of under- and over-representation vis-à-vis the average population. The age group of 25-35 years (and also beyond 75 years) is under-represented. Lower-level education groups are underrepresented, and higher-level educated individuals are overrepresented. Dutch-Dutch citizens are over-represented compared to other non-Dutch-originated citizens (SCP, 2021).

It is clear that 'the' citizen does not exist in the world of participation. There are significant differences in terms of willingness and representation.

It needs three to tango: citizens, politics, and administration

Classical and traditional bureaucracies are not always willing or able to accept citizen participation, which is sometimes perceived as interfering in public affairs. To the extent that the historical participatory democracy movement correlated with social movements in society, the debate of representative bureaucracy emerges. To what extent are bureaucracies representative of the diversity of populations they serve? In this matter, perception of access to positions in bureaucracy is crucial, and hyper-diverse societies, especially in countries with considerable migration waves, become part of the participatory debate (Schröter, 2019).

Figure 10. *Collaborative Governance, Participation and New Public Leadership*



Another shift in the capacity of the bureaucracy to facilitate engagement and participation is the positioning of Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) as the primary interface with citizens. SLB is under pressure from two sides: political polarization and populism, and replacement by Artificial Intelligence. Lotta has clearly described, in the Brazilian case, how SLB is subject to populist pressure, and what possible responses, in the interest of citizens, could be (Lotta, 2025). Also, substituting 'expensive and inefficient' SLB by cost-friendly and efficient algorithms and artificial intelligence, as it happened, e.g., in neoliberal governments of Australia and the Netherlands under the then Minister-President Rutte, resulted in activating biases in these algorithms, and also in extrapolating mechanisms of decisions which caused serious violations of citizen rights.

For deliberating and representative politicians, collaborative bureaucracy, and participating citizens to tango together, new types of leadership will be needed (figure 10). This implies collective leadership, characterized by open communication and respectful dialogue, with genuine listening and genuine learning (Ospina, 2017).

The necessity of participation in handling crises and turbulence

The need for participation goes beyond standard policies and service delivery. A different type of participation is required during crises and periods of system turbulence.

Classical administrations rely on certainty and stability for standard operating procedures, with predictable and known mechanisms in a context of clear and accepted 'solutions' for citizens. Risk and uncertainty transform this classical bureaucratic regime entirely. In a VUCA context characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, the role of participation shifts. It gets even more problematic when there is a situation of turbulence and disruptive environments, with oscillating, unpredictable, and unknown quality of data, information, and knowledge of what to do. This deteriorates even further when policy fields collapse like dominoes, with unknown sequences. During the COVID-19 pandemic, what started with an implosion of 'health' triggered a range of policy dominoes: mobility was shut down, followed by education and the economy, which in turn affected security.

This was even more the case when sets of sustainable 'solutions' were opposed by experts from different disciplines (health versus economy), publicly disputed, and where 'solutions' became as wicked as the problems. These TODO system-quakes (Bouckaert & Galego, 2024) (Turbulent environments, Oscillating knowledge quality, policy Domino's falling, Opposing 'solutions') require adjusted governance, which will urgently need different types of participation from society.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a clear case of this, demonstrating the need for flexible governance with strong yet diverse types of participation from local governments and communities.

Resilience needs strong levels of inclusion and participation

In line with the need to have a strong potential to activate and different types of participation also to handle crises and turbulence, participation becomes a key requirement for resilience, as is also shown in the OECD agenda for strengthening government resilience (OECD, 2021). 'Representation', 'Interest aggregation', and 'Inclusion in policy-making' all refer to different degrees and types of participation to build, keep, and maintain trust and transparency by ensuring the 'inform', 'consult', and 'engage' troika of participation.

Figure 11. *The OECD model for strengthening government resilience.*

Source: OECD (2021, p.44).

Governing 'Participation' through 'Collaborative Governance' (Barandiaran et.al., 2023)

Collaborative governance, as a complement or component of deliberative or participatory democracy refers to the public sector and its policies, directly engaging non-state stakeholders, in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative; which entails new structures of governance as opposed to hierarchical organizational decision making; and that engages across the boundaries of levels of government, and the public, private and civic spheres, to achieve common goals and to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished (Agranoff, 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bingham et al., 2005; McGuire, 2006; Emerson et al., 2012; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, among others).

The term 'collaborative governance' (CG) is interpreted normatively and culturally in different ways in different countries. However, in general, CG is about multi-actor collaboration, led by a public sector organization, aimed at building consensus among stakeholders on a formal set of policies, designed and implemented to address key current challenges in social policies (Batory & Svensson, 2017). A key question is how practices of CG could travel across borders and countries.

The following statements (Table 3) are hypothetical sentences, and in this sense, might work as propositions for practice and research for strengthening 'participation' through 'collaborative governance'. These propositions are clustered around three governance levels: macro (the system), meso (policies), and micro (management) (Bouckaert et al.,

2023). Linking 'participation' and 'collaborative governance' in a sustainable, resilient, and functional way should happen at an operational and strategic level, at an individual and collective level, culturally and structurally. Based on an empirical analysis of a collaborative governance reform programme in the Basque Country (the Gipuzkoa province) (Barandiaran et al., 2023), these clustered propositions have inductively been generated. In essence, the conclusion is that participation can only be facilitated when all levels of collaborative governance are developed, including macro-systemic, meso-policy, and micro-organizational levels. The chain of involvement through collaborative governance will only be so strong as the weakest part of that chain.

Table 3. *Positive drivers for collaborative governance*

Levels of collaborative governance	Positive drivers
Macro	- A history of social capital and collaboration in civil society - A shared vision between the major political factions beyond elections - Support from political and societal actors who think collaborative governance is desirable and feasible - Have more non-political actors included in the political process - Systemically and systematically, institutionalise the inclusion and alignment of different stakeholders - Redistribute the power of legitimate stakeholders - Focus on results, but also and even more on appropriateness - Realize a 'hierarchy' (as a 'rule of law' driven democratic state) with 'markets' and with 'networks'
Meso	- Mobilize local knowledge through dialogue for sustainable societal ownership - Mobilize proactively local universities to foster knowledge governance - The sooner key societal actors are involved in the policy cycle of design (decision, implementation, and evaluation), the better - Ensure interaction and alignment of different levels of government - Realize interactive, distributed, and collaborative leadership - Ensure horizontal accountability
Micro	- Ensure internal and external active collaborative listening and learning - Make sure civil servants have a culture of change, allowing empowered stakeholders - Organize different communications for different purposes and different target groups - Acting together is more important than sending messages - The more tangible the intangible outcomes of collaborative projects, the easier it is to involve all target groups in collaborating - Ensure that the making and the telling come together in communication

Source: Barandiaran et al. (2023).

In conclusion

Participation and collaborative governance are not a panacea; however, this essay assumes that a system based on these concepts is more trustworthy, legitimate, resilient, democratic, and rule-of-law-based, as well as effective for all citizens.

The list of challenging conditions for today's democracies is long: increasing polarization, the changing nature of political parties, tensions between executive, legislative, and judicial powers, easier conditions for the dissemination of fake news, and expanding populism (Bouckaert, 2025). Handling crises and turbulence only adds to this.

Even when participation and collaborative governance are not a panacea, they help move toward a self-fulfilling prophecy. OECD evidence demonstrated that participation (informing, consulting, engaging) contributes to a more trustworthy system. This culture and practice of participation requires adjusted leadership, also in times of crises and turbulence. To be consistent and resilient, this culture and practice of participation and collaborative governance should be implemented at the macro-institutional, meso-policy, and micro-organizational levels. For that purpose, a hybrid governance space which combines hierarchies, market,s and networks will be necessary, however not controlled by market (NPM) of by networks (NPG), but by a democratic, open, transparent, inclusive, and rule-of-law based hierarchy as in a Neo-Weberian State.

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How to cite this text:
Bouckaert, G. (2025). Participation and collaborative governance. *Revista del CLAD Reforma y Democracia,* (Edición Especial 2025-1), 63-83.
https://doi.org/10.69733/clad.ryd.nee1.a451