A Citizen-Defined Vision for the City's Future. A New Contribution to the Discourse of Citizen Participation in Piura, Peru

S Schroeder¹

¹Academic at University of Piura, Peru

E-mail: stella.schroeder@gmx.de

Abstract. Many urban projects have shown that there is a lack of exchanges between the different communal actors. Inhabitants are poorly informed about urban development and are not included in it. In managing current challenges in urban development, a balance must be struck between common sense approaches and local needs. Therefore, the active participation of target groups is an important prerequisite for the success and sustainability of projects and programs. To address this gap in urban development in the city of Piura, Peru, an urban vision was developed along with many Piurans. A discursive space was created that invites to formulate ideas about urban development with which it is possible to collect, value and promote local knowledge of the citizen about places, challenges and opportunities of urban planning as well as their creativity to achieve the empowerment of the population and boost new bottom-up activities. Based on 600 ideas, a first version of the urban vision was developed. The vision is meant to serve as a participatory counterpart to the official plans of the city: a constructive contribution to the discussion, which reveals the weaknesses of public programs and shows the power in the ideas of citizens.

1. Introduction

The bigger the problems, the better it is to involve citizens to find solutions. Participation must be rethought. More and more citizens demand other possibilities for participation and involvement and want to actively shape their urban environment. However, many urban projects have shown that there is little communication between different community actors. When managing current challenges, a balance must be found between common sense approaches and local needs. Therefore, the active participation of target groups represents an important factor for the success and sustainability of projects and programs in urban development and new paradigms of participatory processes are influencing the hegemonic understanding of planning: Complex tasks of urban society must reach constructive and mutually accepted results through cooperative activities.

In the opinion of the Sociologist Querrien [1], it is not enough to present wishes and interests; what matters is dialogue and a collective result. The extent to which users participate in the design and construction process, how and in which processes they participate and who is defined as a user, determines the intensity and quality of the participation process. The precise exploration of the users’ wishes, as well as effective communication between population and planners, are important factors for the quality of the design and the use of the urban spaces expressed by the satisfaction of its users.
Therefore, knowledge of the quality of the city and its demands on the use of spaces is a social potential that must be considered in urban planning [2].

In 2017, after the El Niño phenomenon, a project began with the idea of creating a discursive space that invites citizens to formulate their ideas on the urban development of their city. To respond to the gap in urban development in Piura, Peru, an urban vision was developed together with many Piurans. A discursive space was created that invited to formulate ideas about the development of the city. With a bottom-up approach the intention was to collect, value and promote the local knowledge of the citizens about places, challenges and opportunities of urban planning, as well as their creativity to achieve population empowerment and facilitate new activities from the bottom up.

Between 2017 and 2019 ideas were collected. On the basis of around 600 ideas, we worked on a first version of the urban vision of Piura. This vision was meant to serve as a participatory counterpart of the city's official plans: a constructive contribution to the discussion, which makes the weaknesses of public programs visible and communicates the power that lies in the ideas of citizens. How should the city develop over the next 20 years? How and where do we want to live and work? An overview of the situation in Piura reveals the problems that should be solved together with the citizens.

In this sense, the general objective of this work was to visualise a set of ideas that arose from the citizens' initiative. The urban vision represents local wishes and needs for the urban development of Piura until 2032. It consists of different future scenarios, which in turn are assigned to different thematic blocks. It shows how the city could develop if the ideas and wishes of its citizens would be taken more seriously.

2. Theoretical Framework

If questions about urban development are to be discussed by a broad audience, the creation of planning communities is an interesting approach to solve existing urban problems such as inequality and segregation. A basic idea of participation is that representatives of all social groups feel integrated. For the Architect De Carlos [3], participation is not planning for the user, but with him. In this context, urban planning is understood as a collective learning process in which the possible methods and models for the realization of the wishes and needs formulated by users are shared and discussed.

In the discourses on participation in research and governance processes it is suggested that participation has been introduced in reaction to different kinds of problems. In development research a lack of ownership and empowerment is problematized. Participation is seen as the answer to these problems. Consequently, participation is related with various ends and given diverse social, political and methodological meanings [4].

There are various definitions of the term. The International Centre for Policy Studies explains “Citizen participation is a community-based process, where citizens organize themselves and their goals at the grassroots level and work together through non-governmental community organizations to influence the decision-making process. […] Furthermore, citizen participation occurs when all the stakeholders cooperate to implement changes” [5]

In this sense, participation is understood as a process in which local citizens can influence decision-making processes and, to varying degrees, participate in the identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects. Therefore, participation allows the integration of the local population in political, social and economic decisions. It is considered as an essential prerequisite to avoid failures in planning processes or long procedures.

Involving citizens in spatial planning is nothing new. There are many examples of public involvement in planning processes. Civil society actors increasingly participate in urban development processes, becoming activists and project initiators. In this way, active participation of various interest groups in urban development has created the opportunity for the authorities to expand the focus and understanding of the project, integrating local needs and allowing strengthening other forms of learning and problem solving.

Models of participation based on the degree of involvement, motivation, and nature of involvement are widely spread. In the 1960s Armstein [6] defined the “Ladder of Participation” by categorizing eight
uses of the term participation arranged in a ladder pattern in which each step corresponds to the degree of citizen power. Regarding Arnstein’s model the participatory progress reflects a linear logic which follows the idea of ‘the more participation, the better’. In this sense it is a one-dimensional process that is organized by power-holding actors handing over a degree of power to the participating community [7]. For this hierarchical concept, the ladder has been criticized [8].

However, the component of social passivity and the little contribution of the population to generate citizenship in addition to the few possibilities of participation are recent factors of the failure of citizen integration in planning processes. The problem is to achieve a new, more democratic and efficient configuration of the state itself, based in turn on a notion of citizenship rooted in social commitment. In this regard Font [9] emphasizes that the perfect informed, active and coherent citizen is very hard to find and a minority in urban societies. Therefore, any project that intends to open spaces for citizen participation must consider clear strategies that allow to strengthen the associative sector, seek the participation of the unorganized citizen and promote a change towards a more participatory culture. It is about building citizenship with the responsibility of citizens being involved in the satisfaction of collective needs.

Piura represents the reality of many Latin American cities. There is still little participation by citizens that seeks to improve their built environment. The development of the city is closely linked with a top-down policy. In urban development plans, the authorities are obliged to organize participatory tables and workshops, however, in reality, few residents are contributing. At the same time there are few actors of civil society who participate in urban planning.

Since the year 2017, when the city was hardly hit by the damage of the El Niño phenomenon, the landscape has changed. Despite the destruction, it has also contributed to wake up the population and its desire to participate in shaping the city they live in. Initiatives have emerged with the aim to improve the city and urban quality.

In 2018 Piura celebrated the anniversary of its 486 years of foundation. With the reconstruction and adaptation to climatic events, Piura faces once again major changes. It is still unclear whether these changes will significantly transform the urban landscape, but they will certainly change the way we live in the city, how we move in it, how and where we live in it.

3. Development

In order to influence the population's concern about the improvement of the city and act with the intention of optimizing the quality of urban life, the work presented in this paper shows different actions that were carried out involving the population, community neighborhood boards, municipalities and non-governmental organizations.

The primary goal of a participatory city laboratory is to collect proposals and elaborate ideas for urban development projects or policies. These ideas can be both structural-spatial and social, cultural or economic - up to proposals for a political reorganization of the city. Citizens themselves can become urban promoters, design their own vision of the city and invite politicians and administrators to debate. The ideas are meant to give new impulses for urban development.

In the case of Piura, the objective was to create a space of thoughts, an urban laboratory of the future in which new solutions for the development of the city can be publicly discussed. Participatory workshops were organized to design innovative responses for the city together.

The collection of ideas was used as important material for the work and obtained positive and satisfactory results in general. Hence, the starting point of the urban vision was the questioning of the Piurans about the future of their city and the way in which it could be developed, if the ideas and wishes of their citizens were considered.

In addition to workshops, different tools were used to facilitate the dialogue process between citizens, planning experts and administration. A Facebook page offered the opportunity to look at the latest ideas, to follow the discussion or to formulate individual ideas and continue to complete others. The collection of ideas for a future of the city was carried out through a map. Different events, fairs and talks were visited, in order to contact the population directly and find ideas for Piura. In addition, there was also
the opportunity to question and discuss some ideas directly. On the other hand, we started an online mapping. Figure 01 shows how the people were reached.

![Map of ideas online](image)

**Figure 1.** The ideas were collected by participatory mapping activities in different events or workshops (offline map) and with an online map available on Facebook and Instagram. Source: own illustration

After the first phase, we selected the top ideas from which in turn winners were chosen. In various scenarios, ideas for implementation were identified and solutions were developed.

### 4. Results: 600 ideas – One Vision “Piura 2032”

In July 2018, a number of up to 600 ideas were reached. Well studied, they led to a general image: the so-called vision of the citizens of Piura for Piura.

Visions are representations, images of possibilities that can be realized in the near or distant future. Those scenarios are tools: when well-planned and communicated properly, they can have a huge impact on the development of our cities.

The urban vision of the citizens shows a diverse city, with a quality of life in an equitable way. The ideas visualize where Piurans see a concrete need for action, where they expect more changes or development, what places and what topics were neglected in the past.

In general practice if any of the participants mentions unusual ideas, they are quickly told that they are politically inapplicable, technically unfeasible or impossible to finance. But sometimes it only takes time and creativity for an idea to develop and helps to find ways and evaluate possibilities, which politics and administration generally do not offer.
The work done follows a process model. The first level of evaluation concerns the output of the process, which essentially consists of the collection of ideas. As a result, these ideas should have an influence on urban development. This must be done in two ways: first, summarize the wishes and ideas of citizens to form a general picture of a possible future for the city: the vision of citizens. Secondly, the active inclusion of the vision in the discussion of urban development in the field of planners, experts and other social actors.

The number of ideas is an important criterion for determining the value of the results. In general, in participation processes, success is often measured by the number of contributions - especially when it comes to open procedures without a specific project reference, where the goal is to build the largest possible base of ideas.

In the following the results are presented divided in places and themes including all the ideas organized in thematic blocks and in scenarios which were developed using the top-rated ideas.

4.1. Places and themes
In order to gain an overview of all the ideas, various categories were formulated and the individual ideas were then assigned to them. Every single idea was individually processed. In terms of content, many ideas are similar, so that they could be incorporated into the main topics and first inter-connections became clear.

The ideas were divided into three thematic blocks.
- The attractive city: For some, this means a city with many public spaces open to all, cultural activities or many green areas. Perhaps they can also be educational offers that the city offers to citizens and the preservation of cultural heritage and art as well as crafts. It is probably the mix of everything.
- The responsible city: A responsible city is a clean city, without garbage and with less pollution. A city that provides security to its inhabitants and protects the environment. In addition, the vision towards the future must venture with new and modern forms of sustainable energy generation
- The mobilized city: The city is reinvented as a cycling city and expands public transport to meet the needs of residents. There is a concept to regulate private transport and introduce bus stops. Even pedestrians get their right.

50% of the ideas are related to the attractive city, 38% to the responsible city and 12% to the mobilized city.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 2.** Percentage distribution of subcategories of ideas. Source: own illustration

The blocks in turn are divided into different sub-themes that group similar ideas (figure 02). However, many ideas still seem quite general, but in the future, they can be developed in greater detail.
Some proposals may seem difficult to implement; others are already part of the Municipal Agenda. Many of the ideas seem so compelling that it feels more than important to implement them immediately.

Looking at all ideas, from the spatial aspect, i.e. the place of their action, shows that not every idea can be assigned to a specific place. Ideas can have a specific location, an area or no location at all. Ideas without location usually refer to the total city of Piura.

4.2. Scenarios Piura 2032

Among the first collection, the main ideas were sought and identified those that may have been mentioned several times or that had received a particular approval. For these ideas, a visual representation of the “Piura 2032” scenario was created: (1) A pedestrianized center. (2) Human settlements with public spaces. (3) The waterfront: heart of the city. (4) An ecological park Kurt Beer. (5) The city for children. (6) The city with an ecological infrastructure.

The scenarios show how Piura could look like if the ideas of the citizens are taken seriously in urban planning. They do not represent a complete and finished proposal, but a first representation of the city in the future.

![Images of scenarios](image1.png)

**Figure 3.** Scenarios Piura 2032: Identification of the main ideas and those that have been mentioned several times or those that received a particular approval. Source: own illustration

5. Conclusions

The New Urban Agenda [10] aims to leave no one behind, create sustainable and inclusive urban economies and generate environmental sustainability. Citizens should be involved in decision making, conflict resolution and planning for their future. In this context, national sustainable development strategies are requested to be prepared with the greatest possible participation.
In order to carry out such planning processes, all parties involved need to open up to experiment, as well as recognize and rely on the collective knowledge and understand local residents as experts in their daily lives. Organizing a participation process means participating in an alternative form of decision making, it is in this process where many people come together with different interests. The objective is to find a solution that incorporates the different opinions and that best meets the different needs. In essence, the urban vision responds in a practical way to this objective, by procuring scenarios for its application.

The vision of Piura specifies superior objectives. It provides guidance points for all participants and for all citizens, focuses on considerations and starts discussions. At the same time, it can mobilize private commitment. It shows that the cooperation between the city and citizens through private investors and civil society organizations, with the help of relevant disciplines such as urban planning and architecture, is essential for the positive development of a city. Just as private project developers optimize their own designs and projects, the city must also be understood as a responsible developer in its general considerations and key projects.

In the first place, however, it is important to work on the current scenarios and ideas of the urban vision. Which are those that are most likely to be performed, which should be thought out more, which are missing completely How do the contents of the vision jump into the world of urban planning in Piura?

However, the urban vision is not a finished product. Even after the first publication in 2019, joint urban development continues. It is always possible to add new ideas and develop future images. As well it is possible that one or another scenario will lose meaning, and others may arise. The future is constantly changing.

As well in the future all residents are invited to participate in their different activities and achieve a concept of participation that goes beyond the hierarchical model of Arnstein, with a participatory citizenship, expressing their needs and desires. In this way, new associations and actions of social groups may arise that are not necessarily formal, but that may be important and spontaneous initiatives of the citizens, which, on the one hand, point to a void in public policies and, on the other, invite and create synergies between the actions carried out by the community and the social policies that the government implements in order to generate cooperation situations that increase the effectiveness of public social action.

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