



LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY IN HONDURAS:
Overcoming Traditional Forms of Governing through the Creation
of Citizen Committees

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Academic Year: 2012/2013

EIUC/University of Ljubljana

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I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Assistant Professor Irena Bačlija of the University of Ljubljana for her guidance, patience and valuable inputs, which made the writing of this thesis possible. I would like to thank the members of the citizen committees of Santa Rosa de Copán who contributed immensely to the aim of this research by responding the interviews. Finally, a special thank you to every single person that whether directly or indirectly contributed to this achievement.

ABSTRACT

The present Master's Thesis aims to assess the importance of fostering a transition from government to governance, particular at the local level. In particular this thesis argues that especially in a country like Honduras where democracy is fragile, local governance can constitute an enabling environment in which citizens can be the 'shapers' of their society and local governance structures establish foundations for the development of a democratic society and state, based on respect and the promotion of human rights. Thus, by means of a study of literature, questioning quantitative data and a qualitative analysis based on a case study of citizen committees in the municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán in Honduras, this thesis provides an illustrative example of the positive impact of local governance in terms of development, respect for human rights, transparency, accountability and democracy. Furthermore, this research reveals that there are more significant issues that ought to be considered than just the mere establishment of participatory spaces, in order to construct genuine local governance. It is expected that the findings will provide the actors involved with useful information to assess their performance in search for improvement. Moreover, it can serve as a reference to other local governments and civil society organisations to start taking steps towards governance.

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

ADELSAR	Agencia de Desarrollo Estratégico Local
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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INTRODUCTION

In Western democracies, systems of checks and balances built into government structures have formed the core of good governance and helped empower citizens for more than two hundred years.¹ Nowadays, globalization and the information revolution have driven a large and growing number of countries around the globe to re-examine the roles of various levels of government within their respective societies, and the partnerships of these governments with the private sector and civil society.² Both developed and developing countries are currently pursuing various forms of decentralisation. In developed countries, effective local governments are considered essential actors in the regeneration of localities challenged by serious democratic and economic crises. In developing countries, governments struggle to (re)define the role of local governments within the political framework, as they seek to improve the democratic and developmental role of national government as a whole. In these countries, particularly since the 1990s, decentralization reforms have become very popular under the slogan of “good governance” often advocated by donor agencies.³ Such reforms typically involve shifting responsibilities to local governments and beyond government providers, with the objective of strengthening local governance.⁴ Thus, it is inevitable to assess the importance of fostering this transition from government to governance, particularly at local level. This thesis will address this phenomenon through empirical research, by evaluating an illustrative case in the municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán in Honduras.⁵ Municipalities constitute the level of

¹ Léautier A. Frannie, *Foreword*, p. xvii-xviii, in Shah Anwar, *Local Governance in Developing Countries*, Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, World Bank, 2006, p. xvii.

² Islam Roumeen, *Preface*, pp. xix-xx, in Shah Anwar, *Local Governance in Developing Countries*, Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, World Bank, 2006, p. xix.

³ Saito Fumihiko, *Foundations for Local Governance*, Heidelberg: Physica-Verlag, 2008, p. 2.

⁴ Islam, 2006, p. xix.

⁵ In the area of participation the municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán has become a national model, their experience has been systematised due to its positive impact on the construction of citizenship through

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government closest to the citizens. These governments respond to the most diverse populations and to the most intense social, economic, political problems within a country. To a greater or lesser extent, depending of the level of decentralisation, municipalities have both the need and the capability to define their respective structures and determine their own development. Thus, at local level, it is possible to observe the process of resolving issues of governance.⁶ This actuality is especially valid in a country like Honduras, where, studies suggest, democracy may be at stake.⁷ Hondurans exhibit strikingly low levels of support for their political institutions, and Honduran political culture is less than fully consistent with or supportive of democratic institutions.⁸ Mere political participation appears not to be sufficient to satisfy Hondurans that their democracy is working. Poor economic performance, inability to curb crime, and widespread corruption are all factors that contribute to the political cynicism displayed by Hondurans.⁹ However, at the same time, political culture in Honduras responds to the performance of such institutions, suggesting that Honduran political values are not fixed or unchangeable. Thus, in Honduras, the quality of governance matters.¹⁰ Moreover, while Hondurans are distrustful of their institutions, they are more satisfied with their local government than any other state institution. It is therefore important to take heed of local government and its potential to improve the current crisis, particularly when citizens are actively engaged in decision-making processes, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. In this respect, local governance should be considered as an enabling environment in which citizens can be the ‘shapers’ of

participation. According to, UNICEF, ‘UNICEF y el Municipio Hondureño de Santa Rosa de Copán renuevan Pacto por la Infancia y crean programa municipal’. Available at http://www.unicef.org/lac/media_9854.htm (Consulted on 9 July 2013).

⁶ Mouritzen Poul Erik & Svava James, ‘*Leadership at the Apex: Politician and administrators in Western Local Governments*’, Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2002, p.6.

⁷ See Coleman Keneth & Argueta José René, ‘*Political Culture, Governance and Democracy in Honduras*’, LAPOP-Vanderbilt University, July 2008. Available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/2008-politicalculture.pdf> (Consulted on 9 July 2013) / Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, ‘*Political Culture of Democracy in Honduras and the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity*’, LAPOP-Vanderbilt University, April 2013. Available at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/Honduras_Country_Report_2012_English_W.pdf (Consulted on 9 July 2013).

⁸ Coleman & Argueta, 2008, p.xxiii.

⁹ Ibidem, p.xxi.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p.xix.

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their society. Additionally, local governance structures establish foundations for the development of a democratic society and state, based on respect and the promotion of human rights.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 1 constitutes the theoretical framework wherein this research is grounded; it introduces key definitions such as governance, local governance and participation. Additionally it addresses the relation between participation and democracy, as well as the human rights framework provided for participation and governance. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the decentralisation process in Honduras that took place during the 1980s. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the general structure of local governments in Honduras, in addition to the national legal framework for participation, based on the Municipalities' Law and the Constitution. Chapter 3 sets forth the argument that in light of the general distrust of governmental institutions in Honduras, increased acknowledgement must be given to local government, which enjoys relative 'popularity' amongst Hondurans in comparison to the central government, particularly where citizens are participating. Analysis of a quantitative study on participation in Honduran local government is presented to support this contention. The case study in Chapter 4 focuses on the municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán and its path towards local governance through qualitative analysis of the particular experience of citizen committees in this district. The analysis finds that there are more significant issues be addressed when constructing genuine local governance, in addition to the mere establishment of participatory spaces. The exploratory research detailed in this section is based on interviews conducted with key actors involved in the process. The analysis and conclusions drawn in this study are a subject to a number of limitations, outlined in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the findings of this empirical research could serve as a basis for further exploration of the matter.

CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. The Emergence of Governance

Before entering into a conceptualization of governance, it is necessary to understand which circumstances led to the emergence of this concept and altered the perception of state as the main decision maker and provider of social services. Although circumstances may vary depending on the particularities of a region, Saito¹¹ attributes the change in perception of the state to four pivotal reasons: First, demands from the public have increasingly diversified, and the governments can no longer meet all demands. In the past, democratic government with the consent of the citizens was considered to represent 'public'. However, as the configurations of nations are getting more diverse and fluid, citizens' demands are also becoming more diverse. Governments have not been able to respond to this diversification. Populations in many sections of the world have lost faith in governments as the main providers of social services. Second, demographic and economic situations do not allow sufficient financial resources to be pumped into the governments to meet huge demands. Thus, there is a significant gap between popular demand and government supply. Accordingly, citizens feel dissatisfied with the state since they feel that their voices are unheard. Third, the situation is further aggravated by globalization which reduces the effectiveness of the state to control the exchanges of people, goods and services. With the increasing flow of information as well, the boundaries of nation-states become less significant. Fourth, alternative public services providers have emerged, which in some

¹¹ Saito, 2008, p. 3.

cases compete with, and in other cases collaborate with, the government. This complicates what public really means and what the role of the government should be.

In the light of these changes, governments have been forced to redefine its priorities and move towards a more innovative and collaborative approach of problem solving, namely governance.¹²

1.1.2 Definition

Several definitions have been given in an attempt to conceptualise this relatively recent phenomenon: 'Governance is a flexible pattern of public decision-making based on loose networks of individuals. The concept conveys the idea that public decisions rest less within hierarchically organised bureaucracies, but take place more in long-term relationships between key individuals located in a diverse set of organizations located at various territorial levels'¹³. Governance is a process. Understanding governance is largely a matter of observing and interpreting the way in which this process evolves and the relative clout of actors involve therein; is about maintaining public-sector resources under some degree of political control and developing strategies to sustain the government's capacity to act. Governance refers to something that deliberately transcends the borders of government and where governmental structures coordinate and give direction to collaborative, public-private efforts¹⁴. Governance involves government coupled with the looser processes of influencing and negotiation with a range of public and private sector agencies to achieve desired outcomes. A governance perspective encourages collaboration between the public, private and non-profit sectors to achieve mutual goals¹⁵.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ John Peter, *'Local Governance in Western Europe'*, London: SAGE Publications, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁴ Peters Guy & Pierre John, *'Governance without Government? Rethinking public administration'*, pp. 223-243 in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1998, pp. 232-233.

¹⁵ Hambleton Robin, *'New Leadership for Democratic Urban Space'*, pp.163-176, in Robin Hambleton & Jill Simone Gross, *Governing Cities in a Global Era: Urban Innovation, Competition and Democratic Reform*, New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2007, p. 164.

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Throughout the diversity of definitions, some common elements can be identified - elements such as government, public and private sector, collaboration and coordination. Bearing these features in mind and for the purposes of this thesis, governance will be defined as the process in which government and societal actors (public, private, non-profit) coordinate efforts and share decision making, in order to achieve mutual goals.

When considering the concept of governance, it is essential to notice that the hierarchical power of the State does not vanish. Rather the state's role shifts to steering and coordinating the actions of others. The concept of governance includes recognition of the fact that government cannot go alone¹⁶. Government organisations remain a part of the networks in these models of governance, but they are conceptualized as dependent on the other actors to the same extent that those actors are dependent on government¹⁷.

This concept transforms the 'classic' definition of government – a system of democratically elected institutions and structures, responsible for political decision-making and the provision of public services – and brings it closer to its 'ideal' form, in which democratically elected institutions of the state operate in the locality, providing services, acting as channels for the representation of local interests, and generating a secure environment for residents, businesses and visitors alike.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Peters & Pierre, 1998, p. 226.

¹⁸ Gross & Hambleton, '*From Governance to Governing*', pp. 213-224, in Robin Hambleton & Jill Simone Gross, *Governing Cities in a Global Era: Urban Innovation, Competition and Democratic Reform*, New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2007, p. 215.

1.2 LOCAL GOVERNANCE

1.2.1 From Local Government to Local Governance

Local government can be defined as a democratically elected representation of a local community with a certain level of political and fiscal autonomy¹⁹. The local authorities are considered the main foundations of any democratic regime.²⁰

The twentieth century was a difficult period for local government. What was local came to be considered old-fashioned and conservative. Large territories and the nation state were considered the main vehicles for more equality, better effectiveness, and enhanced citizen participation.²¹ While the relevance of the local context is still contested, especially in the light of globalization, many critics agree that a nationally organised system of administration cannot be as responsive, to local interests and opinions as an elected local counterpart.²² Municipalities are the level of government closest to the citizens. These governments respond to the most diverse populations and to the most intense social, economic, political problems within each country. Although countries vary in the degree of ethnic heterogeneity and inequality, the greatest diversity and the widest range of conditions are usually found within the boundaries of cities. To a greater or lesser extent, depending of the level of decentralisation, municipalities have both the need and the capability to define their respective structures and determine their own development. Thus, at the local level, it is possible to observe the process of working out issues of governance.²³

The classic statement of the value of elected local government is that of John Stuart Mill. His position rested on two main arguments. First, local elected institutions are an essential

¹⁹ Van Assche Danny, *'In search of the citizens: how to make city local again?'* Universiteit Antwerpen, 2004, p. 2.

²⁰ Preamble of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

²¹ Mouritzen & Svara, 2002, p. vii.

²² Andrews Caroline & Goldsmith Michael, *'From Local Government to Local Governance – and Beyond?'*, pp. 101-117, in *International Political Science Review*, Vol.19, No.2 1998, p.112.

²³ Mouritzen & Svara, 2002, p.6.

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element in a democratic system of government because they widen opportunities for political participation as well as providing for the education of citizens in the practice of politics and government. Second, Mill contends that an elected local government is necessary as its ability to oversee the affairs of the locality, based on local knowledge, interest and expertise, likely renders it more efficient and effective than a distant central government when providing local services.²⁴

In light of the previous arguments, Saito believes that in order to achieve an “ideal” state often decentralisation is considered to be the most desirable option. As local governments exist in close proximity to the people, they therefore occupy a more suitable position to provide desired public services than the central government.²⁵

Osmani notes a profound lack of clarity in definitions of “decentralisation”.²⁶ He makes a distinction between different types of decentralisation. “Classic” decentralisation a term first used in the 1950s, refers to a period when a fairly consistent set of institutional changes were being introduced by the colonial powers (especially Great Britain), to prepare many African Countries for impending independence. In practice however, classic decentralisation rarely took place. Instead the political leadership of developing countries usurped the term to describe very different types of administrative reorganisations.

One classification scheme distinguishes between four different forms of decentralisation:

- *Deconcentration*, refers to institutional changes that shift the authority to make certain types of decisions from national civil service personnel in the capital to national civil service personnel posted at dispersed locations. In this arrangement, staff and resources are transferred from headquarters

²⁴ Quoted in Andrews & Goldsmith, 1998, p.108.

²⁵ Saito, 2008, p.2.

²⁶ Osmani S.R, ‘*Participatory Governance and Poverty Reduction*’, pp. 121-143, in Grinspun Alejandro, *Choices for the Poor: Lessons from National Poverty Strategies*, New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2001, pp. 123-124.

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to lower units of administration under chief officers who can take operational decisions without reference to the headquarters.

- *Devolution* refers to reorganisation efforts that approximate ‘classic’ decentralisation most closely, insofar as significant amounts of independent legislative and fiscal authority are transferred to sub-national governments. Responsibilities and resources are transferred to these local governments with a large degree of autonomy to decide how to use the resources.
- *Delegation* refers to transfers of authority to public corporations or special authorities outside the regular bureaucratic structure. Agents not belonging to public administration are delegated by the central government to perform specific functions. The central government sets the objective of the delegated agents and transfers resources to them on the basis of approved plans and budgets, but the agents have a fair degree of autonomy in performing their functions and may even have autonomous sources of revenue, including borrowing from the capital market.
- *Privatisation and partnerships* refer to transfer of responsibility for public functions to voluntary organisations or private enterprises. The objective here is to mobilise the capacity and initiatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) working for social and economic development. Resources are transferred to the CSOs who enter into an agreement with the government on the basis of an indicative programme of work.²⁷

Of these four forms deconcentration encompasses the least amount of transfer of power to the local people. This type of administrative organisation can hardly be described as a move towards the development of local governance. Delegation, too, does not by itself transfer power to the local people, although the delegated agencies have scope for involving local people in their decision-making process. The two other forms, devolution and privatisation or partnership, provide the greatest scope for developing genuinely local governance based on popular participation. It is arguable that people’s participation in the process of

²⁷ Ibidem.

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governance is an essential precondition for successful decentralisation from the point of view of both efficiency and equity. One of the reasons is that it enables local services to be tailored according to local preferences.²⁸

Hence, as power starts to be returned and redistributed to the locality through the process of decentralisation, new relationships are established between the local government and the citizens. Subordination is no longer the link between both of them and citizens are not only seen individuals, but also as persons in interactive networks and as members of a community that local government claims to represent.²⁹

Stoker³⁰ categorises the shift from local government to local governance into 3 main periods or “Eras of Local Governing” (See Table 1). The first era, the “Elected local government in a post war setting”, is characterised by managing inputs and delivering services in the context of a national welfare state; democracy was reduced to voting in elections, mandated party politicians, tasks achieved through control over democracy. The second era “Local government under new public management” took place in the late 1970’s. In this period emphasis was initially placed on limiting the cost of public service provision through stronger management disciplines in way that ensured economy and responsiveness to consumers; the overarching goal is greater effectiveness in tackling the problems that the public most care about. Public interest is defined as the aggregation of individual preferences, demonstrated by consumer choice.

Currently, in the 21st century a new model is emerging, which Stoker labels as “Networked Community Governance”. In this model the overarching goal is to meet needs as defined by the community, within the context of the demands of a complex system of multi-level governance. It takes its main inspiration from the perspective of ‘new

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Van Assche, 2004, p.2.

³⁰ Stoker Gerry, ‘*New Localism, Participation and Networked Community Governance*’, University of Manchester, UK /Institute for Political and Economic Governance, 2007, pp. 19-21.

localism'.³¹ This model demands a complex set of relationships with government, local organisations and stakeholders³².

1.2.2 Definition

Local governance stems from governance, but is about cooperative decision-making on the local level, which is under different constraints than national or supranational levels of government. According to Abbott³³, the importance of governance as a concept is that it establishes the principle that political decision-making is a shared process, both the States and organs of civil Society. This is particularly important at a local level where decision-making moves from the policy arena to the level of implementation³⁴.

Local governance has been defined as a much broader concept than local government. It can be define as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Therefore, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighbourhood associations in pursuing collective action by defining the framework for citizen-citizen and citizen-state interactions, collective decision making, and delivery of local public services³⁵.

³¹ "New Localism", can be characterised as a strategy aimed at devolving power and resources away from central control and towards front-line managers, local democratic structures and local consumers and communities, within an agreed framework of national minimum standards and policy priorities. In other words, it means devolution of power to local levels, in order to implement national goals.

³² Stoker, 2007, pp.19-21.

³³ Abbott John, '*Governance and Participation, in International Conference Governance and Participation: Practical Approaches to Urban Poverty Reduction*'; Towards Cities for the New Generation, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat), Florence, Italy, November 1997, p.7.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Shah Anwar, '*Local Governance in Developing Countries*', Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series, World Bank, 2006, p.2.

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TABLE 1. ERAS OF LOCAL GOVERNING

	Elected local government in post war setting	Local government Under New Public Management	Networked Community Governance
Key objectives of the government system.	Managing inputs, delivering services in the context of a national welfare state	Managing inputs and outputs in a way that ensures economy and responsiveness to consumers	The overarching goal is greater effectiveness in tackling the problems that the public most care about
Dominant Ideologies	Professionalism and party partisanship	Managerialism and consumerism	Managerialism and localism
Definition of public interest	By politicians / Experts. Little in the way of public input	Aggregation of individual preferences, demonstrated by customer choice	Individual and public preferences produced through a complex process of interaction
Dominant Model of Accountability	Overhead democracy: voting in elections, mandated party politicians, tasks achieved through control over the bureaucracy	Separation of politics and management, politics to give direction but not hands on control , managers to manage, additional loop of consumer assessment built into the system	Elected leaders, managers and key stakeholders involved in search for solutions to community problems and effective delivery mechanisms. System in turn subject to challenge through elections, referendums, deliberative forums, scrutiny functions and shifts in public opinion.
Preferred system for delivery	Hierarchical department or self-regulating profession	Private sector or tightly defined arm's length public agency	Menu of alternatives selected pragmatically
Approach to public service ethos	Public sector has monopoly on service ethos, and all public bodies have it.	Sceptical of public sector ethos (leads to inefficiency and empire building) – favours customer service	No one sector has a monopoly on public service ethos. Maintaining relationships through shared values is seen essential
Relationship with higher tiers of government	Partnership relationship with central government over delivery	Upwards through Performance contracts and key performance indicators	Complex and multiple: regional, national, European. Negotiated and flexible.

Source: Adapted from Stoker, 2007, p.1

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A much more 'modest', definition is given by Hambleton³⁶, who posits that 'Local Governance refers to processes and structures of a variety of public, private, and voluntary sector bodies at the local level. It acknowledges the diffusion of responsibility for collective provision and recognises of different levels and sectors.' In a more lively description: 'Out goes the hierarchical model of the city 'boss' determining policy for services controlled and delivered by the state, and in comes the facilitative leader reaching out to other stakeholders and local people in an effort to influence decisions made by others in order to improve the local quality of life. Recognition of the shift from government to governance requires leading politicians and senior managers to adopt an outward-looking approach and, crucially, to engage with the economic and other interests that influence the current and future well-being of their locality'.³⁷

1.3 PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Participation is a necessary condition for a democratic government. Local government is democratic if its performance is decisively influenced by the citizens themselves, either directly or indirectly through the election of representatives. The active participation of citizens in decision-making in local matters represents an important dimension of democracy and also a means for its enhancement in the wider social space, as, with increasing interests in local-level politics, the interest in politics at large should be increased as well.³⁸ By definition, local governance implies an increased participation of civil society in activities that traditionally formed part of the public sphere.

³⁶ Hambleton, 2007, pp. 164-165.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Nahtigal Lea & Brezovsek Marjan, 'Territorial and Participatory Aspects of the Development of Local Democracy in Slovenia', pp. 182-202, in Czech Journal of Political Science 2, 2011, p.189.

1.3.1 Forms of Participation

Participation in a broad sense can be defined as the act of taking part in something. Although the term ‘public participation’ presumes that the initiative and procedure are in hands of the citizens, the participation process is generally managed by the public entities.³⁹ Nonetheless, the concept of participation can differ; scholars have identified different types, forms and even methods of participation, according to the context, legalities and particularities of where and how it is exercised.⁴⁰

Based on whether it is stipulated in a legal act or not, it can be said that there are two categories of participation, formal and informal participation. Formal forms of participation are defined by legislation, hence they are binding; in the case of informal forms it is that independently decide which form of participation they shall choose in specific cases, for example collection of signatures, protests and petitions.⁴¹

There further forms of participation classified by the circumstances in which participation takes place, and the level of involvement of the citizens, including the following:

- Political Participation

In a more traditional sense, it refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personal and/or the actions they take.⁴² Political participation expresses itself in individual and collective actions that include mainly voting, campaigning, contacting, group action and protest, all oriented towards influencing the representatives in government, rather than active and direct

³⁹ Addink G.H., ‘*Local and Regional Level Participation in Europe: A comparative exploratory study on the application of the participation principle at local and regional level within the framework of the Council of Europe*’, Province of Utrecht, November 2009, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Gaventa & Valderrama 1999, Nahtigal & Brezovsek 2011, Stoker 2003.

⁴¹ Nahtigal & Brezovsek, 2011, pp. 189-190.

⁴² Verba Sydney, ‘*Participation in America*’, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, p.2.

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participation in the process of governance itself.⁴³ The most obvious way of political participation is to vote. But few will agree that voting is enough to cover political participation on the local level. Even in a classic representative democracy, it is possible to award citizens with more significant role.⁴⁴

- Community and Social participation

From this perspective participation could be seen in the level of consultation or decision making in all phases of a project cycle, from needs assessment, to appraisal, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. While these participation projects could be funded by the state, participation within them was seen not as related to broader issues of politics or governance, but as a way of encouraging action outside the public sphere.⁴⁵

- Citizen Participation

Furthermore, certain scholars⁴⁶ argue that the moves from government towards civil society, and from social and project participation towards governance offers new spaces in which the concept of participation may also be expanded to one of “citizenship”. This concept, perhaps better known as *Citizen Participation*, involves linking participation in the political, community and social spheres. This redefinition of the concept of participation implies that participation is no longer concern only with beneficiaries, but also broad forms of engagement by citizens in policy formulation and decision making in key arenas which affect their lives. This leads to a more “democratic participation”, which forms a key component of this thesis.

In this sense, Nahtigal & Brezovsek divide democratic participation in local-level public life into two main subsections: participation in a political process, or interest (non-political)

⁴³ Gaventa John & Valderrama Camilo, ‘*Participation, Citizenship and Local Governance*’, background note prepared for workshop on ‘Strengthening participation in local governance’, Institute of Development Studies, June 1999, p.3.

⁴⁴ Van Assche, 2004, p.7.

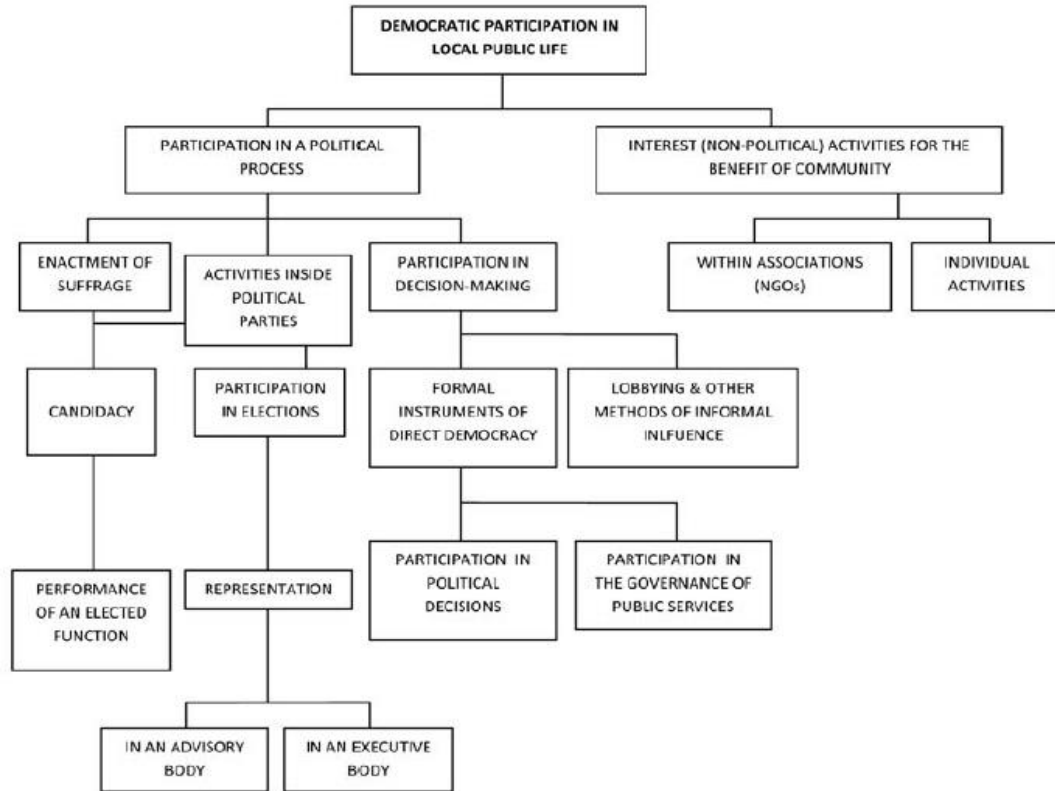
⁴⁵ Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999, p.2.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p.4.

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activities for the benefit of community (within the framework of associations, non-governmental organisations and individual activity).⁴⁷ (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1. TYPES OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL PUBLIC LIFE



Source: Nahtigal & Brezovsek, 2011, p.190

⁴⁷ Nahtigal & Brezovsek, 2011, p.190

1.3.2. Methods of Participation

Each of the forms of participation carry with them different means, procedures or methods through which participation can take place. According to Stoker⁴⁸ participation methods can be divided into five categories:

Consumerist methods, it refers to forms of participation, which are primarily customer oriented in their purpose and are mainly concerned with aspects of service delivery. For example complaints, suggestions schemes and service satisfaction surveys.

Traditional methods, these methods have a long history of use in local government and are traditionally associated with public participation. Key examples would be public meeting, inviting co-optees onto local authority committees, and consultation documents for comment.

Forums, this involves activities which bring together users of particular services, residents of an area, individuals concerned with specific issues or those who share background or interest. For example neighbourhood committees or forums that brings together young people or ethnic minorities.

As innovations within these categories, there are the *Consultative and Deliberative* methods (See Table 2). The first one seeks mainly to consult citizens on particular issues rather than to engage them in sustained dialogue (interactive websites, focus groups, citizens' panels). While the latter encourages citizens to reflect upon issues affecting them and their communities through some form of deliberative process (citizens' juries, visioning exercise, community planning).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Stoker Gerry, '*Participation in Local Government*', University of Manchester, UK, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

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TABLE 2. CONSULTATIVE AND DELIBERATIVE INNOVATIONS

Technique	Description
Interactive Website	The key here is a website that provides more than information but offers an opportunity for citizens to join the debates or send in messages about local issues or services.
Citizens' Panel	These are on-going panel made up of a statistically representative sample of a local area. The panel is consulted through regular survey based consultation its views about issues, services and local authority proposals.
Referendums	These allow citizens to vote on a particular issue or decision such as for example which council tax option they prefer.
Focus Groups	Focus groups usually last between one and two hours and involve collecting together by invitation a relatively small group of people to express their views on an issue in a facilitated discussion. An effort might be made to gather together groups of relatively hard-to-reach social categories such as the vulnerable elderly
Citizens' juries	A group of citizens, usually chosen to represent as fairly as possible the local area, who are brought together to consider a particular issue. They have their discussions facilitated and receive evidence from expert witnesses before coming to a judgement. The process may last over several days and the citizens ultimately agree a report with recommendations on the issue.
Visioning Exercise	The purpose of this technique is to produce a vision among a group of residents about the kind of future they would like to create. A variety of techniques are usually combined in order to uncover people's preferences
Community planning exercise	Here citizens are tasked with giving priority to potential service developments in response to local authority suggestions
User Management	A form of participation where the running of a service and direct control over resources is given to citizens. Examples include community based housing organisations and community managed local centres

Source: Adapted from Stoker, 2003, p.2⁵⁰

⁵⁰ After carrying out an assessment of two census surveys of local authorities in the UK, specifically on the use by local authorities of these 'new consultation techniques' between 1997 and 2001, Stoker concluded that the growth in participation was 'more than a simply response to new Labour's democratic renewal agenda'. He found that it was rather a sense of ownership within individuals and authorities of the democratic possibilities which such initiatives hold and a willingness to develop them.

1.4 DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

Participation is a vital element of democracy, it is even argued that as a matter of fact 'democracy means participation'; Wolff believes that the effectiveness of a democratic society depends mainly on the citizen being aware of the power and the social responsibility invested in him and having unlimited opportunities to be cognizant of all issues challenging the society, to voice his opinion on them and to cooperate in effecting change.⁵¹

According to Van Assche⁵² the level of involvement of the citizens within the different typologies of participation can be a reflection of different forms of democracy. In that regard, local government is nothing more than representative when political participation is limited to voting. The local council governs, while the citizens' role is limited to that of voter and consumer of public services (representative democracy).

G.H Addink⁵³ states that participation should be a necessary supplement to representative democracy. In a representative democracy, the citizens either directly or indirectly elect their representatives. These representatives then form the legislative authority, whose task it is to monitor the administration. The reasons why participation is a necessary supplement are threefold: First, it appears that the public representatives limit themselves in their monitoring task to the main points of the policy being implemented by the administration. Second, party discipline has resulted in public representatives increasingly expressing the party's standpoint rather than their own. Third, the minority does not always get what it deserves if there is a majority government.⁵⁴

In a commentary democracy, it is still the council that governs, but the politicians are interested in the reactions of the citizens on their policy plans. Politicians make proposals;

⁵¹ Wolff Max, '*Democracy Means Participation*', pp. 129-134, in *Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1949, p. 129.

⁵² Van Assche, 2004, p.8.

⁵³ Addink, 2009, p.17.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

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they listen to the public and decide autonomously (for example in formal ways of participation as referendums and public assemblies).

In a deliberative democracy citizens join the political process earlier, and stay longer. Citizens become co-producers of policy. They can decide on priorities and policies, in cooperation with the representatives. This thesis will be precisely motivated by this conception of deliberative democracy.⁵⁵

Most fundamentally, deliberative democracy affirms the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives. In a deliberative democracy, leaders should therefore give reasons for their decisions, and respond to the reasons that citizens give in return. Thus, its first and most important characteristic, then, is its reason-giving requirement.⁵⁶ The moral basis for this reason giving process is common to many conceptions of democracy. Persons should be treated not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their own society, directly or through their representatives.⁵⁷

A second characteristic of deliberative democracy is that the reasons given in the process should be accessible to all the citizens to whom they are addressed. This means that the reasons must be comprehensible and should be addressed publicly.⁵⁸

The third characteristic is that its process aims at producing a decision that is binding for some period of time. The participants do not argue for argument's sake; they intend their discussion to influence a decision the government will make, or a process that will affect how future decisions are made.⁵⁹ Finally a fourth characteristic of deliberative democracy is that its process should be dynamic. Although deliberation aims at a justifiable decision, it does not presuppose that the decision will in fact be justified. It keeps open the possibility

⁵⁵ Van Assche, 2004, p.8.

⁵⁶ Gutmann A. & Thompson D., *'Why Deliberative Democracy?'*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Ibidem p.4.

⁵⁹ Ibidem p.5.

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of a continuing dialogue, one in which citizens can criticize previous decisions and move ahead on the basis of that criticism.⁶⁰

Saito⁶¹ establishes that in order to respond to democratic crises, consultative processes are deemed essential because through discussions among various stakeholders, it becomes more obvious what the common issues are and what efficient and effective solutions would be possible in particular situations with limited resources and constraints. This process often constitutes deliberative democracy. For this purpose, local governments can play a bigger role than before. Granting more autonomy to them to become more effective facilitators is considered promising. Once local government officials can be reasonably free from tight bureaucratic control from the central government, they can have more flexibility in consultation and negotiation in locally specific conditions. Accordingly, the devised policies are likely to be more responsive to societal needs, and responsiveness is an essential element of democracy. If the deliberation processes generate new information and support collective action, it becomes more likely that people will consider such kind of democratic engagement more legitimate. The mutual distrust between government and the governed is likely to be reduced.⁶² Furthermore, Van Assche recognises that there are three main advantages that can be identified in using deliberative instruments. First of all, as natural consequence, participation is enhanced. Citizens are directly involved in the decision making process. Second deliberative democracy can be representative in a different way than formal representative democracy is. In deliberative democracy minority groups can be explicitly represented in the decision making process. Thirdly, these instruments help government to be responsive.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibidem p.6.

⁶¹ Saito, 2008, p. 9.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Van Assche, 2004, p.9.

1.5 HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

1.5.1 Governance and Human Rights

International Organisations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations (UN) have embraced governance as a principle to guide their work and policies. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) establishes in one of its documents that: ‘Good governance and human rights are mutually reinforcing. Human rights principles provide a set of values to guide the work of governments and other political and social actors. They also provide a set of performance standards against which these actors can be held accountable. However, without governance, human rights cannot be respected and protected in a sustainable manner. The implementation of human rights relies on a conducive and enabling environment’.⁶⁴ ‘‘Good governance’’, as most of international organisations label it, implies the exercise of authority through political institutions and processes that are transparent and accountable, and encourage public participation.⁶⁵

A set of principles or attributes have been established by the UN to identify good governance, these principles are endorsed in a series of the documents. Though minor variations occasionally arise, the essence of these principles remains unchanged. On this occasion the principles of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)⁶⁶ will be considered, namely: Participation, consensus orientation, strategic vision, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, accountability, transparency, equity and the rule of law (See Table 3). Each of these principles has a strong universal claim since they can be related with clauses of key international human rights instruments.

⁶⁴ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ‘*Good Governance Practice for the Protection of Human Rights*’, New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2007, pp.1-2.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ United Nations Development Program, ‘*Governance and Sustainable Human Development*’, 1997.

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TABLE 3. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE	
The Five Good Governance Principles	The UNDP Principles and related UNDP text on which they are based
1. Legitimacy and Voice	<p>Participation: All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their intention. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively.</p> <p>Consensus orientation: Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.</p>
2. Direction	<p>Strategic vision: Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.</p>
3. Performance	<p>Responsiveness: Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders. Effectiveness and efficiency – processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources.</p>
4. Accountability	<p>Accountability: Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organizations and whether the decision is internal or external.</p> <p>Transparency: Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.</p>
5. Fairness	<p>Equity: All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.</p> <p>Rule of Law: Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights.</p>

Source: Adapted from Graham, Amos & Plumptre, 2003, p.2 ⁶⁷

1.5.2 Human Rights Norms and the Right to Participation

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) marked the beginning of the development of participation as a human right. Participation, directly or through freely chosen representatives, is the norm to which a number of other substantive human

⁶⁷ Graham John, Amos Bruce & Plumptre Tim, *Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century, Policy Brief No. 15*, Institute on Governance, Ontario Canada, 2003, p.2.

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rights are connected. Democracy, however, is not prescribed in the UDHR, nor is it defined. In fact, democracy is usually not mentioned as a term connected to participation in human rights documents.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, it is widely known that both terms should go hand by hand, as established in the previous subchapter.

In the UDHR, the right to participation is included in Article 21. However, most of the elements established in that article, namely periodic and genuine elections, universal and equal suffrage and secret vote, denote that the essence of the article refers mostly to participation in the political sense. Moreover, the article is mainly concerned with the level of central government, rather than regional or local government.⁶⁹

Article 21, UDHR

- a) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chose representative.*
- b) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country*
- c) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.*

Nonetheless, the right to participation is not constrained to Article 21 of the UDHR; it is also connected to and reinforced by other political rights established in the same document, including freedom of association, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. These rights are of particular relevance in the context of deliberative democracy, particularly at local level where deliberation usually takes place in public spaces e.g. open meetings or public assemblies. Furthermore, deliberation involves the expression of citizens' opinions

⁶⁸ Markku Suksi, '*International Human Rights Norms and the Right to Participation*', in Compendium of International Standards for Elections, Third Edition, NEEDS & European Commission, Brussels, 2011, p.4.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem* p. 5.

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on particular policies, impending government decisions or at times the resolution of certain problems facing the community.

Article 19, UDHR

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas throughout any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20, UDHR

Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and no one may be compelled to belong to any association.

Likewise in article 29 of the UDHR, the exercise of the right to participation is restricted by certain limitations which the state establishes through the law. These limitations differ depending on the context of every state and constitute a guarantee for the protection and respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

In addition, article 29 fosters participation at the local level in the establishment of ‘duties to the community’, explicitly inviting everyone to take part in the welfare of the community, in which the free and full development of his/her personality is possible.

Article 29, UDHR

- a) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible,*
- b) In the exercise of this rights and freedoms, everyone shall subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare of a democratic society.*

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The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also envisages the right to participation in its Article 25. Again, the word democracy is not mentioned in relation to participation. The article is mainly concerned with political participation, as it introduces a number of human rights aspects related to the electoral process. However, participation is extended to other spheres in the Human Rights Committee General Comment to Article 25 of the ICCPR. The comment states that direct participation in the conduct of public affairs may imply that a person appears, for instance, as a voter in elections, as a voter in referendums, as a participant in local decision-making assemblies, as a member of legislative bodies, as a person holding executive office and as a member of a body which is established to represent citizens in consultation with government.⁷⁰

Article 25 of the ICCPR, differs in some aspects from Article 21 of the UDHR. For instance, the reference to not only the right but also the opportunity to take part; this reference is there to make clear to the states that the right to participate should not only be guaranteed as a right *de jure*, but also as a right *de facto*. Thus, the state is required to take so-called measures to realise the right to participate.⁷¹

Article 25, ICCPR

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity,

- a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;*
- b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;*
- c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.*

⁷⁰ Markku, 2011, p.9.

⁷¹ Ibidem p.8.

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Additionally, the institutional scope of Article 25 of the ICCPR is much broader than Article 21 of the UDHR. Whereas, Article 21 is primarily focused on the government of a country, Article 25 of the ICCPR refers to the conduct of public affairs. Institutionally speaking, participation should thus not only take place in relation to the national government, but also in relation to other levels and forms of administration, such as regional and local government levels.⁷²

⁷² Ibidem.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

As seen in this chapter ‘Governance’ as a concept has been interpreted in many different ways so as to encompass many different aspects of social organisation and the institutional framework within which social and economic activities are performed. In recent years the public perception of ‘government’ has moved from a central institution providing services within the state with absolute hierarchy over other institutions to an idea of a ‘government’ focused on steering, influencing and coordinating the actions of others actors in the political arena – in other words, a government engaged in governing. The shift in the role of government results in two processes, privatisation and decentralisation. Thus the rowing was entrusted to private and local actors.

Within this process and in the context of decentralisation, particular attention has been directed toward the local setting, which welcomes new forms of interaction, engagement and collaboration between local actors and authorities. Both parties engage in policy formulation and decision-making in key areas affecting citizens’ lives, through new participatory processes.

Forms of participation may vary depending on the circumstances and the level of involvement of the citizens. The most traditional form is political participation, which is typically reduced to the act of voting. However, participation can be stretched beyond the ballot box.⁷³ New forms and methods to exercise are emerging, wakening the interest of citizens to take part in the decision-making of the matters that affect their lives.

There is doubtless an intrinsic value in participating, since consensual decisions between the local government and citizens represent a gain in themselves. The exercise of participation goes beyond the local setting and has a universal claim, as it is established and protected by the main international human rights instruments, namely the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

⁷³ Stoker, 2003, p.1.

CHAPTER 2
LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN HONDURAS:
AN OVERVIEW

2.1 80s- 90s: ‘THE RISE OF THE MUNICIPAL REGIME’

The 80s represented a significant period in Honduras’ history. Following years of dictatorship, the country was faced with the challenge of moving towards democracy and consolidating a nascent process of democratisation. The transition to democracy and quest for democratic governability entailed a series of changes for the local government system in Honduras. From the beginning of the nineties, the municipal system underwent major legal and institutional changes, including reviews of political rules in the municipal system, financial autonomy and taxes, and the relation of powers within the local government. These changes sought to establish greater democracy at local level and to strengthen the decentralization of the state as a whole. Within this ‘new regime’, special attention was paid to the enhancement of local democracy by creating a series of mechanisms and spaces to promote civic participation, including, amongst others, open meetings, plebiscites and extended sessions, which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. Finally, the process of state reform and its consequent decentralization resulted in a new Municipalities Law in 1990.⁷⁴

In the case of Honduras it is particularly interesting to examine the situation of democracy at local level, taking into account the fact that many of the country’s issues arise at this level of government, particularly environmental problems related to mining and water. Local government is also faced with increased demand for services, employment generation

⁷⁴ Sierra Rolando & Cáliz Alvaro, *‘La Gobernabilidad Democrática Local en Honduras: Estudio en 16 Municipios’*, Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH), Tegucigalpa, 2005, p.25.

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and a necessity for poverty reduction. Moreover, with the introduction of the Municipalities Law the country's political structures have become more dynamic given the pronounced effort to strengthen local organisations, transforming them into effective political and social actors that contribute to decision-making processes of local governments.⁷⁵

2.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE IN HONDURAS

Before exploring the features of the new regime following the introduction of Municipalities' Law of 1990⁷⁶, it is important to explore two basic concepts, *municipio* (municipality) and *municipalidad* (local government). Honduras' territory is divided in 18 provinces (*departamentos*) and these are composed of 298 municipalities (*municipios*). *Municipio* is understood as a population or association of persons residing in a municipal area, ruled by a local government that exercises and extends authority over its territory. It is the basic territorial unit into which the entire country is divided and is the immediate channel of citizen participation in public affairs.⁷⁷ *Municipalidad* is the governing and administrative body of the municipality; it exists to ensure the welfare of its people, promote their overall development and preserve the environment with the authority granted by the constitution and further laws.⁷⁸

The highest authority within the municipality is the Municipal Council (*Corporación Municipal*). The council is the legislative body of the local government; councils are directly elected by the people and considered highest authority of the municipality. The Municipal Council is composed of a major, a deputy major and councilmen⁷⁹, the number

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ The original Municipalities' Law was issued in 1927, but reformed in 1990 with the Presidential Decree 134-90.

⁷⁷ Municipalities' Law of Honduras and its Regulation (in Spanish), 1990, Art. 2.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, Art. 14.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, Art. 25.

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of the latter depending on the population of the municipality⁸⁰. This is the body through which the municipality acts. In its public fortnightly and special meetings⁸¹ the Council can create, amend and derogate instruments that regulate the local affairs. It is also responsible for numerous administrative duties such as approving the annual budget and appointing the municipal officials. The major is the chairman of the council and presides over the meetings and assemblies held by this body. Furthermore, the major is the highest executive authority within the municipality and as such he/she sanctions the agreements, regulations and resolutions of the Council, making them binding to citizens and further authorities.⁸²

In legal-institutional terms, the new Municipalities' Law installed democracy at the local level. One of the central components of the Municipalities' Law is that of municipal autonomy, which states that the municipality is a political body through which citizens participate directly in the exercise of "public power". According to the law, this recently introduced municipal autonomy is based on the following assumptions: the free choice of its authorities by direct secret ballot, in accordance with the law; self-administration and decision making; power to raise its own resources and invest in benefits for the municipality, with special attention to the preservation of the environment; the development, adoption, implementation and management of its budget; the planning, organization and administration of municipal utilities and the power to create its own administrative structure and operational methods, in accordance with municipal needs.⁸³ The system formed by this municipal autonomy makes it easier to construct the conditions

⁸⁰ Ibidem, Art. 26, municipalities with less than 5,000 population 4 councilmen; Municipalities of 5.001 to 10.000 inhabitants 6 councilmen; Municipalities of 10.001 to 80.000 inhabitants eight councilmen; Municipalities with more than 80,000 inhabitants 10 councilmen.

⁸¹ Ibidem, Art. 32,34.

⁸² Ibidem, Art. 44.

⁸³ Ibidem, Art. 12.

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that allow local governance to take place. In other words, it facilitates the encounter between the local government and citizens.⁸⁴

The new local government system has developed innovative approaches to strengthen local democracy. The value of municipalities is expressed by Honduran scholar Orellana⁸⁵, who affirms that no other public entity possesses the characteristics of the municipality, which offers easy access to the local decision-making process to its citizens. The municipality is the only entity that guarantees participation, due to its size and proximity of the government to its voters. It is the fundamental body in the political community and the closest to the citizens, who it allows to participate in the management of common interests within a given territorial area. As a result, the municipality represents an authentic instrument for democratic expression. It provides advantages that cannot be ignored, since its consolidation signifies the strengthening of democracy in the minds of the politically active.

2.3 A NEW LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PARTICIPATION

‘The Awakening of Citizens’

Since the establishment of democracy in Honduras and the issuance of a new constitution in 1982, opportunities were introduced for social and citizen participation that were of fundamental importance to establishing opportunities for the genuine involvement of citizens in the public sphere. The Constitution theoretically provides a legal guarantee, almost without exception, for citizens’ participation in the democratic process; for the first time it is established that ‘the government must be based on the principle of participatory democracy’⁸⁶. However, it is important to recognise that this principle was present in the

⁸⁴ Sierra & Cálix, 2005, p. 29.

⁸⁵ Orellana Edmundo, ‘Corrupción y *Transparencia*’, pp. 125-130, in *Democracia y Gobernabilidad: Evaluación y perspectivas*, Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH), Tegucigalpa: Lithopress, 2010, p. 130.

⁸⁶ Constitución de la República de Honduras 1982 (Constitution), Art. 5.

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legal-political system for many years before it recently became familiar in the public ambit. Furthermore, other relevant breakthroughs were the punishment of acts that threaten the participation of citizens in the political sphere⁸⁷; the establishment of suffrage as a right and vote as universal, equal, mandatory, direct, free and secret⁸⁸ and liberty of association as long as it does not disturb public order⁸⁹. Although the Constitution of 1982 paved the way towards a more participative democracy, it is obvious that most of the spaces and guarantees are related to political participation.

The Municipalities Law of 1990 appears to be the most significant legislative instrument for the promotion of local participation. By presenting new mechanisms and spaces that encourage active interaction between citizens and local governments, the law broke new ground. A number of significant policies encouraging participation have subsequently been published. Presidential Agreement No. 01-93, issued on 12th January 1992 established the “National Policy and Program of Municipal Decentralisation and Strengthening” within the framework of the modernisation of the state.

In 2006, the government of José Manuel Zelaya Rosales instigated a national effort to promote rising levels of participation. The Citizen Participation Law was approved and aimed to ‘promote, regulate and establish the bodies and mechanisms that allow the organization and functioning of participation and its relationship with State’s bodies’⁹⁰. This law sought to complement and broaden what was already established in the Municipalities Law regarding citizen participation. Furthermore, it recognised the principles upon which citizen participation should be founded, namely participatory democracy, shared responsibility, inclusion, solidarity, legality, respect, tolerance and persistency. The law emphasised a number of participatory mechanisms, namely plebiscite,

⁸⁷ Ibidem, Art.45.

⁸⁸ Ibidem, Art.44.

⁸⁹ Ibidem, Art.78.

⁹⁰ Citizen Participation Law (in Spanish) Art.1. (This law is currently derogated).

referendum, municipal open meetings, and introduced ‘citizen initiatives’.⁹¹ However, following the coup d’état that removed Zelaya Rosales from power in 2009, the Citizen Participation Law was abolished by the interim government on the grounds that it had been utilized by the overthrown president to extend his term in office.

2.3.1 Participation Mechanisms at Local Level in Honduras

In response to the need to tighten the relationship between local government and citizens, the Municipalities Law establishes specific mechanisms that enable citizens to engage in participatory experiences within the framework of local government. These mechanisms are plebiscite, open meetings, community boards (*patronatos*), municipal development boards, working committees and auxiliary majors. The mechanisms established in the Municipalities Law are mostly consultative, allowing for discussion and consultation between citizens and local authorities (See Table 3).

⁹¹ Article 5 of the derogated law defined it as a mechanism that permits citizens to request authorities to issue opinions and make proposals to solve collective problems affecting them and provide assistance in execution of works or provision of services.

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TABLE 4. PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS IN HONDURAS⁹²

Mechanism	Description	Legal Basis
Plebiscite	This is a consultative mechanism for citizens of a municipality to participate in decision making processes of issues that are critical for the community. They can only be summoned by the Municipal Council. Its outcome is of obligatory implementation and must be published.	Articles 15, 19 and 25 (10) of the Municipalities Law.
Popular Assembly	Popular Assemblies constitute an instrument of direct communication between the municipal government and the residents of a municipality, partially or totally, and representatives of local organizations legally constituted. The aim of these meetings is to contribute to a more effective local government, responsive to the needs of population and serve to an expression of the popular will. According to the Law there has to be no less than five a year and they are convened by the Municipal Council.	Articles 25 (9) and 32 of the Municipalities Law; article 19 of the Municipalities' Law Regulation.
Community Boards (patronatos)	They are a manifestation of the right of association. It is an organizational structure based on common interests that favour a particular community. The State recognizes its legal personality. Citizens may join the community boards without restrictions.	Article 302 of the Constitution and Article 62 of the Municipalities Law.
Municipal Development Council	This is considered an advisory body and of support to the Municipal Council. It promotes and participates in the development of the municipality. It has to be formed by a number of members equal to the one of councilmen. The members are selected by the council from amongst society. ⁹³	Article 48 of the Municipalities Law. Article 49-53 Municipalities' Law Regulation
Auxiliary Majors	They are appointed by the Municipal Corporation on a proposal from the major, who chooses from a list submitted by the Community Board. The auxiliary majors are representatives of the Major and serve as liaisons between neighborhoods and villages and the Municipal Council.	Article 60 and 61 of the Municipalities Law.
Working Committees	They can be permanent or temporary, appointed to resolve specific issues of interest to the local government. Their members are councilmen and there can be as much committees as needed.	Article 25 of the Municipalities Law.

Source: Own making.

⁹² The mechanisms established in the present table are not exhaustive.

⁹³ In the case of Santa Rosa de Copán they are formed by the coordinators of the Citizen Committees

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From the mechanisms previously exposed, the first three, namely plebiscites, popular assemblies and community boards, are deemed to be the most important, since their essence is community-based and aim to be truly representative.⁹⁴

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

During the transition to democracy in Honduras, the local context was granted a significant position. After the dismantling of the dictatorship and the installation of democracy, particularly in the nineties, a growing interest in strengthening the municipal regime emerged. With the introduction of the Municipalities Law in the nineties, the municipalities were endowed with new attributes. In particular, the local government gained autonomy and created spaces and mechanisms to foster active citizen participation in public life. In legal terms at least, Honduras appears to be progressing in the direction of governance. However, in the next chapter it will become evident that though legislative innovations have indeed emerged in the context of participation, these spaces have not in fact translated into the successful practice of governance at local level.

⁹⁴ It is important to note that plebiscite was not clearly regulated in the law, as it did not establish the rules of procedure, however, in December 2012; a Citizen Participation Mechanisms Law was approved, aiming to clarify this gap in the previous legislation. See La Prensa, available at <http://www.laprensa.hn/Secciones-Principales/Honduras/Apertura/Congreso-de-Honduras-aprueba-ley-que-regulara-el-plebiscito-y-referendum#.UdwsDfnLqSo> (Consulted on 09 July 2013).

CHAPTER 3

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY THROUGH GOVERNANCE: A NEW
ROLE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN HONDURAS?

The transfer of power from the national to local level through the process of decentralisation is an important prerequisite of governance, as emphasised in previous sections of this paper. In the particular case of Honduras, this process has been underway throughout the past two decades, in which (at least in legal terms) new powers have been granted to local government and new spaces opened that encourage the participation of citizens in public life. This participation typically extends beyond the traditional channels of political engagement, namely elections. However, throughout this chapter it becomes manifest that ensuring the participation of citizens in political life requires more than the passing of legislation, given that research suggests that participatory spaces have not translated into successful practices of governance at local level. Nonetheless, in Honduras the importance of locality is more valid than ever, as is evident from its potential to exact a positive impact on citizens in a period where public discontent with governmental institutions is significant. This impact will be determined by one important element – participation.⁹⁵

Two existing studies will be employed for the purposes of this chapter; Political Culture, Governance and Democracy in Honduras and Culture of Democracy in Honduras.⁹⁶ Both studies were published by the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). The

⁹⁵ Throughout this chapter participation is measured based on two main activities: Attendance to Municipal Meetings and Demand-making to the Local Government. Political Participation is excluded.

⁹⁶ Coleman Keneth & Argueta José René, *The impact in of Local Government Performance and Civil Society Participation on the Support for Stable Democracy*, pp. 62-100, in Coleman & Argueta, 'Political Culture, Governance and Democracy in Honduras', LAPOP-Vanderbilt University, July 2008. Available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/2008-politicalculture.pdf> (Consulted on 9 July 2013) / Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, *Political Culture of Democracy in Honduras and the Americas, 2012: Towards Equality of Opportunity*, LAPOP-Vanderbilt University, April 2013, pp. 141-163. Available at http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/Honduras_Country_Report_2012_English_W.pdf (Consulted on 9 July 2013).

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LAPOP is a project that has studied democratic values and behaviours in the Americas since its inception over two decades ago until present. These studies cited in this paper were carried out with the help of Americas Barometer (one of its many activities), the only survey of democratic public opinion and behaviours that covers the Americas (North, South, Central and the Caribbean).⁹⁷

3.1 TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN HONDURAS

Figure 2 shows average levels of trust throughout the Americas. The highest levels of trust in the region were reported in El Salvador, Venezuela, and Chile. In contrast, low levels of trust were reported in Perú and Haiti. Local governments in Honduras receive a trust rating of 46.6 on the 0-100 scale. This measurement represents a relatively low trust level, but is favourable when compared to levels of trust in other state institutions, demonstrated in Figure 3.⁹⁸ This outcome could be explained by Frederickson's 'paradox of distance'. This theory states that citizens are often sceptical when questioned in general, more abstract terms, but relatively satisfied with more specific services. While people trust government officials who are near at hand, they believe that distant government officials are lazy, incompetent and probably dishonest.⁹⁹ In relation to the former response suggested by Frederickson's 'paradox of distance', it could be contended that when Hondurans are asked about their trust in the central government institutions *vis-à-vis* the local government, they may tend to relate trust with the delivery of specific services or better said public services. Thus, it is only logical that municipalities, as the closest level of government to the citizens,

⁹⁷ For more information visit: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>. (Consulted on 9 July 2013).

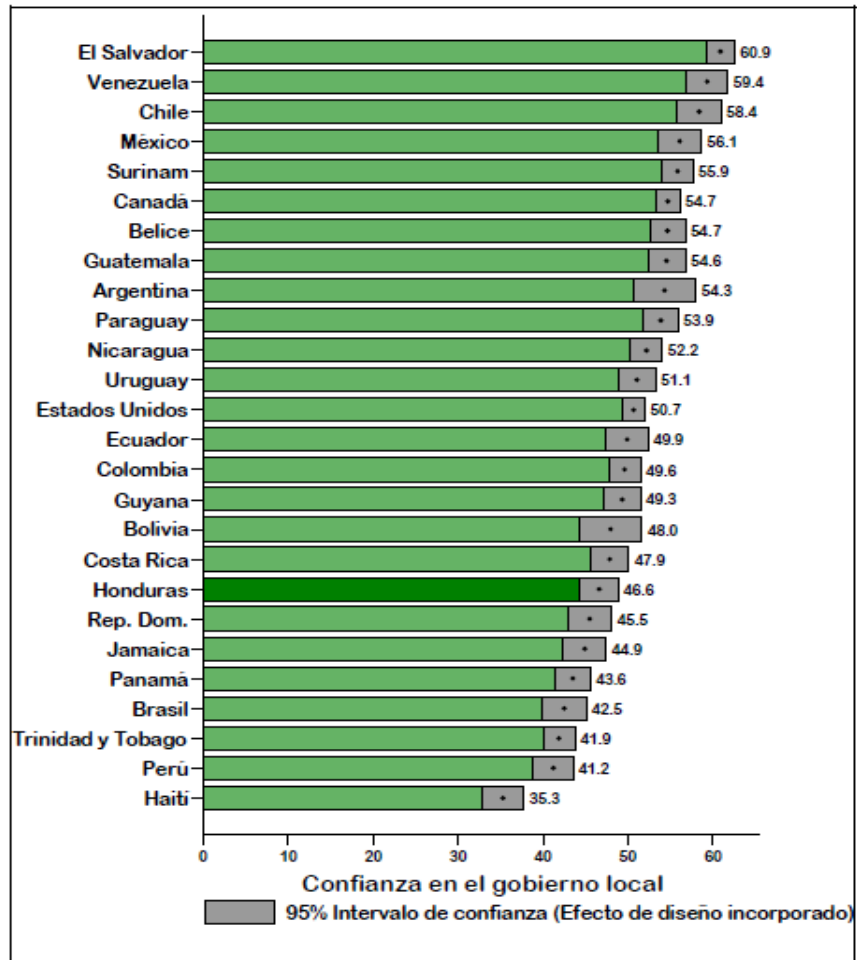
⁹⁸ A score of 46.6 on the 0-100 scale (0 being none trust and 100 being a lot of trust) exhibiting very low levels of trust compared with many of the countries in the region.

⁹⁹ Quoted in: Christesen Tom & Lægreid Per, '*Trust in Government: The Relative of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors and Demography*', Working Paper 18-2002, Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Bergen University Research Foundation, November 2002, p.7.

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influence the perception that citizens have regarding the delivery of services and consequently trust. Furthermore, opinions of the central government may be coloured by macroeconomic factors e.g. economic performance and levels of unemployment, which in Honduras are not exactly flourishing.

FIGURE 2. TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

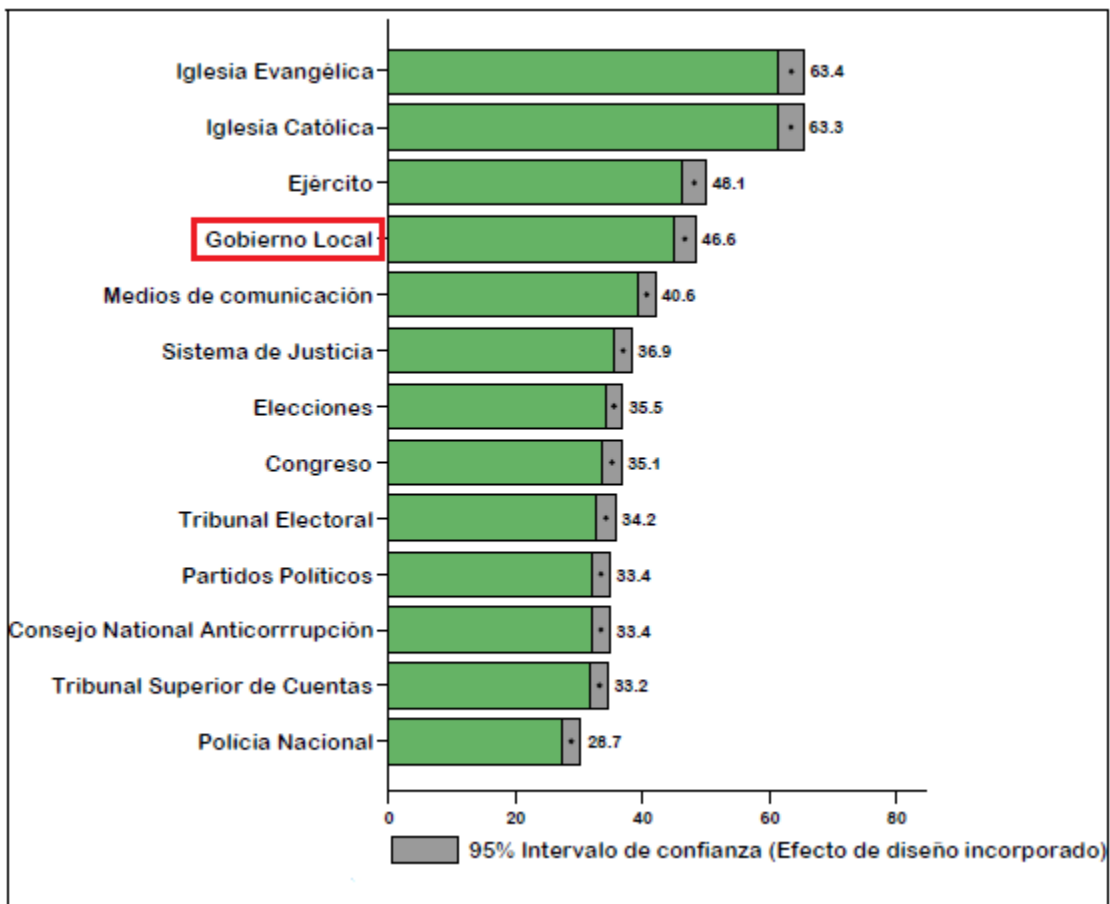


Source: Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.157.

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As underlined before, the levels of trust in the local governments are actually higher than those of other state institutions (See Figure 3), such as the Congress, the Police, and the Political Parties, which makes it the more plausible, among a list of no-very-plausible institutions for leading reforms efforts.

FIGURE 3.COMPARISON OF TRUST EXHIBITED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.¹⁰⁰



Source: Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.135

¹⁰⁰ In order from the top down: Evangelic Church, Catholic Church, Army, Local Government, Media, Justice System, Elections, Congress, Electoral Tribunal, Political Parties, Anticorruption Council, Supreme Audit Court and Police (In Spanish).

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3.2 PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN HONDURAS

Nevertheless, although Hondurans seem to have more trust in their local governments (at least compared to the other government institutions), they are barely interested in engaging into activities with the local government. In 2008, only one in ten citizens reported to have attended municipal meetings (See Figure 4).

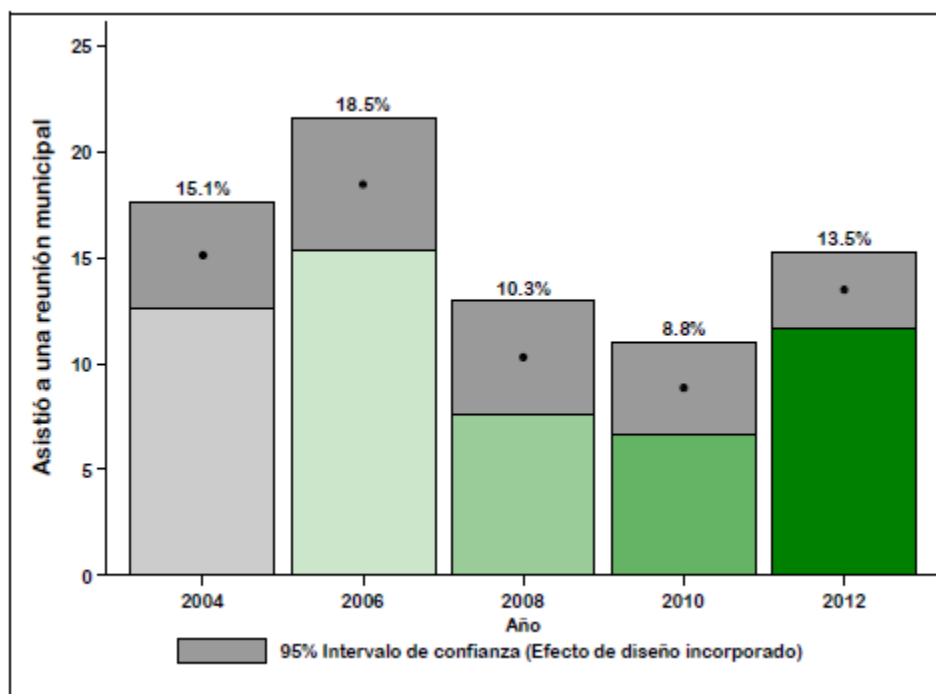
FIGURE 4. PARTICIPATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN HONDURAS



Source: Coleman & Argueta, 2008, p.72

However, compared with 2008 where 10.3% participated in local government meetings, there is a minor increase in 2012 with 13.5% of citizens. Still the number is quite low if compared to 2006. (See Figure 5)

FIGURE 5. PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT MEETINGS 2004-2012



Source: Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.146

As emphasised in chapter 1, it cannot be denied that there is an intrinsic value to participation; the fact that citizens are actively involved in decision-making in their respective communities is good in itself. Though the advantages of increased participation are indisputable, convincing citizens to participate is no easy task. Gaventa & Valderrama¹⁰¹ identify a number of barriers encountered by those seeking to participate in local government:¹⁰²

- *Power Relations*, citizen participation is about power and its exercise by different social actors in spaces specifically created to facilitate interaction between citizens and local authorities. However, the control of the structure and processes of

¹⁰¹ Gaventa & Valderrama ,1999, pp. 6-9.

¹⁰² Based in an evaluation of studies carried out in the context of development countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

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participation - defining spaces, actors, agendas, procedures - usually rests in the hands of governmental institutions and can become a barrier to the effective involvement of citizens.

- *Level of citizen organisation*, citizens are most able to counter existing powers relations where there is some history of effective grassroots organisation or social movement.
- *Participatory Skills*, as progress is made from lower to higher levels of participation, participatory processes become more complex and demand different types of skills knowledge, experience, leadership and managerial qualities.
- *Political Will*, a strong and determined central authority in providing and enforcing opportunities for participation at the local level is an important prerequisite.
- *Level of participation*, strengthening of local governance participation related to strengthening direct citizen involvement in decision-making by individuals or groups involved in public activities, through newly established institutional channels.
- A final obstacle to enhanced participation is the limited availability of *financial resources* at the local level.

In addition, not only Hondurans are not interested in attending municipal meetings but they are reluctant to make demands in their local government. According to this criterion, the level of participation of Hondurans is even lower. In 2008, only 1 of every 13 Hondurans has made a demand on or presented a petition to their local government (See Figure 6).

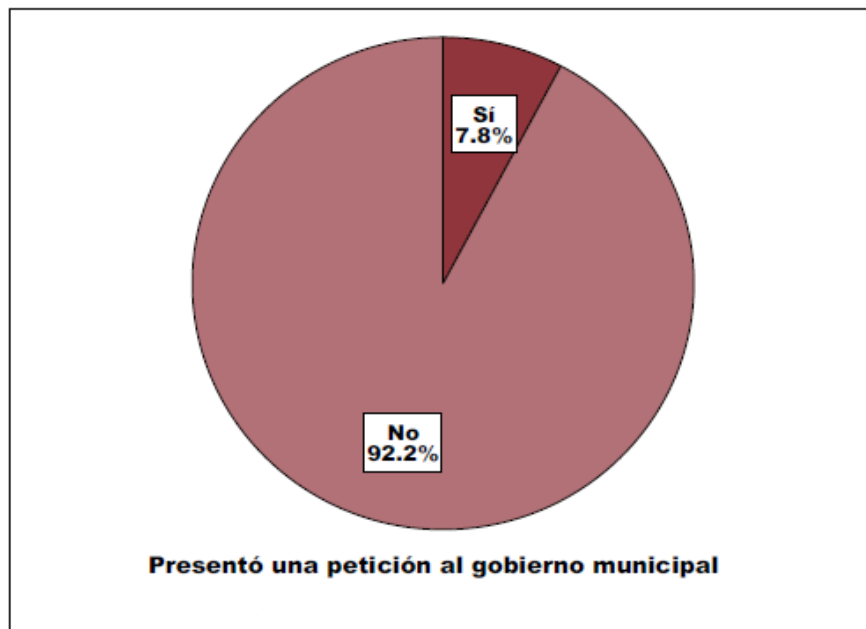
A Honduran scholar considers barriers to participation in a similar manner. Cáliz¹⁰³ states that ‘There is no doubt that though the opportunities are existent, there are still factors that limit the exercise of participation and hold back citizens from taking action in handling their own interests. Some of these factors might be lack of awareness of the population

¹⁰³ Cáliz Jorge, ‘*Participación Ciudadana: Experiencia en el Municipio de Santa Rosa de Copán (Parte I)*’, Proyecto Descentralización y Desarrollo Municipal (PNUD/ASDI), Municipalidad de Santa Rosa de Copán, October 2002, p. 13.

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about the importance of participating in decision making; lack of political will of the authorities to give openness to citizen participation; lack of operational capacity of the municipality and/or the government in response to citizen demands; lack of sufficient financial resources to promote public participation processes; lack of tools, methods and experiences to conduct participatory processes'¹⁰⁴

FIGURE 6. DEMAND-MAKING DIRECTED TOWARD THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Source: Coleman & Argueta, 2008, p.75

Combining the last two criteria, participation in local government meetings and demand-making to the local government, it is clear that citizens who attend local government meetings are 30% more likely to present a petition or demand to local government than those who do not (See Figure 7). According to Blair, two factors distinguish democratic local government from other forms of decentralisation, namely participation and

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

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accountability. In the process of local governance, participation promises to increase popular input into the decisions of local government, while accountability increases popular control over the actions (or inaction) of local political representatives.¹⁰⁵ Following Blair's reasoning, it is possible to analyse the previous figure. Citizens who attend municipal meetings are more likely to perceive these meetings as a method of increasing accountability. Thus, by participating in meetings and inputting into the decision-making of local government, citizens may feel entitled to make demands of their public representatives and to receive a response in return. In other words, they feel politicians should be accountable to the public.

On one hand, participation involves the cooperation of state and non-state stakeholders in a process of communication and negotiation that influences decision-making that affects their lives. Participation leads to the creation and sustenance of accountability. Accountability allows citizens to hold government accountable for decisions that affect their interests. A sense of the right to accountability forms a basis from which citizens can act, and leads to openness and transparency in policy-making.¹⁰⁶ Such openness and transparency may be displayed to citizens who attend municipal meetings. These citizens consequently make demands of local government, recognising that there is a space in which to express dissatisfaction, and hold responsible officials accountable if necessary.

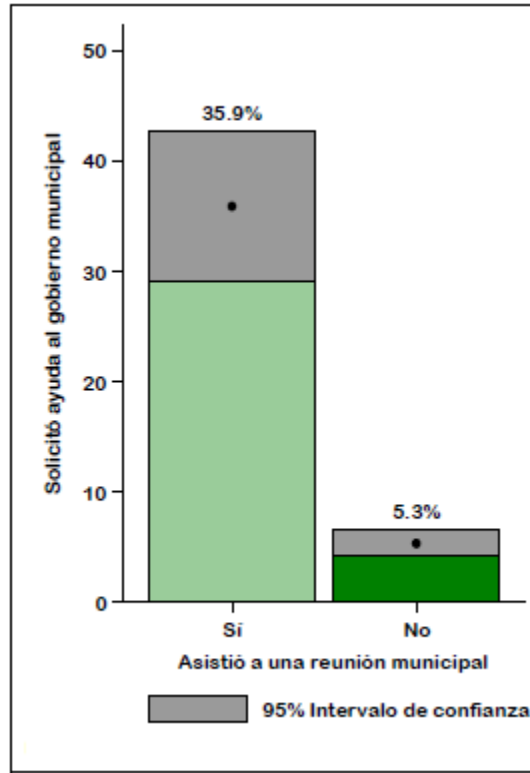
On the other hand, citizens who do not participate in municipal meetings may not possess such a sense of the right to accountability, as they have not contributed to the governance process. Similar reasoning can also be applied to political participation. Free, fair, regularly scheduled elections and universal suffrage constitute the most direct mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of governing parties to citizens.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Blair Harry, '*Participation and Accountability at the Periphery: Democratic Local Governance in Six Countries*', pp. 21-39, in *World Development*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2000, p.22.

¹⁰⁶ Tandon Rajesh, '*Linking Citizenship, Participation and Accountability: A perspective from PRIA*', in *Innovations in Civil Society, PRIA*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 2001, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁷ Blair, 2000, p.27.

FIGURE 7. RELATION BETWEEN ATTENDING MUNICIPAL MEETINGS AND DEMAND MAKING TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Source: Adapted from Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.150.

In that sense, citizens who exercise their vote may be more likely to possess a sense of a right to accountability than those who do not directly participate in the election of local authorities. However, citizen participation in municipal meetings can be deemed more meaningful, as they take place more frequently than every four years, thus allowing people to express their likes and dislikes and views on specific proposals on a more regular basis.

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Municipal meetings represent a vehicle through which citizens can publicise their views and uncover the wrongdoings of the local government.¹⁰⁸

3.3 RESPONSIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN HONDURAS

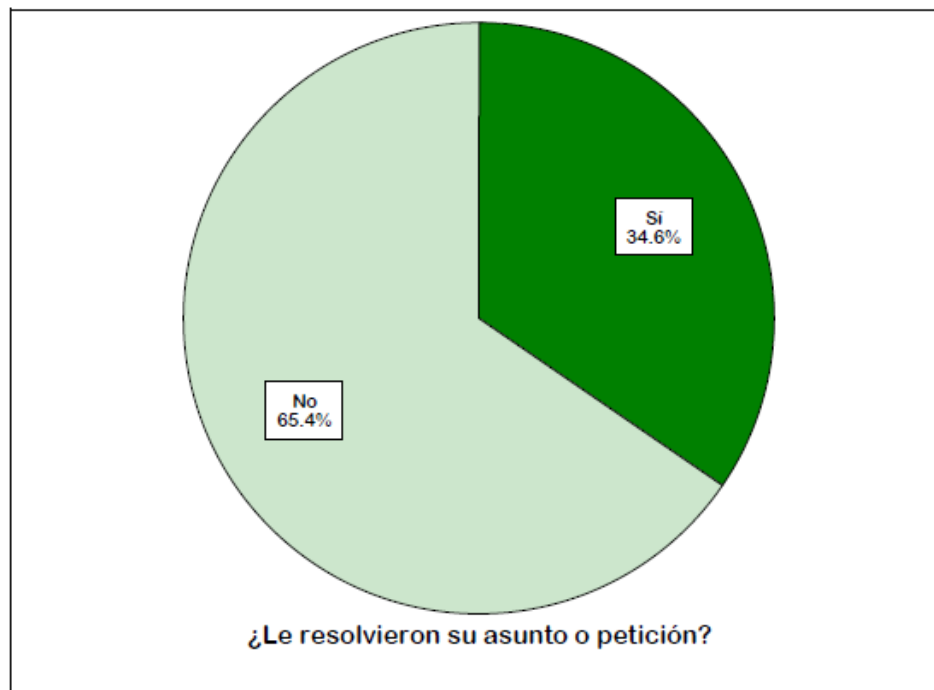
The fact that citizens who participate in activities with local government are more likely to make demands of it is overshadowed by Figure 8. In this figure, it can be observed that more than half (65.4%) of the citizens who presented a petition or demand to the local government did not receive a solution.¹⁰⁹ In attempts to create new spaces in which citizens can directly engage in decision-makings, it is crucial to adopt appropriate strategies and methods. Though such strategies and methods have already been adopted in Honduras, as explained in the previous chapter, it is important to recognise that their effectiveness largely depends on the position of the state. Thus in processes of meaningful decentralisation, both power and resources must be transferred from the central to local government, in order for the latter to become more responsive to its citizens. In the case of Honduras, the non-responsiveness of local government can be attributed to its lack of necessary financial resources to successfully perform its duties. At the same time, this factor may also have a negative effect on participation, as it can openly discourage, or even suppress citizens' initiative to increase participation in local governance, as mentioned earlier in the chapter.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ This percentage is based only in the people who presented a petition or demand to the local government.

¹¹⁰ Learning Initiative on Citizen Participation and Local Governance (Logolink), '*Citizen Participation and Local Governance: Review and Annotated Bibliography*', 2001, p.6. Available at: <http://www.logolink.org/index.php/resource/center/536> (Consulted on 21 May 2013).

FIGURE 8.SOLUTION TO THE DEMANDS MADE TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.



Source: Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.149

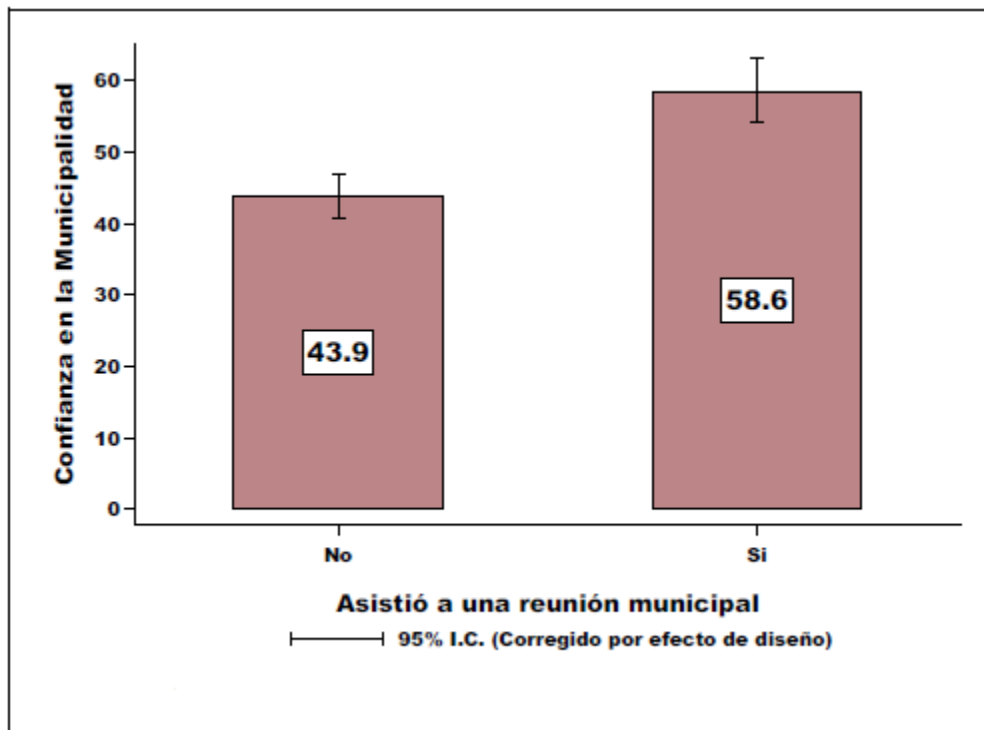
While the importance of citizen participation in local governance cannot be overstated, the willingness of local government to engage in governance, and its ability to effectively exploit newly created legal spaces, is also crucial.¹¹¹ In other words, local authorities must have the political will to provide and constantly reinforce the space granted to citizens to express their needs and make demands. This statement is particularly relevant when examining the following figure, as participation carries benefits not just for citizens, but also for local authorities.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, p.7

3.4 PARTICIPATION AND LEGITIMACY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Interestingly enough, trust in local government is clearly affected by participation. The 2008 LAPOP study confirms that there is a marked difference in levels of trust in local government between those who have attended municipal meetings and those who have not (See Figure 9). The figure shows that those who have attended municipal meetings are inclined to express significantly higher levels of satisfaction with their local government than those who have not attended such meetings.¹¹²

FIGURE 9.EFFECT ON TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BY ATTENDANCE TO MEETINGS



Source: Coleman & Argueta, 2008, p.7

¹¹² 58.5 to 43.9 on the 0-100 scale, 0 being none trust and 100 being a lot of trust.

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Participation is vital in helping to sustain the legitimacy of decisions; especially if there is a need to reconstruct public confidence in political institutions and the most powerful way to do that is to seek active citizen endorsement of the policies and practices of public bodies. Governments need to listen and learn to design better policies and services. This is the best way in which public services are going to meet people's needs. In that respect effective channels of communication are also essential to achieving many wider social and economic outcomes of concern to local public bodies.¹¹³ The existence of channels or their expansion plus the encouragement of major forms of participation leads to a greater feeling of wellbeing among citizens and their more willing acceptance of governmental rules and order.¹¹⁴ Hence, it can be argued that participation makes it 'easier' for local authorities to rule.

3.5 TRUST IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT V. TRUST IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN HONDURAS

Finally, Figure 10 highlights that remarkably, Hondurans trust their local government more than the central government (46.6% v. 36.5% respectively). This finding has remained constant for many years. Nevertheless, trust in either institution does not receive a mark above 50; this may imply the existence of a general tendency of distrust of Hondurans towards government at any level.¹¹⁵ Several factors influence levels of trust in government. One proposition is that trust in government can be composed of both institutional and personal components. People may trust the system or the individual actors they encounter or observe, including both central political leaders and actors in the administration and the public service sector. In other circumstances, citizens may trust the political democratic system, but distrust current leaders or other political actors. This distrust may be influenced by the mass media or first-hand negative experiences with government representatives. A

¹¹³ Stoker, 2007, pp.11-12.

¹¹⁴ Nahtigal & Brezovsek, 2011, p.189.

¹¹⁵ Coleman & Argueta, 2008, pp.200-201.

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third possibility is that people may trust certain political and administrative leaders because of their achievements and personal charisma, while displaying feelings of distrust toward the institutional features of the political-administrative system. A fourth outcome is that citizens may distrust both the political system and specific government representatives.

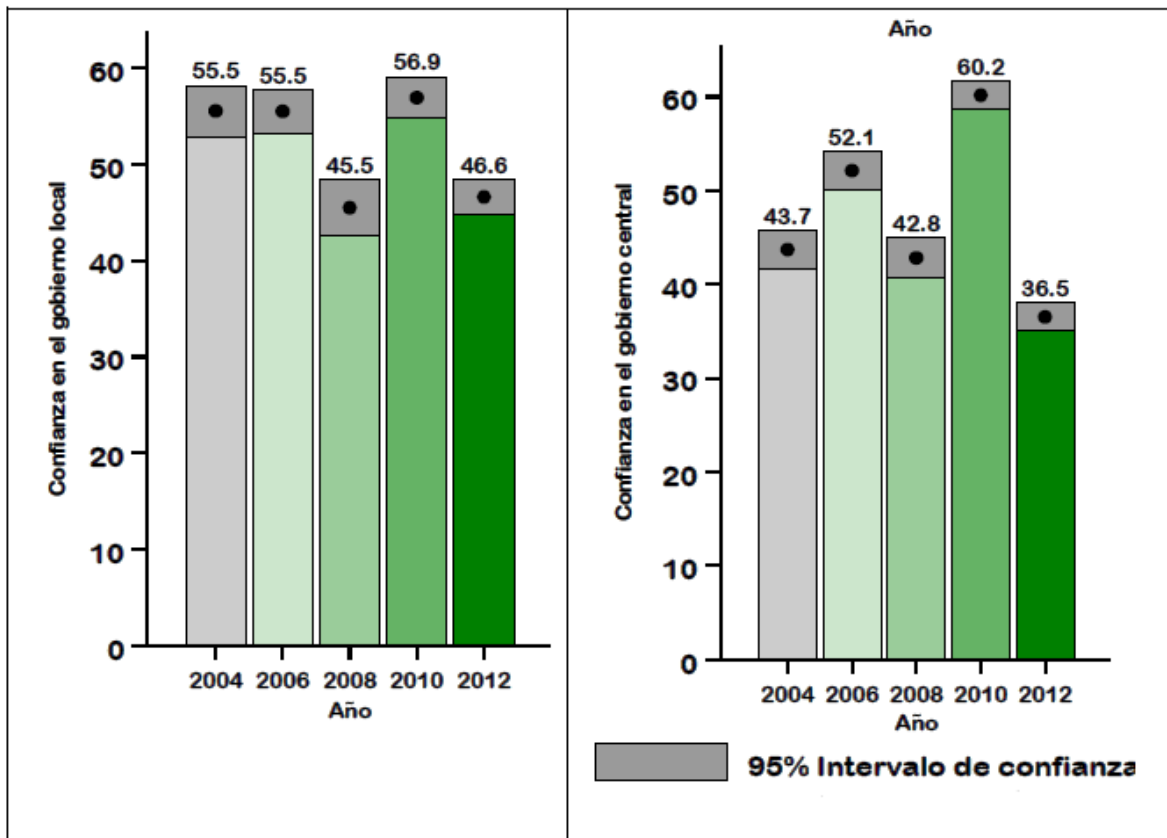
Time constitutes a further variable. Trust in government may be based on cumulative experience over a long period of time, on the current political situation or on future expectations of government. The higher the level of trust inspired by the current government, the more likely a person will express specific support and trust of its institutions. Long-term experience points more in the direction of diffuse support and trust.¹¹⁶ It is difficult to determine the factors that influence the levels of trust or distrust of in the central government in Honduras based solely on charts. However, it is likely that trust is based not simply on personal, but also on institutional or even time-related components, as outlined above. Evidence suggests that the trust in the current government of Porfirio Lobo Sosa is influenced by experiences of the population over a period of time. In the case of this government, experiences have not been positive, and include high crime rates, actions of organised crime and an overall difficult economic situation in Honduras (macro factors), as well as the failure of Sosa to meet objectives outlined during his political campaign.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Christesen Tom & Læg Reid Per, '*Trust in Government: The Relative of Service Satisfaction, Political Factors and Demography*', Working Paper 18-2002, Stein Rokkan Centre for Social Studies, Bergen University Research Foundation, November 2002, pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁷ According to: El Heraldo, <http://www.elheraldo.hn/Secciones-Principales/Pais/Imagen-de-Pepe-Lobo-sigue-en-picada-segun-encuesta-realizada-en-toda-Honduras> (Consulted on 7 June 2013).

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FIGURE 10. TRUST IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT V. TRUST IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN HONDURAS



Source: Montalvo, Montoya & Pérez, 2013, p.200.

3.6 CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, a general discontent exists among Hondurans towards their governmental institutions. This discontent can be observed at any level. Furthermore, compared to other countries in the region, the levels of trust of Hondurans in the local government are significantly low. However, Hondurans are more satisfied with their local government than any other state institution. This satisfaction can be attributed to the level of citizen participation in the dynamics of local government, by making demands, submitting petitions or attending municipal meetings. The more citizens participate, the higher their level of trust in local government.

This trust may however be at stake due to the incapability of local government to respond to the needs of its citizens. A meaningful process of decentralisation from central to local government could make a difference in this regard.

Nevertheless, the relatively positive evaluation of the local governments should not be underrated. On the contrary, throughout the previous analysis, there is an underlying appeal to take heed of local government and its potential to improve the current crisis. According to Coleman & Argueta¹¹⁸, while Hondurans remain distrustful of all governmental institutions, those who do participate in local government tend to be more satisfied with its performance; and satisfaction with local government has positive consequences for the larger political culture in various ways. ‘Thinking globally’ about the Honduran polity, the best route for enhancing Honduran democracy may well be ‘to act locally’. Consequently, local governments should endeavour to increase the presence and involvement of citizens in decision-making processes.

¹¹⁸ Coleman & Argueta, 2008, p. xxiii.

CHAPTER 4

FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE:
THE CASE OF SANTA ROSA DE COPÁN¹¹⁹

In light of the general distrust in the governmental institutions of the country and the relative ‘popularity’ of local government in comparison with other state institutions, there is a flagrant need for Honduras to take heed of the local context.

The local government has an important role to play in creating the conditions in which governance occurs, particularly through strengthening one essential aspect, namely citizen participation. Conventional wisdom places citizen activity in local civil society organisations at the centre of the process of democratisation. In the global context, few citizens have contact with any level of government above that of local authority, though it is not uncommon for citizens to have direct, personal and sometime frequent contact with local elected officials.¹²⁰ This may lead to the assumption that citizens who relate to government at local level only may form impressions based solely on these experiences. Therefore, it could be contended that a significant portion of citizens formulate views on democracy based on interactions with the local level of government.¹²¹ In this chapter, this role will be analysed closely, taking one municipality - Santa Rosa de Copán- as an example. In particular, the case of “citizen committees” will be considered. Citizen committees are civil society organisations that represent in appearance are a real manifestation of governance, and by extension, democracy. This chapter aims to assess the performance of the committees by analysing difference aspects of their creation, objectives and respective roles in the political arena.

¹¹⁹ Santa Rosa de Copán is the largest and most important city of western Honduras with a population of 40,309. All the government institutions of the department of Copán are centralised in Santa Rosa. According to: Municipalidad de Santa Rosa de Copán, available at: <http://santarosacopan.org/index.php?id=6> (Consulted on 9 July 2013).

¹²⁰ Ibidem, p.62.

¹²¹ Ibidem, p.142.

4.1. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CITIZEN COMMITTEES

It can be argued that the 90s were rather uneventful for Santa Rosa de Copán in terms of participation; its role in the promotion of participation was deemed to be rather discreet. A document prepared for the Decentralization and Municipal Development Project of the UNDP¹²² best describes the situation of Santa Rosa de Copán in terms of participation during late 90s: According to Cáliz¹²³ some practices of participation such as popular assemblies were taking place without relevant results, mainly due to the lack of commitment of local government in complying with the agreements reached at the meetings. In time, the municipality reduced the number of assemblies; the last attempt to make one in 1997 was unsuccessful and it was not concluded because of the reason previously mentioned.¹²⁴ In 1998, a new local government assumed power and found itself with a highly discredited municipality and the difficult task of renewing the credibility of the local government among citizens. Moreover, civil society organisations were disjointed and non-functioning, to the point that they could be considered non-existent.

In the light of the above, an evaluation was carried out by the Decentralization and Municipal Development Project in order to assess the shortcomings of the local government functions and the perception of citizens towards it. The evaluation assessed the perceptions of the role of local government among three main groups – citizens, municipal employees and members of the municipal council. The assessment concluded that the lack of credibility of the local government was triggered by two main factors – a limited capacity to respond to the growing demand for maintenance and improvement of utilities and a deficiency in the delivery of services to the public in general.¹²⁵

¹²² The project was executed by the UNDP and financed by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

¹²³ Cáliz, 2002, p.15.

¹²⁴ Ibidem p.18; according to Article 19 of the Municipalities Law Regulation the popular assemblies will be held at least 5 times a year. However, in an interview contained in the same document to an ex municipal official, he confirms that in 1995 there were only 4 assemblies held and in 1996 only 3.

¹²⁵ Ibidem, p.19.

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This outcome drew attention to the fact that the local government was incapable of responding to all of the society's demands in a unilateral way. Finally, the evaluation formed a basis for a local government strategy that aimed to promote development in a participatory manner, involving civil society organisations, institutions and the general public. In the context of a popular assembly¹²⁶ on 20th June 1998, the Municipal Council proposed, as a part of the strategy, the creation of citizen committees, a municipal development council and the implementation of legal mechanisms such as popular assemblies and plebiscites, to facilitate the interaction amongst the actors involved (See Table 4). Finally after the deliberation of the proposal and the agreement of participants, local government progressed with the creation of citizen committees.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ According to the author in the assembly there were 147 participants from public and private institutions, so as civil society.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, p.6.

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TABLE 5. STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANISATIONS, MECHANISMS AND MAIN ACTORS IN PARTICIPATION.

Territorial Level	Organisations		Mechanisms	
	Name	Members	Name	Members
Local: Neighbourhood, Village, Suburbs.	Community Boards: 44 urban and 23 rural	Citizens	Meetings Asemblies Popular Assemblies	Citizens Coordinators
Municipal	Citizen Committees	Organisations (social, professional, cooperatives) and Citizens.	Meetings Assemblies	Members Coordinators
Municipal	Municipal Development Council	Coordinators of the Citizen Committes and the Major	Meetings Asemblies Popular Assemblies	Citizens Coordinators Members Social Leaders
Municipal	Local Strategic Development Agency	Chamber of Commerce and Citizen Committees	Meetings Assemblies	Members Coordinators

Source: Cálix, 2002, p.28

4.2 EXPERIENCES OF CITIZEN COMMITTEES

The citizen committees are civil society organisations formed and based on common interests. As explained by Cálix, the main purpose in creating committees was to promote a participatory management of public affairs, strengthen the accountability of the local government and enhance democracy at local level. The experience went beyond the law, as there was no explicit legal basis for its creation. However, the committees pursued greater participation and commitment from the authorities and civil society, bearing in mind the

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assumption that development is everyone's responsibility and not a prerogative of the local government.¹²⁸

Initially only ten committees were organised¹²⁹. Once the committees were formed, they were organized internally with a board (coordinator, secretary, treasurer). The Major at that time¹³⁰ appointed a municipal official to provide technical support to each of the committees. The official was tasked with advising coordinators of the role of their respective committees, in order to assist in the implementation of agreements that the committee might consider in their respective sessions or assemblies. After their initial establishment, municipal officials trained committee members in specific issues including the role of municipalities and participative strategies. Each committee subsequently began to construct its objectives and work plans, and explore the legal regulations governing their operations. They then developed strategic plans that outlined their interest area and identified and defined strategies and prioritised project ideas.¹³¹

Although it appeared that the strategy was effectively implemented, concerns arose in relation to the sustainability of the newly created committees. The fact that the committees were established and promoted by local government with the backing of foreign aid made them vulnerable organisations that would most likely depend on external assistance in order to be financially and politically sustainable.¹³² In 2002, the local government proposed the establishment of an organisation that would address of the issue of the sustainability of the committees, and go beyond this in a number of ways, as expressed by the Major Juan Carlos Elvir: 'Its aim will be to contribute to the development of the municipality, boosting economic activity, improving social infrastructure and strengthening the civil society's

¹²⁸ Ibidem, pp.22-23.

¹²⁹ Currently there are fourteen committees: Committee on Economic Development Commission, Education and Culture, Transparency, Tourism, Environment, Preservation of the Historic Quarter, Youth, Emergencies and Disasters, Women Solidarity, Traffic and Public Safety Committee, Sports (Infrastructure), Children, Municipal Water Company of Santa Rosa and Federation of Community Boards.

¹³⁰ Juan Carlos Elvir was the major for two consecutive periods 1998-2004.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem, p.48.

management capacity; specifically it seeks to improve levels of production, employment and income of poor families, expand opportunities for social and productive investment and strengthen the capacities of the Citizen Committees'.¹³³

The Local Strategic Development Agency (ADELSAR¹³⁴) was created in 2002 with technical and financial support of the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and Development (AECID) and the UNDP. The agency describes itself as: 'A permanent, joint, collective, non-political institution, with a legal personality that functions with administrative autonomy and constituted by the representation of the Citizen Committees, Chamber of Commerce and Local Government'.¹³⁵

4.2.1 Political Participation in Santa Rosa de Copán

Political participation is of central importance to democracy because it ensures and enables citizens to have an impact on the selection of political representatives and co-operate in processes of forming, adopting and implementing public policies. Voter turnout is an important indicator of the level of development of local democracy within a society. Low voter turnout weakens the democratic basis of local self-government, as representatives are selected by a distinct minority of the entire electorate, raising the question of political representativeness.¹³⁶ However, a decrease in voter turnout in the last decade in Santa Rosa de Copán may suggest that participatory strategies (e.g. citizen committees) are effectively achieving their objectives, allowing citizens to bypass the electoral process, and consequently supplanting political participation in its traditional form (See Figure 11).

¹³³ Cáliz Jorge, 'Documento de Base de la Agencia de Desarrollo Estratégico Local del Municipio de Santa Rosa de Copán (ADELSAR)', Municipalidad de Santa Rosa de Copán; Proyecto de Descentralización y Desarrollo del Municipio (PNUD/ASDI), Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, August 2002, p.3.

¹³⁴ Spanish Acronym. Its stands for: Agencia de Desarrollo Estratégico Local.

¹³⁵ See 'Descripción Institucional' available at

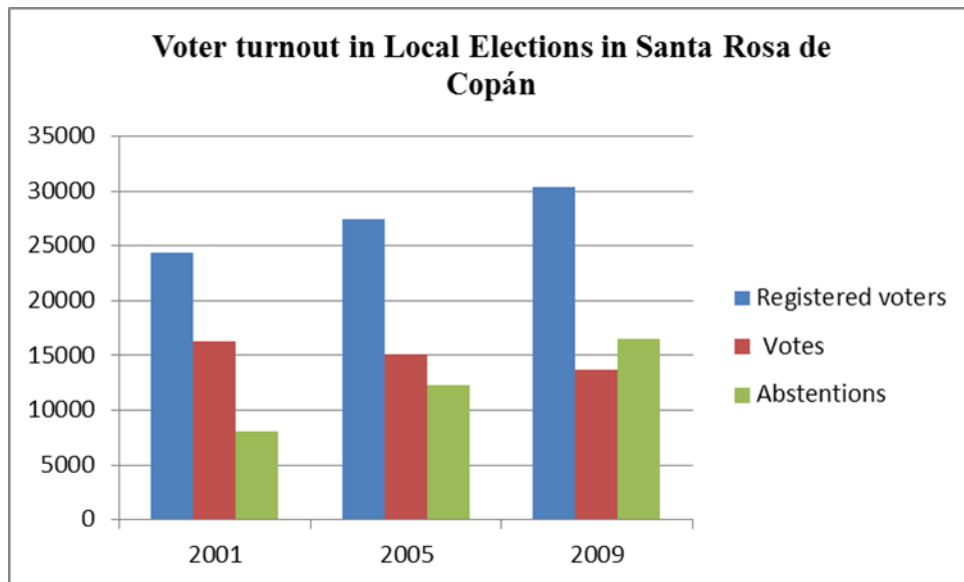
http://www.adelsar.hn/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1&Itemid=9 (Consulted on 22 May 2013).

¹³⁶ S. Vrhovac & I. Bačlija, 'An analysis of Electoral Abstention in Ljubljana, The Capital of Slovenia', pp 183-203 in *Lex Localis – Journal of Self-Government*, Vol. 6, April 2008, p. 184.

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Instead of improving the likelihood of increased voter turnout, participatory activities for citizens could actually cause the opposite effect. Citizens engaged in deliberative forms of participation can become exhausted by traditional political discourses, and alternatively choose to contribute to meaningful participatory processes. They would rather engage in such processes than cast a single vote once every four years. Electing both local and national public representatives to run the government is an essential element of the role of the individual in the political arena. However, elections are an indirect and infrequent mode of participation. Running affairs at local and community levels offers a more continuous and engaging method of political participation. Both top down decentralisation of administration and bottom up growth of community organisations can open up such opportunities for engaged participation.¹³⁷

FIGURE 11. VOTER TURNOUT SANTA ROSA DE COPÁN.



Source: Own making.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Osmani S.R., 'Participatory Governance: An overview of issues and evidence', pp. 9-54, in United Nations, Building Trust through Civic Engagement, New York: United Nations Publications, 2008, p. 22.

¹³⁸ Based on data of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, available at: http://www.tse.hn/web/estadisticas/procesos_electorales.html (Consulted on 10 June 2013).

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The low voter turnout could also be linked to the matter of accountability. According to Osmani¹³⁹, there are many ways of ensuring accountability. Some methods of ensuring accountability are formal, e.g. the traditional use of administrative and judicial procedures to scrutinise the performance of government officials or to ensure that periodic elections are held. The latter method represents a channel through which people can participate in accountability procedures. If elected representatives do not perform to the satisfaction of the voters, the latter group can choose to remove them from office in the next election. However, elections constitute a rather blunt instrument for holding politicians accountable for specific actions, partly because of the lengthy period between elections. Furthermore, it is possible that elected representatives can succeed in completing many of the tasks assigned to them, while failing to complete others. Elections may however be supplemented by other types of participatory mechanisms, which offer a more direct and immediate mechanism through which accountability can be demanded of elected representatives.¹⁴⁰

Nonetheless, a decrease in the voter turnout does not exclude other benefits for the local government, namely the low voter turnout does not mean that the local government cannot still be legitimate in the eyes of the citizens. It was stressed in chapter 3 that participation is vital mechanism in sustaining government legitimacy, particularly given a need to reconstruct public confidence in political institutions. The most effective method of establishing such confidence is by seeking active endorsement of the policies and practices of public bodies from citizens.¹⁴¹

The next section of this research will provide an overall analysis of the performance of citizen committees and the dynamics of local government, which will serve as a starting point to better evaluate the previous assumptions.

¹³⁹ Osmani, 2008, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁴¹ Stoker, 2007, pp.11-12.

4.3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON CITIZEN COMMITTEES

4.3.1 Methodology

The information and data utilised in the following analysis was gathered from semi-structured interviews with nine members of the citizen committees and five officials from the local government assigned to the committees as technical support.

The sampling approach applied was purposive or theoretical sampling¹⁴². In this particular case the selection of participants, based on the purpose of the study, was reduced to two main groups or criteria: members of the committees and municipal officials assigned to the committees. Within this criterion, no further peculiarities were required.

The nature of the interviews was single and asynchronous¹⁴³, applied via email to each participant. The rationale behind this choice was twofold: first, geographic reasons were considered, that is, the lack of resources and funding to conduct a face-to-face interview with participants in Santa Rosa de Copán and second, the limited amount of time to conduct interviews could not be disregarded.

The questions were formulated in principle with the intention of employing deductive reasoning for the analysis. However, the open-ended and semi structured approach¹⁴⁴ utilised to design them left some space for inductive reasoning to be used. This approach was chosen to allow interviewees more space to develop their ideas and experiences, obtain specific information and enable comparison across the different interviews. Structurally, the interviews were designed around a framework formed by four main topics: establishment of the committees, functioning of the committees, improvement of their function, and finally the strengthening of democracy through the committees.

¹⁴² Ritchie Jane, Lewis Jane & Elam Gillian, '*Designing and Selecting Samples*', pp.77-108 in Ritchie Jane & Lewis Jane, *Qualitative Research Practice: A guide for Social Sciences Students and Researchers*, London: SAGE publications, 2003, pp.78-80.

¹⁴³ Hewson Clare & Laurent Dianna, '*Research Design and Tools for Internet Research*', pp. 58-78, in Fielding Nigel et al., *Online Research Methods*, London: SAGE publications, 2008, pp.67-68.

¹⁴⁴ Knox Sarah & Burkard Alan, '*Qualitative Research Interviews*', pp.566-575, in *Psychotherapy Research*, Volume 19, No. 4-5, 2009.

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After the establishment of the topics, specific questions were formulated for each one of them. It is important to notice that some questions differed depending of the interviewee, and whether he/she was a member of the committees or a municipal official. Sufficient information regarding the study was provided to the participants, along with the interview questions. Furthermore, the possibility of requesting and receiving additional information regarding the purpose of the study and use of the interview was also addressed. Both versions of the interview can be found in the Annex section.

The analysis of the data was based on the principles of grounded theory. It must be clarified that due to temporal constraints, it was not possible to fulfil all the major phases that imply the application of grounded theory as a method.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the analysis was prepared with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis software Atlas/ti.¹⁴⁶

Some important interview limitations must be mentioned. Firstly, the inherent limitations of using email as a medium to conduct the interviews must be addressed. Emails interviews deny interviewees the opportunity to communicate with different kinds of cues (facial expressions, hand gestures etc.). As a result, some important visual or non-verbal cues were most likely missed. Furthermore, email may not have been the appropriate medium for fostering interaction and feedback, which may have provided richer data. Second, the interviews were conducted in Spanish, and each was subsequently translated into English. While an effort was made to remain as faithful as possible to the interviewees' quotes in the original language, misinterpretation must not be excluded. Thus, it is possible that some data was 'lost in translation'. Finally, it must be highlighted that the research initially intended to collect opinions of two groups as above mentioned (municipal officials and members of citizen committees) in order to carry out a holistic analysis of the dynamics and roles of each. However, municipal officers were reluctant to participate in the research, as

¹⁴⁵ LaRossa Ralph, '*Grounded Theory Methods and Qualitative Family Research*', pp. 837-857, in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, November 2005.

¹⁴⁶ See Atlas/ti, available at: <http://www.atlasti.com/index.html> (Consulted on 8 June 2013).

no response was received from their side. This factor must be considered by the reader when assessing the next subchapter.

4.4 FINDINGS

4.4.1 Creation of the Citizen Committees

Citizen committees were first established through an initiative of the local government, as established at the beginning of the chapter. In this respect, most of the interviewees seem to agree that this was indeed the case, with the majority expressing that committees originated through a top down approach; ‘the citizen participation process emerges in 1998 during the government of Juan Carlos Elvir, as a response to the low credibility of government amongst members of society. At that moment a new municipal ‘conception’ was initiated, as well as a new approach to citizen participation in the municipality’.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, others believe that the creation of the citizen participation process was both a top down and bottom up project – in some cases, committees were formed to address the need of the local government to gain the support of the community while in others, committees were established by the population to address the limited capacity of the local government to respond to the needs of the public. The Women’s Solidarity Committee was, for example, created with the aim of introducing the theme of gender to municipal plans.¹⁴⁸ According to the majority of interviewees, the aim of increasing the participation and involvement of citizens in public life represents the main reason underlying the creation of the committee; ‘I think that the citizen committees were created with the aim of enhancing citizen participation in the process of public administration’.¹⁴⁹ Before moving

¹⁴⁷ Interview (in Spanish) with Aurora Pérez, Member of the Youth Committee and Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 17 May 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member of the Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

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on, it must be asked why local government seeks to ‘transfer power’ to citizens in deliberative spaces such as citizen committees. The answer appears to be for the purposes of improving its legitimacy; ‘in the beginning they (*the citizen committees*) were created as an initiative of the local government to legitimize its actions and establish mechanisms to get closer and integrate society around different topics of interest’.¹⁵⁰ Interviewees seem to believe that the success of local government is highly related to the actions undertaken by committees.¹⁵¹ They thus perceive citizen committees essential for achieving the long-term sustainability of any process within the municipality. This means that if (*local government*) in Santa Rosa de Copán does not have the support from civil society; it will most likely be destined to fail.¹⁵²

On the other hand, it is also believed that participatory experiences such as citizen committees have always existed in Santa Rosa de Copán. However, following the implementation of the local government strategy in 1998, participation became more structured and formal as citizens began to strategically plan their actions within the committees and to coordinate with the local government.¹⁵³

At present, citizens committees reside at the top of the hierarchy in the organisational chart of the local government, alongside with the maximum deliberative organ of the local government, namely the municipal council (See Figure 12). This suggests that deliberative decision-making is in fact taking place in the framework of local government.

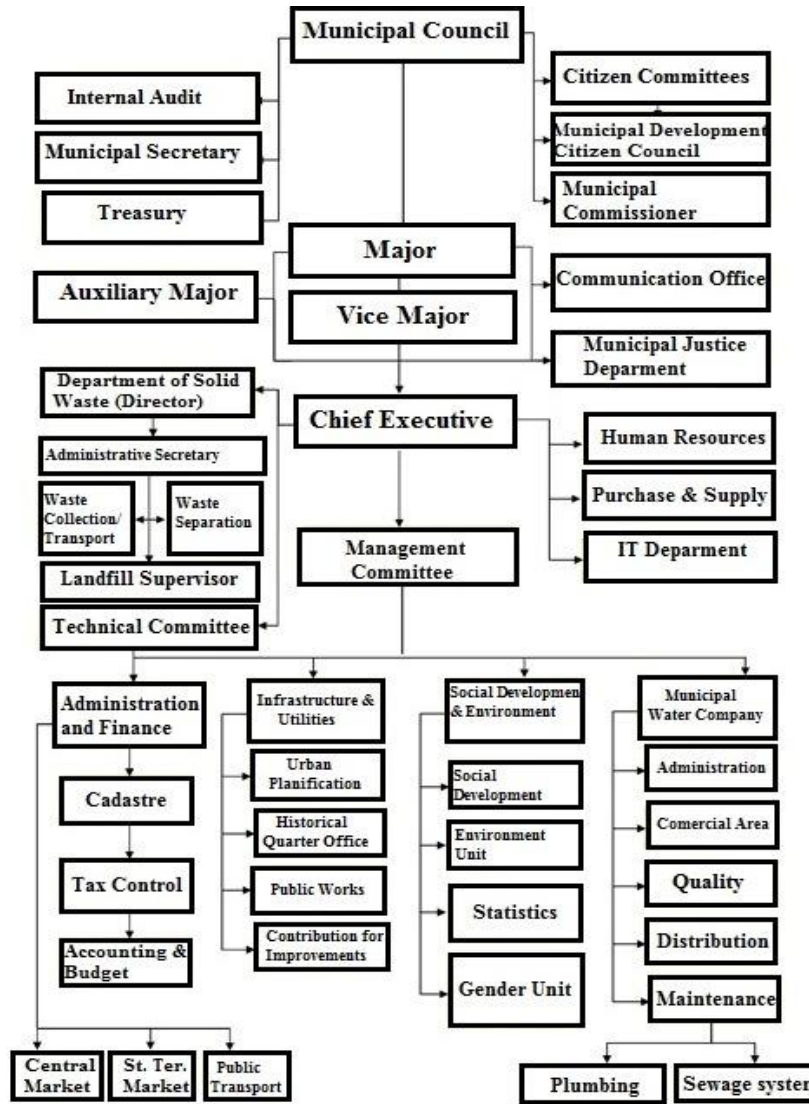
¹⁵⁰ Interview (in Spanish) with Ramón Prado, Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁵¹ Interviewee Nidia Hernández expressed: ‘If the committee did not exist... I think we would see very little improvement within the municipality in terms of gender equality’.

¹⁵² Interview (in Spanish) with Oscar Alvarado, Member of the Historical Quarter Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

¹⁵³ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

FIGURE 12. ORGANISATIONAL CHART



Source: Adapted from website of the Municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Municipalidad Santa Rosa de Copán, *Organigrama*, available at: http://santarosacopan.org/uploads/media/ORGANIGRAMA_2012_Muni_SRC..pdf (Consulted on 10 June 2013).

4.4.1.1 Representativeness of the Committees

The “representativeness” of the citizen committees signifies a contentious issue, even amongst the members of the committees themselves. Interviewees held different standpoints when asked about this feature within the citizen committees. Two main forms of representativeness could be identified amongst the diverse answers. On the one hand, the committees are deemed to be representative of the *best interests* of the whole community. The representation of the best interest of the community appears to be precisely the essence of the committees¹⁵⁵; they represent society by integrating it in a collective and participative way into the development of the community and by guaranteeing its involvement in the public affairs of the local government.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, whilst the committees represent the best interest of the community as whole, they are not representative of the *diversity* within society; this means that certain groups or sectors within society are excluded from participating actively in the committees. Seemingly the committees fail to represent members from a diverse range of economic backgrounds. Furthermore, committees do not incorporate significant variations in age ranges amongst their members.¹⁵⁷

4.4.2 Functioning of the Committees

Generally the committees meet on a monthly basis, sometimes once or twice, depending on the activities they have planned. Most of the committees have executed more than three projects since their inception, in line with the strategic plans designed by members. The projects executed are diverse; the interviewees listed a variety of projects ranging from

¹⁵⁵ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Interview (in Spanish) with Ramón Prado, Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁵⁷ Referring to the representativeness of the Committee. Interview with Oscar Alvarado, Member of the Historical Quarter Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

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infrastructure projects such as remodelling the central park, construction of a centre for arts and heritage, remodelling the central market; services projects like a tourist information office and the implementation of a sports program in public schools; capacity building projects such as a school of leadership for young people and training women in participatory budgeting. Finally, some projects are aimed at the direct protection of human rights e.g. a shelter for female victims of domestic violence and their children.

The interviewees demonstrated a sense of empowerment in their answers, reflected by the fact that their actions led to positive outcomes: ‘The committee has made possible the execution of many projects, such as the creation of a Women’s Centre, a shelter for victims of domestic violence (Casa Hogar) and it has also directly influenced the municipal budget in favor of children, women and the elderly. If the committee did not exist, we would probably not see any these projects’.¹⁵⁸ ‘The committees’ work complements the local government’.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, it was clear that the importance of the actions of the citizen committees in different areas highlight to other members of the community that the issues facing the municipality must be solved through a shared leadership between citizens and local government, in conjunction with the priorities of both.¹⁶⁰

Though the committees appear to be active within the municipality, the interviewees suggest that there is a general lack of awareness amongst the population regarding the existence or actions of the committees. This lack of awareness constitutes one of the weaknesses of the committees, according to its members.¹⁶¹ ‘...it is difficult to reach a lot of people and socialise the role of the citizen committees. According to the latest public

¹⁵⁸ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem

¹⁶¹ One of the questions within the interview was precisely if society in general (meaning non-members of the committees) had awareness about the role played by the committee or even their existence. The interviewees in their majority agreed that there was still a general unawareness about their existence, and in some cases misinformation of the exact role they play within society.

opinion poll, a lot of people are unaware of the role and even the existence of the committees.¹⁶² Even if the results of the actions of the committees are ‘tangible’, sometimes society is misinformed about their exact role, to the extent that they are occasionally confused with a technical office of the local government.¹⁶³

4.4.3 Improvement of the Citizen Committees

In order to better ascertain how to improve the functioning of the committees, it was deemed important to ask to the interviewees to identify the main weaknesses within the citizen committees. The aforementioned lack of awareness of the existence or role of the committees is at this point identified as a weakness.

The interviewees recurrently acknowledged that their volunteering is always limited to the amount of spare time they have available. The time invested by volunteers is determined by whether or not it will affect their personal economic resources, or if volunteering will eat into time that would otherwise be used to meet basic needs. For example, if a person works and does not have much free time available, his/her priority will always be to meet his/her own needs and solve his/her problems, rather than those of others.¹⁶⁴ It appears that the ‘transitoriness’ of volunteers also affects the harmony of the overall functioning of the committees. Interviewees expressed the need for generational change, suggesting that the participation of new members would ensure the continuance of the actions of the committees: ‘The weakness I could identify in every committee is that the entire process

¹⁶² Interview (in Spanish) with Aurora Pérez, Member of the Youth Committee and Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 17 May 2013.

¹⁶³ Interview (in Spanish) with Nelson Suazo, Technical Office of the Historical Quarter (link between the local government and the Historical Quarter Committee), Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

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requires new leadership, because they (members) tend to get worn-out and they are vulnerable to withdraw out of exhaustion and discouragement.’¹⁶⁵

It is little surprise that a lack of funds was mentioned as one of the key institutional constraints that prevents committees from carrying out their actions. It is worth mentioning in this respect that all of the projects seemed to have been undertaken with external funding¹⁶⁶. The local government was hardly mentioned as a funder of projects. It could be the case that as committees’ strategic plans generally seek medium and long term plans, local government may be more likely to solve ‘immediate’ community problems, as such actions may lead to an increase in the electoral popularity of government representatives. Similarly, it is possible that because of their magnitude some projects require an amount of funding not available to the local government. Furthermore, as external funds are usually short-lived, the funds to execute projects are not always available to citizens committees. This factor leads members to feel discouraged and worn out, as mentioned before.

Interestingly, the lack of proper credit given to performance of committees from local government is recurrently raised as a matter of concern by interviews. At times, improved credit is expressed as a condition that would considerably improve the functioning of the committees¹⁶⁷, while others state it would serve as an incentive for volunteers to continue to participate in the committees.¹⁶⁸ Regardless of context, it is evident that the lack of recognition for committee achievements from local government may prevent committees from feeling truly empowered. It was even highlighted that a potential ‘rivalry’ may exist between the citizen committees and local government, which is possible a consequence of a ‘clash of interest’ amongst both actors; ‘The committee is seen as a belligerent organisation

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁶ Some of the organisations mentioned were the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and Development, Poverty Reduction Strategy, TRIAS Belgian Development Organisation and United States Agency for Cooperation and Development.

¹⁶⁷ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Interview (in Spanish) with Aurora Pérez, Member of the Youth Committee and Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 17 May 2013.

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and sometimes as in competition with certain policies of the local government or the interests of some officials.¹⁶⁹ Alternatively, it may be the case that committees can have more control over the actions of local government, either by influencing the prioritization of projects or by monitoring its incomes and expenditures.¹⁷⁰ Hence local governments tend to be defensive and protective of the political power they are granted through elections.

Nevertheless, one of the questions unwittingly revealed that local government values the benefits of the citizen committees' existence, even if not as openly as the committees would like. In this regard, the basis of the relationship between local government and citizen committees appears to be more of a political compromise than a legal duty. While the Municipalities Law establishes the mechanisms for citizens to participate, support for the citizen committees is renewed with the entrance of each new local government, every four years '...As the results were seen and the benefits of participation were obvious, it has been taken up by every local government ever since, becoming like a 'gentlemen's agreement' that gets renewed every four years by signing a political agreement, when a new local government comes into power'.¹⁷¹

The factors that motivate members to continue to participate in citizens committees were also raised in the interviews. One of the members expressed 'the sense of ownership and belonging to the municipality', and a subsequent feeling of empowerment¹⁷² as one of the main incentives for participation in citizen committees. As mentioned above, most of the interviewees reported a sense of empowerment at a personal level resulting from their membership of the committees. This empowerment could ostensibly be triggered by seeing

¹⁶⁹ Interview (in Spanish) with Max Elvir, Member of the Tourism Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁷¹ Interview (in Spanish) with Max Elvir, Member of the Tourism Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

¹⁷² Interview (in Spanish) with Oscar Alvarado, Member of the Historical Quarter Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

their project ideas materialise and by feeling useful by making an active contribution to the municipality. However, according to some interviewees, there is still a need to provide incentives to citizens to further motivate membership of and participation in the committees¹⁷³. The incentive could stem from the acknowledgement of the role played by the committees in the municipality by the local government and society.

In the long-term, committee members appear to be motivated by development; interviewees constantly mentioned the term development, despite the fact that it was not mentioned explicitly in any of the questions. Moreover, it seems that development is often associated with the economic growth of the municipality. Interviewees expressed the desire to contribute to and assume responsibility for the development of the area in a collective, participative and equal way¹⁷⁴, with the purpose of seeing the municipality develop holistically.¹⁷⁵ The increase of citizen participation through the citizen committees in Santa Rosa de Copán has promoted development in the municipality; if they did not exist, it would be a significant step back for the municipality in this respect.¹⁷⁶

4.4.4. The Citizen Committees and Strengthening of Democracy

All interviewees agreed that the existence of the citizen committees contributes to strengthening democracy. Though the interviews did not include an explicit definition of the concept of democracy, all participants answered positively when questioned on their

¹⁷³ Interview (in Spanish) with Max Elvir, Member of the Tourism Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Interview (in Spanish) with Ramón Prado, Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁷⁶ Interview (in Spanish) with Ramón Prado, Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

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contribution to its development. The citizen committees strengthen democracy through active participation and raising issues of interest to the local government¹⁷⁷.

Moreover the committees help to increase public awareness of democracy by identifying problems facing the municipality and proactively seeking solutions to these issues.¹⁷⁸ The committees create an environment that reinforces social leadership; ideally this leadership can become a political one that would facilitate informed political participation and an inclusive political class.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, the committees contribute to democracy by integrating sections of the populations into political and governing processes that previously had no access to them.¹⁸⁰ They also constitute spaces in which the population can express its concerns and interests with regards to the municipality, thus allowing freedom of expression, a fundamental component of democracy, to take place.¹⁸¹

According to the responses of the interviewees, local democracy can be conceptualised as a system in which every member of the population can equally participate in the process of governing by expressing their concerns and interests, as well as making collaborative decisions with the local government on how best to solve the problems of the municipality.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁸ Interview (in Spanish) with Max Elvir, Member of the Tourism Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 15 May 2013.

¹⁷⁹ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁸¹ Interview (in Spanish) with Nelson Suazo, Technical Office of the Historical Quarter (link between the local government and the Historical Quarter Committee), Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The interviews analysed in this research reveal that in addition to the establishment of participatory spaces, more significant issues must be addressed when constructing genuine local governance. Although the citizen committees were created through a local government initiative, their existence has been sustained by the commitment and actions of their respective members, which suggests that there is an inherent culture of participation among the population of Santa Rosa de Copán. For the members of committees, this culture is constantly cultivated by the positive contribution their actions represent, especially when their projects materialise.

The issue of representativeness constituted a concern for interviewees. Although the committees are inclusive in principle, interviewees recognise that a number of factors including temporal and financial constraints restrict the wider participation of citizens in the committees. This creates an element of 'exclusiveness' within the committees. However this does not mean the committees purposely seek to be exclusive. Furthermore, evidence suggests that even if the committees are not representative of the diversity of society, this does not necessarily mean that members do not express the opinions of excluded sectors. The projects that have been executed seemingly respond to a diverse range of needs, benefitting different population groups, and consequently, the whole community. This could be attributed to the fact that participatory practices can act as leaning spaces. Through the participatory process, people begin to perceive the needs of others, develop solidarity, and conceptualise their own interests in a broader manner.¹⁸²

With regard to the general lack of awareness of citizen committees, it is clear that there is a blatant need to develop strategies that would better inform the population of the work of the committees. That said it is important to highlight that first steps are being taken in this

¹⁸² Neaera Rebecca, *Reflections on What Makes Empowered Participatory Governance Happen*, pp. 200-207, in Fung Archon & Wright Erik, *Deepening Democracy*, London: Verso, 2003. p. 206.

direction. The Women's Solidarity Committee has adopted a logo, representative of the committee, which helps the public to identify projects that have been carried out as a result of the committee's actions.¹⁸³ Other committees propose that reports be published detailing the projects and actions undertaken by committees in collaboration with the local government.¹⁸⁴

The interviews additionally disclosed that while there is an apparent sense of empowerment amongst committee members, an antagonism exists between local government and the committees when it comes to certain decisions and actions. 'Institutional jealousy' was said to undermine the good intentions of the participatory experience, and resulted in a lack of appropriate recognition for the work done by the committees.¹⁸⁵ The interviewees appeared to feel that their thoughts and interests were better represented by citizens committees than by the elected local government. This may indicate that the local government is refusing to treat citizens committees as partners or recognise the value of their existence. In this regard, it is worth asking whether local government is actually making decisions in collaboration with citizen committees or if the committees simply participate in the processes of government. It was not possible to adequately address this particular question in this thesis, given the lack of response from municipal officials. However, the fact that support for the citizen committees is renewed through a 'political pact' with the entrance of each new local government reveals that committees indeed constitute a necessary complement to their function.

It is noteworthy that interviewees associated citizen committees with the development of the municipality. Since it is empirically impossible to prove in this research, examining the

¹⁸³ Interview (in Spanish) with Nidia Hernández, Member Women Solidarity Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 30 May 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Interview (in Spanish) with Aurora Pérez, Member of the Youth Committee and Technical Officer in ADELSAR, Santa Rosa de Copán, 17 May 2013.

¹⁸⁵ Interview (in Spanish) with Juan Carlos Elvir, Member of the Sports Committee, Santa Rosa de Copán, 13 May 2013.

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correlation between the existence of the citizen committees and the development of the municipality of Santa Rosa de Copán in the last twelve years may represent an interesting avenue for further research.

Although many caveats must be accounted for when considering this analysis and its conclusions, the empirical research conducted has provided an illustrative example of the positive impact of local governance in terms of development, respect for human rights, transparency, accountability and democracy, through the experience of the citizen committees in Santa Rosa de Copán. Hopefully, the findings outlined here will provide both committee members and local government with a useful tool for performance assessment, enabling each party to consider improvements that will be translated in practical action. Moreover, this thesis can serve as a reference to other local governments and civil society organisations setting out on the journey to governance.

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ANNEX I

Model of Interview Applied to Members of the Committees

Name:

Committee:

Question: Why were the Committees established?

Sub questions:

1. Do you know what the original underlying reasons for establishing the committees were?
2. Were the committees established as a top down or a bottom up idea?
3. If the Committee did not exist, what would happen with the area that it manages?
4. Does the Committee represent the best interest of the community in the area it manages?

Question: Do the Committees function?

Sub questions:

1. How often does the committee meet?
2. How many project proposals that you have submitted to the local government (or international cooperation) have been executed?
3. Is society and institutions related to the topic that the committee manages aware of the role of the committee on behalf of their interests?
4. Does the committee coordinate with the various institutions or actors that have to do with the area managed?

Question: How to improve the functioning of the Committees?

Sub questions:

1. What are the weaknesses that you identify within the committees?
2. What are the institutional constraints for the committees to act?
3. What do you think are the motivations for people to participate in the committees?
4. What aspects would contribute to the improvement of the management role of the committees?

Question: Do the Committees strengthen democracy?

Sub questions:

1. How do the committees contribute to strengthening democracy?
2. What are the bases of the relationship between the local government and the committees?

ANNEX II

Model of Interview Applied to Municipal Officials

Name:

Committee:

Question: Why were the Committees established?

Sub questions:

5. Do you know what the original underlying reasons for establishing the committees were?
6. Were the committees established as a top down or a bottom up idea?
7. If the Committee did not exist, what would happen with the area that it manages?
8. Does the Committee represent the best interest of the community in the area it manages?

Question: Do the Committees function?

Sub questions:

5. How often do you (as a municipal official) meet with the committee?
6. How successful is the committee in raising issues of their area of interest before the local government?
7. How do you know the society and institutions related to the area that the committee manages are aware of the role of the committee on behalf of their interests?

Question: How to improve the functioning of the Committees?

Sub questions:

1. What are the institutional constraints for the local government to collaborate with the committees?

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2. What do you think are the motivations for people to participate in the committees?
3. What aspects would contribute to the improvement of the relationship local government-committees?
4. What weaknesses have you been able to identify when working with the committee?

Question: Do the Committees strengthen democracy?

Sub questions:

3. How do the committees contribute to strengthening democracy?
4. What are the bases of the relationship between the local government and the committees?