

The Awareness Level as a Sine qua non Condition for the Citizen Involvement Level in Urban Actions

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ABSTRACT

Every urban action is the result of a thoughtful or unthoughtful decision and a common product between the city's decision-maker and those who live and experience it. The importance of citizen involvement in urban actions is more than obvious. The person who lives the city cannot be just a witness or a simple user. The citizenship definition refers to this involvement through the city manufacturing. However, who can get involved? The citizen who is not an expert in all aspects of urban life should have a high level of awareness in order to become positively involved. This level of awareness depends on several factors, between educations, willingness, it is imperative to think about ways to increase this awareness in order to increase involvement itself. In this contribution, we will study the citizen involvement indices related to the level of awareness, based on one Algerian society case: El Oued city.

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1. Introduction

Urban actions unite actors. Indeed, in the best of all possible worlds, these actions should be collective actions, in partnership and mobilizing all types of actors, including citizens. Through its expertise in use and its ownership of the city, it is a key player in any urban action. If in some countries, the involvement of citizens is done systematically, in other countries such as Algeria this requires substantive work on the call for participation and the right to involvement and see even the sense of involvement. This sense of involvement depends on several factors, between education, willingness, and possibility of involvement, it is imperative to think about ways to increase this awareness in order to increase involvement itself. Urban education and inducement for participation and involvement are basic when it comes to raise

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the level of participation. In this contribution, we will study the indices of citizen involvement in relation to the level of awareness, based on Algerian society case which is El Oued.

2. Citizen involvement and urban actions

"Urban" public action being "any action that contributes to the development and operation of towns and cities" (ARAB N, IDT J, LE FLEUVE M P. 2009. p188), it is characterized by its complexity of fact that it involves a multitude of actors and a crossroads of interests. It is successful when its practice is done in a concerted manner and becomes accepted by bringing together all the players. The citizen being the main element and the very center of these actions, he is called to participate and get involved in these actions.

The Participation as a concept is generally defined as the gathering of concern, it is the guarantor of the acceptability of the action by its recipients and users, minimizes the risk of rejection of the project and the feeling of exclusion inhabitants. The involvement of citizens in urban action is essential for its success, even it is very difficult to translate the participation concept in urban actions. The search for methods and tools to facilitate this participation is an issue for all actors involved in urban actions. Several levels of participation have been identified, the most observed level of participation in most countries is the so-called passive participation (MDSFS & ADS 2007), where the user and / or the inhabitant is a mere spectator of the changes that affect their environment and their living environment. He is totally excluded from the decision-making process where he is just informed. Some may consider this as a form of participation, but for ARNSTEIN R, this is one of tokenism degree.

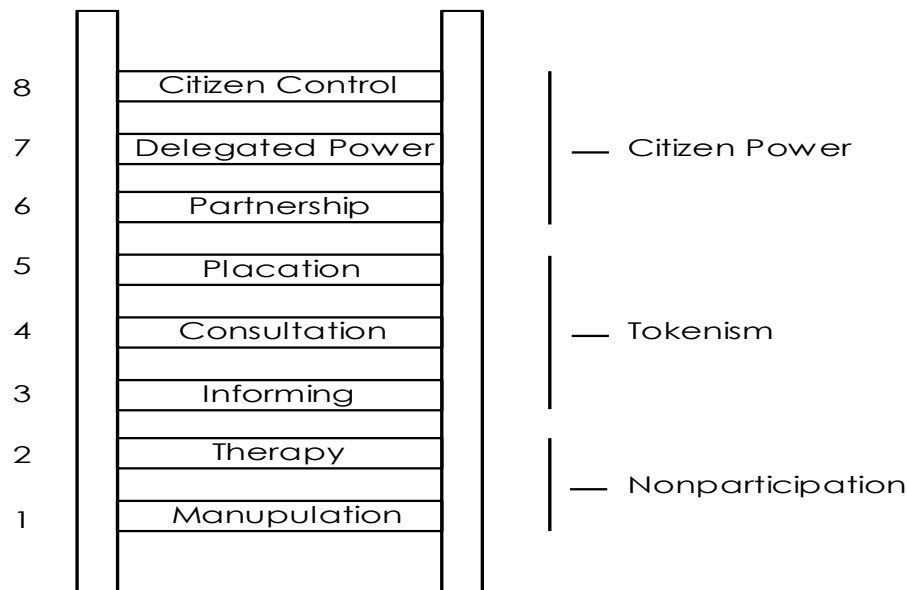


Figure 1. The eight participation ladders according to Arnstein R Sherry (ARNSTEIN R. S, 1996)

The second level is the so-called active participation or most often called physical one (MDSFS & ADS 2007), where the population is considered as a means and an instrument (Ibid), to carry out an action of which it was excluded or not during the planning or during the decisions about it. The most researched level of participation and the highest one is the citizen control according to Arnstein R. It's the degree where the population carry out the task's identification, analysis, decision-making, planning, financing (participate by partnership) and evaluation of the action.

These levels of participation are varying from scholar's point of view, and even in the professional world. Scholars cannot decide whether 06 or 08 degrees. There are even those who decline only three real degrees of participation. However, the more we get into the degrees of participation, the more the urban project tends towards sustainability, as affirms Ariella MASBOUNGI: "if the consultation is one of the main words of the sustainable urban project, it must be participatory and not only informative ..." (Galhardo, 2014).

We summarize the degrees of participation as follows:

- Information: where it is a question of informing about the project decided in closed rooms;
- Consultation: gathering the opinion of participants and these opinions can be used (not necessarily) for decision support after analysis;
- Concertation: seeking compromise on choices and prior opinions that stipulates an exchange of information to reach a consensus and a joint decision;
- Dialogue: exchange of points of view, without seeking compromise but rather the construction of innovative solutions;
- Involvement: to engage his responsibility in the project;
- Participation: integrate the project into its design through decision support and even funding;
- Ownership: to appropriate the project and conferring on its own appropriation;
- Accession: total sharing of objectives with co-decision and co-production;
- Co decision and co-management: the association of the inhabitant in the decision and the management of the project;
- Self-management: which means that it is the inhabitant who makes the decisions on the projects, but also on their budget.

In all these levels, the representation of the publication is essential even it is almost impossible given the diversity, which exists, then the choice is question difficult, the criteria of choice must be established on good bases (level of study, citizenship, sex ...) so that the sample is as present as possible. Thus, the elected representative are the main actors in this process.

2.1. From information to adhesion: tools and objectives

The participation level and approach used are mainly depends on the objectives that are presumed. Tools can be diversified in the search of a better solutions in urban actions. The citizen is the main actors that all the process is turning around. The table below explains the different levels and tools used depending on the objectives searched.

Table 1. From information to adhesion: tools and objectives (MOUHOUBI N, 2017, page 84-85)

Level	Degree	Approach	Tools	Actors	Objective
Passive	Information	Share decisions already made to residents and external bodies	Posters, websites, presses, TV		inform
Physical and advisory	consultation	Collect the opinions and use them for decision support	Questionnaire, surveys, interview, blog, vote, televoting, focus groups	Inhabitants and internal and external authorities	collect information, and collect opinions; guarantee the feasibility of the project
	concertation	and share reasons, objectives and arguments	Round table; meeting; statement of reasons; TV vote.	The inhabitants, the users but much more the sectorial actors whose policies are confronted and the objectives too.	Search for compromise and consensus, establishment of contract or consultation agreement where the compromise will be official.
	Dialogue	Exchange of opinions and points of view.	Forum, clubs, discussion center, brainstorming meetings	Inhabitants and all concerned actors.	Mutual exchange, constitutions of a collective problem.
decision	Involvement	Commitment and designation of roles	Partnership and signature of contract and convention	Inhabitants and all concerned actors...	empower
	Participation	Join the project	All tools are welcome	All actors	Exchange, commitment, responsibility, and compromise research.
	ownership	Presentation of objectives and exchange of points of view	All tools are welcome	All actors	Consensus and ownership of the project
	Membership / adhesion	Gather all the information held by each actor to problematize and solve	All tools are welcome	All actors	Co-design, co-decision, co-development, and co-production of the project.

It is essential to say that participation is a very important pillar in the urban action. It allows clearly seeing the expectations of the recipients of the project. It not only allows a good elaboration of solutions to the problems of society that are perceived in a different way between inhabitants and leaders, but, even better, allows to use this perception to better conceive the problem.

However, some constraints and difficulties are evident in the implementation of the participatory approach:

- Operations may be fragmented due to real estate financing;
- Merging roles and difficulty of managing actors and their games;
- Difficulty of integration and involvement of all actors;
- Divergence of stakeholder interests and difficulty in reaching consensus;
- Difficulty in selecting participants and representing residents;
- Confiscation and monopolization of power by the representatives of the inhabitants;
- Splitting participation by leading to an amorphous consensus;
- The NIMBY attitude that develops in the individualized society and which poses a problem of fruitless participation;
- The cost of the participation procedure.

For a better result of the participation, the objective of the participation must be clearly defined before launching the method of participation, however "... the objectives of the participation remain unclear and the methods little controlled" (BACQUE MH 2009. P23) and participation becomes a waste of time and money for unsatisfactory results.

2.2. How does the involvement come about; several scenarios arise?

The pseudo common sense says that you just have to ask people what they want and that's it! (VERDIER Ph. 2009. P5). But participation is much more complex than that. It manifests itself according to three mobilization scenarios which are a kind of process to make one's voice heard; thus, two approaches are defined by BACQUE M.H (BACQUE M.H. 2009).

First, the top-down approach, it comes from the top of the pyramid (politico-institutional) to develop a project adequate to local needs in the form of consultation. This approach is very widespread in France (Ibid.).

Then, the Bottom-up approach, it is a more frequent approach in North America, it is materialized by the mobilization of social movement which takes the orders of local development, and which can even develop counter-projects by the mobilization of knowledge, and it is also the first form of participation that existed during the project of the Hales of Baltard with 600 counter-projects developed.

However, there is a combined bottom-up and top-down approach that BEREZOWSKA-AZZAG calls the middle way, is the mix between the two approaches and is in the form of a round trip. She can also influence decisions from the bottom up.

These procedures use several types of procedures, of which we can cite:

- **Referendums:** where municipalities and public authorities consult residents by giving them the power to vote directly for or against a project. This procedure, which is more widespread in Switzerland as well as in the United States, makes it possible to involve all the inhabitants, (coming from the political authorities or the inhabitants themselves). It is undoubtedly effective, especially when it comes to making major political and constitutional decisions.

- **Neighbourhood councils:** it is the constitution of the representatives of the inhabitants in the form of a group, it is with these councils that the debates on the projects are initiated. This form is more common in France. The work of these groups becomes more effective if they are diverse;
- **Participatory budgets:** this form is used most in Latin America, where the inhabitant can participate in discussing the budget of the project;
- **Community development:** here it is the inhabitants who manage their local services, the Anglo-Saxon countries use this type of procedure the most;
- **Consensus conferences:** as the name suggests, the purpose of this procedure is to reach consensus by using the conference as a means of presentation and debate;
- **Advisory committees:** these are committees made up of institutions and unelected residents or specific groups that are consulted during a project, this form has recently experienced considerable success;
- **Participatory strategic plans:** these are forms of back and forth where the inhabitant is involved in the planning.

These procedures were developed to become operational methods of implementation of participation, they are, as we have already said, from one country to another but also differ depending on the purpose of their implementation.

3. The Awareness level scale

Psychologically, awareness is the ability to perceive, identify, think and behave in an appropriate manner. It is what we feel and what we know about ourselves, others and the world. In this sense, it encompasses the apprehension of our subjective experience and objective perception of reality.

Being aware of something is to have a full and clear knowledge of what to do, existence or reality of that thing. The human has consciousness and let his willing influenced by his feelings, he has a character feature of its own: it is able to control his actions, thoughts and decisions (Rafika et al., 2016).

Awareness refers to citizens' understanding of their position as part of a state system within the framework of democracy (Yani et al., 2017). When citizens' awareness is poor, it is assumed that they are apathetic and will not participate in the planning and urban actions. On the other hand, if citizens are aware, they would be more willing to participate. The more awareness of the citizens, the more eligible their participation would be. However, awareness is the most important factor that encourages individuals to engage in local activities.

The aim of this section is to present a clear analytical framework for identifying the main determinants of awareness and generating empirically testable predictions, there is a substantial amount of literature on the subject of public involvement awareness, researchers from different fields of study have compiled a summary of the relevant issues of citizen involvement awareness.

Basing on the previous scholars, we establish four points improving citizen awareness:

- **Level of knowledge and competence**

This point is basically about knowing their elementary rights as citizen to involve, or about having some knowledge that allows them to be effectively involved.

- **Level of commitment and responsibility towards their community**

Responsibility towards community it is a notion that refers the citizen to his own actions; It is also a person who is in charge of making decisions.

- **Level of readiness to collaborate with stakeholders**

In this point, we are trying to know the citizen readiness to exchange knowledge and resources with the different actors.

- **Level of willingness to get involved in the future**

In this point, we are trying to figure out if citizens wish to participate in the succeeding urban actions.

4. Method

4.1. Sample and procedure

This study was conducted in February and March 2019. A total of 267 participants living in El Oued city were asked to complete this Arabic-translated survey, the population evaluated consisted of all contacted individuals aged 18 years old and above who were willing to participate in the study. Contacted individuals who were less than 18 years old, did not wish to participate were excluded from the study.

We determined the study sample according to the simple random probability design where each individual of the target population had an equal (and known) chance of being part of the selected sample, no selection bias affects the selection process of individuals to be surveyed and made sure to diversify the sample as much as possible (age, sex, level of education, occupation, etc.).

4.2. Questionnaire

We translated the scale criteria for awareness level of citizen in a survey, which contains two types of closed questions, dichotomous questions, and multiple-choice questions. We have developed a semi structured questionnaire consists of four sections and each section containing a group of questions/items.

5. Results and Discussion

The significance of the city in which we all live and carry out our daily life routines cannot be overemphasized, the interdependence between man and environment is so obvious beyond any hesitant mind. Algerian's cities degradation became apparent in recent decades, largely as a result of authority's greedy actions exacerbating the situation.

Hence, the global scientists' attention has been brought to the need for a better and more effective urban actions through citizen involvement. Citizen awareness became crucial condition for inducing the involvement process in in urban actions in order to achieve this goal.

This study aims to determine whether citizens are aware of their involvement in urban actions and what factors could influence citizen's perceptions of the participation process.

Notes provided by the participants in the pilot testing proving that the questionnaire items were straightforward, easy to understand, and in a reasonable order. For the research instrument suitability and reliability, and a CRONBACH test achieved a score of 50% and 88%, and this value reflects an acceptable internal consistency, indicating that the content of the questionnaire is well adopted into the sample environment.

The values obtained were later inputted in SPSS statistical software

The analysis and interpretation of the data in this research work are made by the SPSS 2017 software which offers several tabulations and graphs, following these steps:

- First, the technique of principal component analysis (PCA) which aims to structure the starting variables by grouping them into a smaller number of factors;

- Subsequently, the internal consistency of each dimension was measured using the α of CRONBACH (which is usually used as a measure of the internal consistency of a multi-item scale);
- Finally, visualization of the results in the form of tables and graphs.

The data were collected with one sample size of 267 participants living in El Oued city located in the Algerian South Est, prior to data collection, we performed a pre-test to examine the suitability and reliability of the research instrument, using the α from CRONBACH (1951) which is commonly used as a measure of internal consistency of a scale with several items (Cronbach. 1951).

Table 2. Relevance and reliability survey test

Item group	Number of items	Expected interval of a value	Cronbach's Alpha value
Level of knowledge and competence	3	50%	0.35-0.55
Level of commitment and responsibility	1	88%	0.70-0.90
Level of readiness to collaborate with stakeholders	1	88%	0.70-0.90
Level of willingness to get involved in the future	1	88%	0.70-0.90

From our demographic data, our participants were primarily young (average 35 years) and had at least a university degree (67%). After the results interpretation of the present study, we found that the majority of the participants were aware of their right to participate and be involved in urban actions (Fig.2).

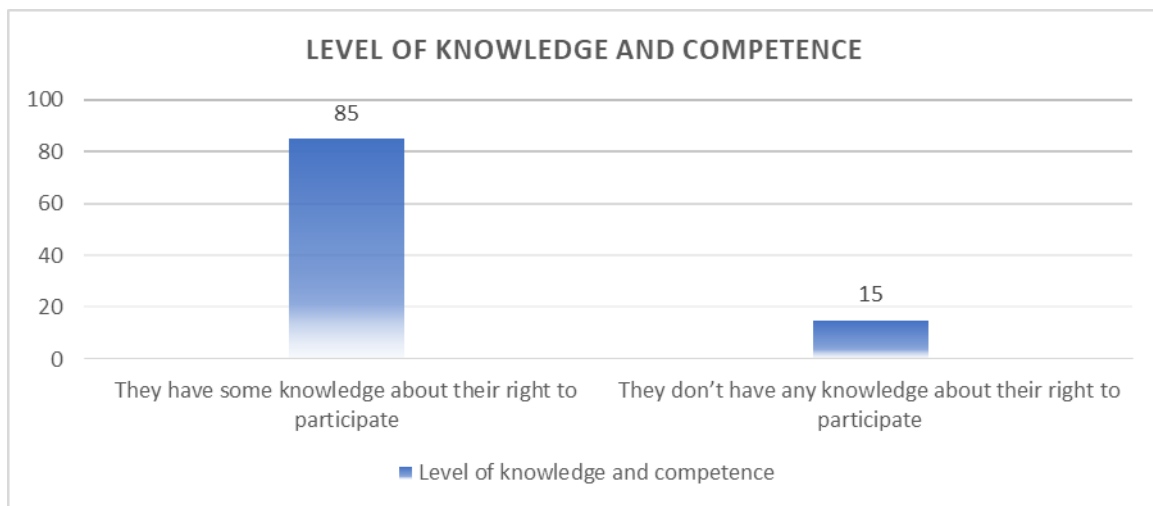


Figure 2. Level of knowledge and competence (By author, 2019 using SPSS)

From the figure above, the level of knowledge and competence of the respondents were ranked from Low to High. However, out of the total 267 citizens investigated, only 40 citizens fall under the low category of Low awareness with the valid percent of 15%. This result can be explained by the fact that

the majority of participants in our survey have a high academic level and by the popularization of information through social networks. However, it is to be distinguished between knowledge of the rights to participation and knowledge of urban actions undertaken in the citizen's-built environment. Indeed, the fact that most citizens know that they have the right to participate in the construction and conservation of their built environment does not guarantee their participation without having the third degree of passive participation and Tokenism; which is according to ARNSTEIN R: information. The presence of a channel that can ensure the dissemination of information relating to urban actions undertaken or to be undertaken is crucial for the very exercise of this right to information. In other words, what would be the point of knowing your right to participation and involvement in urban actions when their planning and design are done in closed rooms? This right to participate can only be fully exercised if the citizen is aware of the urban actions, projects and projection in his environment.

In the Oued and in Algeria in general, these channels of information spreading are lacking. Indeed, the official sites and pages of the public authorities in charge of urban actions are not always supplied and the displays in their seats are not often consulted by citizens. This blockage of information constitutes a first obstacle to the active participation of citizens, it then starts from ignorance of urban actions to disappointment when they are carried out (Mouhoubi, N. and Boudemagh, S.S., 2015). As a result, a feeling of exclusion spreads among the citizens, this exclusion often leads to the creation of indifference or anger (Ibid.).

Thus, this anger comes from the commitment and responsibility that citizen have for his city. The result of our survey shows that citizens of El Oued city exhibited the most positive attitudes and the greatest level of commitment and responsibility towards their community (78% of citizens said that they feel responsible for their city) (Fig. 3). Thus, the higher level of responsibility is necessarily reflecting the good level of citizen involvement awareness towards their city issues. This higher level of commitment and responsibility are confirmed in the readiness and the will to collaborate with stakeholders and participate in the various urban actions (Fig. 4 & Fig. 5), indeed, the citizens with higher level of readiness to collaborate with stakeholders made the largest count of 243 out of the 267 total respondents with valid percent of 91%. Thus, data from the study generally revealed high level of citizens who are ready to collaborate with stakeholders among El Oued citizens.

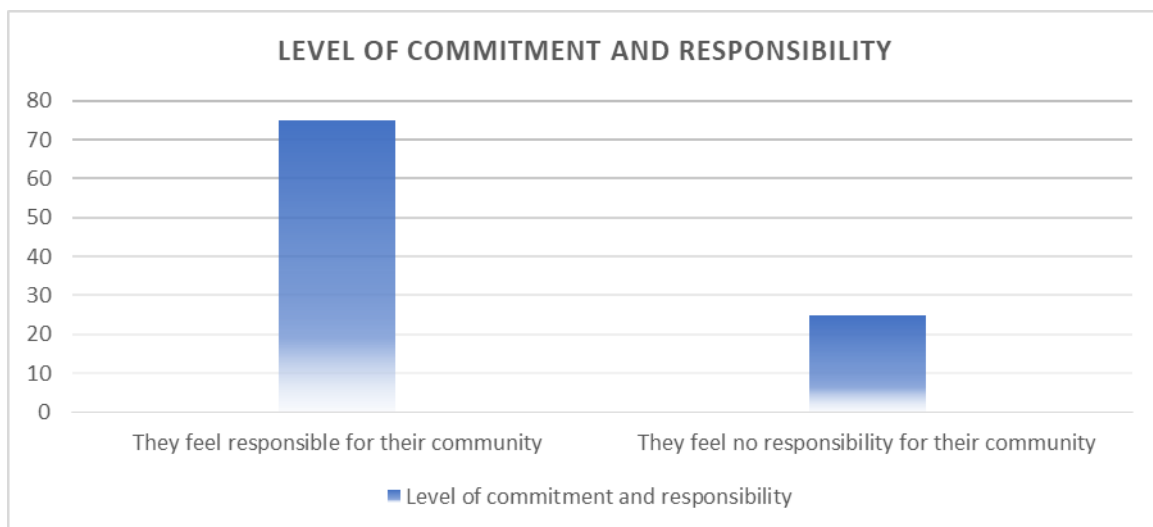


Figure 3. Level of commitment and responsibility (By author, 2019 using SPSS)

This result found citizens of El Oued city exhibited the most positive attitudes and the greatest level of commitment and responsibility towards their community (78% of citizens said that they feel responsible

for their city). Thus, the higher level of responsibility is necessarily reflecting the good level of citizen involvement awareness towards their city issues.

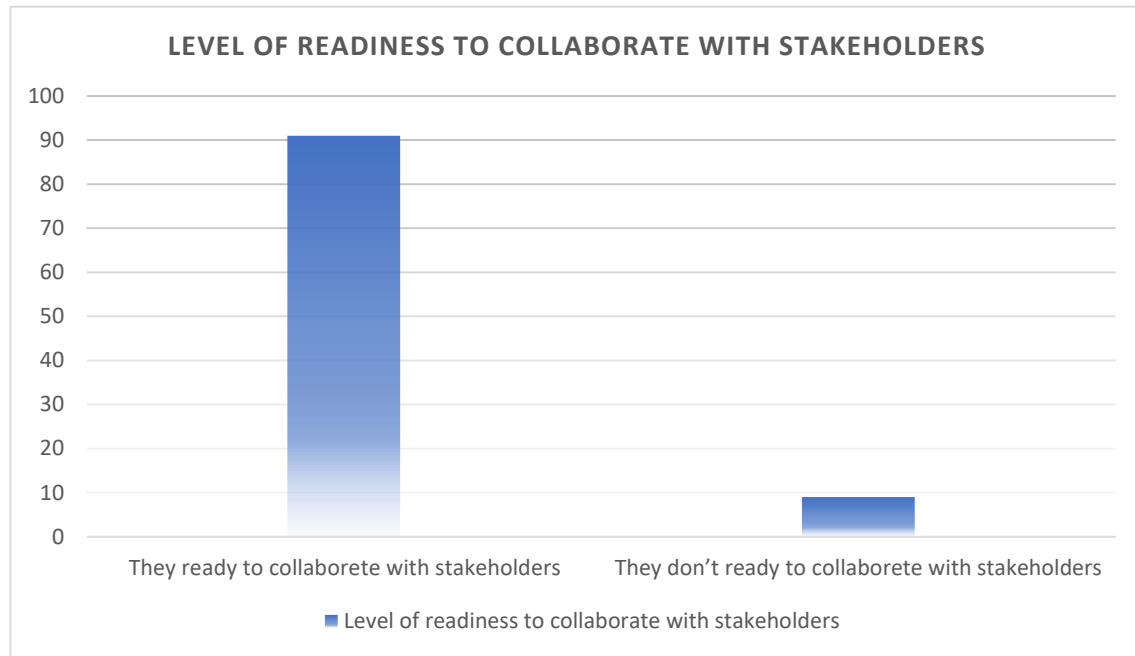


Figure 4. Level of readiness to collaborate with stakeholders (By author, 2019 using SPSS)

The citizens with higher level of readiness to collaborate with stakeholders made the largest count of 243 out of the 267 total respondents with valid percent of 91%. Thus, data from the study generally revealed high level of citizens who are ready to collaborate with stakeholders among El Oued citizens.

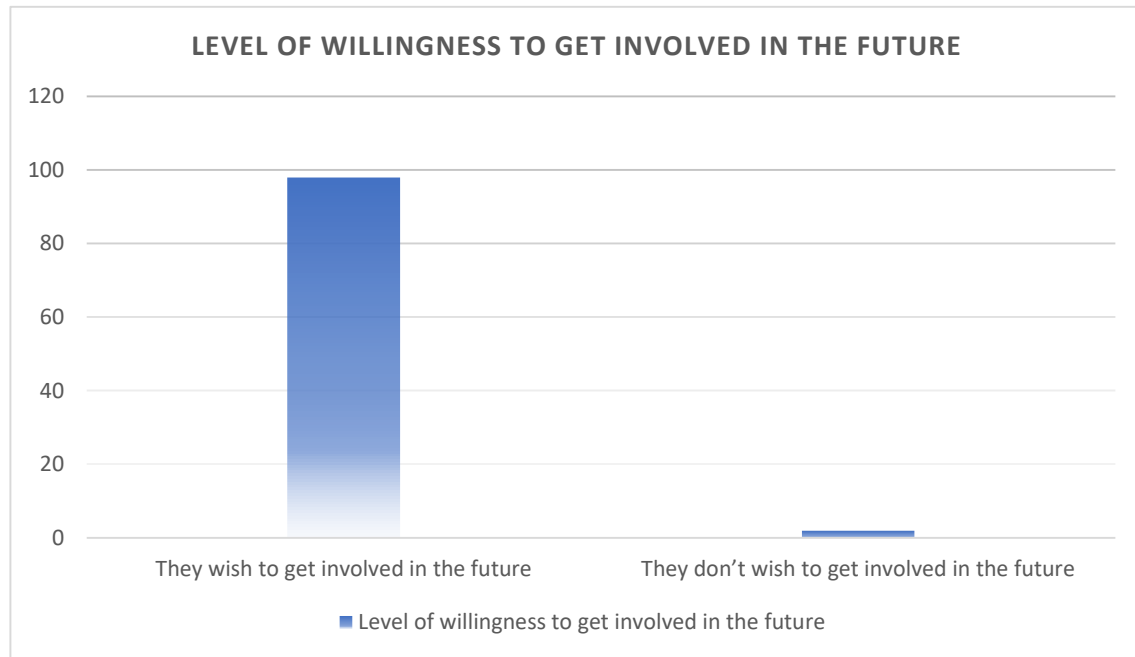


Figure 5. Level of willingness to get involved in the future (By author, 2019 using SPSS)

As to confirm, the proportions of respondents who wish to get involved in the future carry 98% which is the largest proportion of the total sampled population. The remaining 2%, which does not present a commitment to future participation, is justified by the fact of having lost confidence in their ability to change their environment and especially by the fact of being excluded for decades from urban actions. Thus, we are witnessing the weakness of the bond of trust between citizens and the actors in charge of urban actions. Citizens often feel that their opinion and participation is not of great importance to these actors (Mouhoubi, N. and Boudemagh, S.S., 2015) this only increases the feeling and attitude of exclusion.

The study also attempted to find out the attitudes and citizens' sense of responsibility towards their community. Since attitudes are sets of values and feelings of concern towards city improvement and urban actions, they may affect one's feeling of responsibility towards the city. Therefore, positive attitudes shape citizens' behaviour and perceptions towards the responsible actions to environment (Hungerford et al, 2010). The results express also some degree of concern from El Oued citizens, that they are not only aware of involvement in urban actions, but also have certain feelings towards their city issues.

6. Conclusions

The study surveyed citizens' involvement awareness level in urban actions. Results from the study revealed that a significantly higher proportion of citizens exhibited high awareness level by 90% of the total sampled population.

Also results of this research highlighted that although citizens had a high level of awareness this gain did not turn into effective involvement. In other words, the study's findings suggest that citizen's awareness level toward their community may not be the sole thing that motivates them to get involved in urban actions. The study also found that having a high level of awareness is linked to having positive attitudes and a greater sense of responsibility for the city.

As a result, this study has uncovered a significant research vacuum that needs to be filled in order to learn more about what other factors, if any, can motivate citizens to actively participate in urban actions and cities' issues. This may apply to larger community and other actions relevant to the city.

Therefore, a thorough study is required in order to arrive at a reliable conclusion and to determine what other factors encourage effective citizens' involvement.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Ethics statements

Studies involving animal subjects: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

Studies involving human subjects: No human studies are presented in this manuscript.

Inclusion of identifiable human data: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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