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# **A participatory citizen consultation: The case of the state of Michoacán, Mexico**

Carlos Núñez Hurtado

This article discusses the process of construction of “critical citizenship” in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, since 2002. After the anthropologist Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, the candidate of the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), took office as state governor in that same year, a process designed to favor, stimulate and empower the citizens in the exercise of their right to participate in the government’s co-management was started. On the basis of the political platform of his electoral campaign, his government plan and mainly the explicit political will to govern “from, for and with the citizens,” actions designed to materialize this motto were developed. The article describes the foundations of this process, the methodological proposals, the design of the “workshops for self-diagnosis and working out of proposals” (TADEPs), their implementation, the required instruments and the results that have been obtained. It presents other consultation mechanisms that have been applied and their results. It also describes the “follow-up mechanisms” that were implemented to apply what was researched and in this way to strengthen the real processes of citizen participation.

**Key words:** Citizen consultation, participation, participatory planning

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The invitation to participate in this collective work on experiences of participatory action research (PAR) highlighted in the instructions that we should offer contributions “on the current state of participatory research (or of participatory alternatives in the broader realm)”. I was invited to participate precisely with this approach.

On the basis of that, I gladly accepted the invitation to describe a very recent, and still ongoing, experience of a broad “citizen consultation” and its follow-up strategies, developed in the context of a state policy of promoting and supporting processes of “citizen participation” generated by the new government of the state of Michoacán in Mexico.

## 2. Background

In June 2001, during the campaign of the candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution for the office of governor of the state of Michoacán, the anthropologist Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, I was invited to propose and implement a “participatory methodology” that would make it possible to construct in a short term an inclusive and plural proposal of the “Government Plan for the State of Michoacán” that the candidate would submit in his electoral campaign.

This experience was developed through an “intensive workshop” for a “strategic participatory design and planning”. Around 60 people representing the Party of the Democratic Revolution itself, the business community, the organizations of the civil society, social organizations and the academic and intellectual sector participated in it.

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<sup>1</sup> Although this article was drafted by me, it has dozens of co-authors, namely the people involved in the process of “citizen participation and participatory planning” being implemented by the present government of the state of Michoacán. I would like to thank all of them. It’s impossible to name them. But it’s indispensable to mention at least Vicente Romero Guerra, associate adviser, Santiago Lomelí Gusmán, Planning director of the State Secretariat of Planning and Development and Dr. María Argelia González Butrón, who undoubtedly is the promoter of the process in the field of civil society. I would like to particularly acknowledge her enthusiastic and committed work.

In his electoral campaign for the state governor's office the candidate Cárdenas Batel proposed to govern *with and for* all inhabitants of Michoacán. The implementation of this commitment required not only to design administrative mechanisms, but also to define the forms and methods through which the government and society would participate in the design and construction of the policies that the new administration would promote.

It is clear that the proposal of *governing with and for society* implies several challenges, commitments, wills, definitions and deep analyses of the methods and forms that will have to be applied to turn it into reality and guarantee its result.

Alternation in power does not simply imply the actual elimination of the old practices of governing and administering a people. The true transition in power has a conceptual and structural, rather than conjunctural character. For these reasons, the new form of government that the state Executive proposed, is proposing and is promoting must be the "seal" that permanently characterizes this government. Consequently, the civil servants and employees, the organic design of public administration, its processes and procedures, from planning to operation, must obey, in a congruent and consistent manner, the proposed form of government. Otherwise we would backslide into the traditional government practices, the inertia and ineffectiveness of which are known.

The electoral process culminated in the indisputable triumph of the candidate Cárdenas Batel, who took office in February 2002. In March the newly appointed Planning and Development secretary, Enrique Bautista, got in touch with me asking for an interview, on behalf of the governor and himself, in order to explore possible forms of my cooperation with the new state government. These interviews took place in Morelia on March 28, April 12 and 25, and from these conversations derived the commitment to sign an advisory contract for "citizen participation and education". The contract materialized through the Planning and Development Secretariat (SEPLADE).

The first demand that arose in accordance with the proposals of the state Executive of promoting a democratic and participatory form of government was to carry out an authentic "citizen consultation" that would make it possible to gather the opinion of the Michoacán society in its different realms.

This opinion would be considered an essential input for the construction of the government proposals contained in the State Development Plan (PED).

### **3. The State of Michoacán – some general data**

The state of Michoacán de Ocampo has 3,986,000 inhabitants distributed in 113 municipalities. It has a territory of 58,585 square kilometers. The state capital is the city of Morelia, with 620,532 inhabitants.

Four ethnic groups live in its territory: the Purépechas is the largest and most representative one, having around 109,361 members. The others are the Nahuatl with 4,706 members, the Mahazua with 4,338 members and the Otomí with 732 inhabitants. In geographic terms they occupy territories located on the mountain range, the coast, the plateau and the ravines. The rest of the population is made up of mestizos, like in the rest of the country.

Although Michoacán is an area of great beauty and enormous natural resources, it is a poor state, occupying the 10<sup>th</sup> position in the country's development indices. That is why it is the second state in terms of labor expulsion: it is estimated that the number of state inhabitants who have migrated to the United States amounts to 4,2% of the existing population.

This panorama was presented to us as part of the complexity related to the challenge of truly consulting the population of Michoacán.

### **4. First task: Citizen consultation to work out the “Plan of Development of the State of Michoacán” (PED)**

#### *a) Legal and political foundations*

Mexico is defined as a federal republic. The republic's states have their own democratically elected state governments. They also have their own legislative branch through the chambers of state congressmen and congresswomen, which are also called “state congresses”.

As a consequence, each state defines itself as “free and sovereign” and has its own state constitution and system of laws. The latter are (or at least should be) all ratified in the framework of the mandates of the federal constitution and the federal laws derived from the constitution.

Thus a federalist regime grants the states a relative autonomy, as long as there is no contradiction to the national legal framework. In Mexico, both at the federal and state level, planning is a constitutional mandate with full legal backing in the respective planning laws. In this legal framework the process of “consulting” the citizenry is clearly indicated. It highlights the “participatory” and “democratic” meaning of the consultation for the planning of the development of the federation’s entities.

On the basis of this legal framework the “consultations” for the working out of the corresponding federal and state plans have been carried out, but only in a formal sense.

In Michoacán the legal framework has been taken up on the basis of a deep interpretation of its ethical, political and conceptual implications. Therefore, and on the basis of what is established in articles 129 and 130 of the political constitution of the state of Michoacán de Ocampo and in articles 5, 10, 16 and 18 of the state’s Planning Law, the governor presented in due time and form in February 2003 the “State Development Plan for 2003-2008”, after having carried out for that purpose a broad and authentic “citizen consultation.”

*b) Political will and its consequences*

The starting point for that process was a clear political will and a profound and honest interpretative framework. In general, however, due to lack of knowledge of truly participatory methodologies and, mainly, due to lack of clarity and political will on the part of the administrations that take office, the government officials continue to understand power as acquisition of spaces of government and command at the service of particular interests and groups. For these reasons, when carrying out citizen consultations, they end up manipulating them by turning them into simple “forums” of a formal, political and/or academic nature, where most of the proposals are made on the basis of disconnected “papers” read one after the other by “experts” who are usually the public servants themselves. Instead of listening, they devote themselves to “formally” comply with the legal requirement, presenting what has already been anyway established by that particular administration.

The participation of organized citizenry is extremely scarce and inorganic, not to mention the citizenry in general, which isn't even aware that it "is being consulted." As a matter of fact, of course, neither is it consulted nor does it participate in any way.

In time, this extremely interesting mandate to plan participatory and democratic development has been worn out by being turned into a shabby liturgy of formalities, which, besides manipulating the mandate, have discouraged the different sectors of society and the citizenry in general from participating in them.

In view of this phenomenon, the posture and will of the new government of Michoacán is expressed in the text of the PED itself, when the governor emphasizes in the official document that "traditionally, the drafting of development plans has been ordered from expert groups or offices of external consultants that gathered only a few requests or real demands from the population. The PED for 2003-2008 has been constructed in a different way ... it has been worked out on the basis of a long and consistent process of interaction and consultations with the most different sectors of the citizenry and social nuclei of the state..."

He indicates the three "inputs" for that: the data and demands gathered in an extensive electoral campaign, the experience that was accumulated during the first year of the new government and "*a direct consultation with the citizens.*"

Thus, the challenge of carrying out the consultation mandated by the law in an authentically participatory manner constituted our first great challenge, since we had to answer in a strict and creative way a central question: how to apply our views of education, popular communication and participatory action research to a challenge of such a dimension? Usually most of the experiences that we develop or know have a framework of action and repercussions which are much more modest and limited in terms of territorial extension and target population. To design our theoretical-methodological assumptions for a challenge of such a dimension was undoubtedly an exciting challenge.

*c) Ethical-political, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical foundations*

c-1) The ethical-political framework

The main problem in the processes of “citizen participation” is centered in *the search for consistency between saying and acting*. Usually one talks about a “democratic participation” that is even, as we indicated, supported by a pertinent legal framework.

But the problem is not actually solved only through declarations and norms. The problem lies in deeply accepting in political terms the full extent of that normative indication, without demagogy and pretense. And the support for this lies in *the true belief in the processes of democratic deepening*, in the authentic expression of the citizenry’s voice, in the dialogue between government and society. In a word, it means *to believe and work for the construction and deepening of a substantial democracy* that surpasses the mere formal and representative democracy without disdaining it.

In fact, under the conception of participatory (and not only representative) democracy as understood and accepted by the present administration of Michoacán, the substantial aspects of that democracy have to do precisely with *“participatory citizenry”*. In other words, *with the role consciously assumed by the citizens in the construction of the democracy we long for*. But we have to acknowledge that we are still very far from a well informed, educated, aware, active, responsible society, a society committed to the “res publica”, which is the object of substantial democracy. On the contrary, apathy and lack of interest seem to be the generalized norm of most citizens. Participation is occasional, linked to conjunctural moments of an electoral nature and with percentages that are very far from the levels that a modern, democratic and participatory society must aspire to.

Furthermore, however, this participation of a political-electoral nature, besides being low, in no way exhausts all the tasks that society, the citizens, should daily and permanently take on in the construction of the model of democratic society that we aspire to.

Thus it is clear that the legal framework is not enough (however important it is) to make people participate. There must be enough knowledge, information and motivation for the citizens to decide to actively participate in the “res publica”, which continues to be of great interest and to have obvious repercussions on their own interests, but they do not consider getting involved.

Hence participation implies an act of political will by the government, in which it commits the structure, the resources and the very future of the state. This is what the decision to carry out the citizen consultation for the integration of the PED meant.

That will represents the occasion for the Michoacán citizens to be truly heard, beyond the merely formal sense, and to grasp, as far as possible, the depth of their own subjectivity and the symbols with which they express their wishes in life, their longings, the things they can rely on, the obstacles they perceive, the commitments they are willing to take on and the acts they suggest to their government. This is done in such a way that nobody dictates, insinuates or manipulates what should be their answers to the questions that are made.

Therefore, the consultation must be (and has actually been) an experience in which the citizen is considered to be and actually emerges as a true *subject*, going beyond the traditional role ascribed to the “target population” of public policies. This consultation would be the moment in which the citizen participates with the state in the definitions of the future and is able to negotiate them with the state itself.

#### c-2) The epistemological framework

The consultation is based on a new epistemological approach in which the knowledge is understood as a permanent social construction rather than as a “knowledge” that the “expert” extracts from reality through statistical procedures, but apart from the true voice and feeling of the population. To take on the proposal implies to accept that there is a *natural “dialogue of knowledge forms”*, because the “*scholarly knowledge*” should never impose itself on and disdain the citizenry’s “*natural knowledge*” which always exists, although it may be limited, fractioned or confused in its “original” state.

It is necessary to overcome this functionalist approach, and to start from the *application of the theory of knowledge based on the “dialectical logic”*, i. e., the logic whose *“point of departure” is the participants’ “social practice” itself*. The point of departure should not be the theory or abstraction, which, albeit valid, *is usually removed from and alien to the initial knowledge and interests of the participants*.

### c-3) The methodological proposal

Hence, the proposal aims at generating processes of *self-diagnosis* of the participants in the process, and these processes are understood as the critical self-recognition of the *“view/vision”* that the citizens have of the state itself, as well as their interpretation of their *real context*. In general methodological terms, this process of self-diagnosis also includes the critical self-recognition of the participants’ real practice. In this case, it was decided to eliminate this phase, since no common practice can be supposed in view of the diversity of sectors and realms.

What we call *“the triple self-diagnosis” (conception, context and practice)*, by departing from people themselves, from the closest and most concrete, from the objective and subjective, *guarantees a vital interest of the participants in the process*. It makes it possible to get to know ideological and/or subjective positions as well as the socio-cultural approach with which they “experience” the topic or situation to be worked on and investigated. Thus, it makes it possible to recognize the attitudes and behaviors with which they approach them. A critical revision of them is generated. The *consistency*, or lack of it, between their thinking, their view of the context and their concrete practice is faced and analyzed, although the latter is the apparent “non-practice” (which is eliminated in this case). *All this is done in a participatory, self-diagnosing, systematic manner, and is strictly done by the participants themselves*, although it is conducted with great responsibility and rigor, in a democratic manner, by the pedagogical “coordinator” or “facilitator” of the process.

The goal is not just to reach a “first” level of analysis. The process continues in an ascending form, thus attaining a level of *critical “distancing,”* of

greater ability to ask questions, of reviewing and analyzing the topic and its approaches. A *process of "theorizing"* on the basis of practice is actually initiated. Operating concepts are constructed, categories are worked on, the horizon is broadened; hence you open up the need and you generate the interest to get to know answers on other levels of complexity and depth that are usually not in the participants' "natural" domain. This is then the moment when the coordinator, who is in charge of the methodological and pedagogical process, who has designed and knows the process and the contents that s/he wants to be worked on according to the goals that have been established, *can and must* suggest approaching the theories that explain and intend to help find the answers to the new concerns and questions raised by the group in the previous stage. This is the moment of *"theorizing"*. This is "the theory *starting* from practice"... rather than *"about it and/or alien to it"*.

Within this general proposal, this stage, for the case of the self-diagnosis processes of the citizen consultation as inputs to the State Development Plan, must seek to make a stricter analysis of the topics, problems or situations that were detected in the self-diagnosis. *In this way it will be possible to establish priorities and hierarchies in relation to the themes that the participants of some region or sector want to raise and that should be taken into account in the strategies set by the PED.*

Thus, after the analyzed topics, problems or situations have been systematized and prioritized, the following, and last, stage of the process will focus on the *collective search of solution proposals for the discussed topics.*

In methodological terms, this is, dialectically, the "return to practice." In our case, after the participants have reached a consensus on the main points of the diagnosis, on the establishment of priorities and hierarchies, they devote themselves to defining the main proposals or general action lines that the government of Michoacán should incorporate into its strategies derived from the PED.

*This is the main product that is expected: the proposals of solution for the detected situations.* Nonetheless, the very elements obtained from the self-diagnosis are an invaluable input to get, based on the voice of the actors themselves, a profound knowledge of the objective and subjective perception of the problems of the region, sector or specific topic about which they are

being consulted, in other words, of the state's situation in the eyes of its citizens.

c-4) The pedagogical aspects

As you may have inferred, in order to attain this one “necessarily” has to work with a *deeply participatory pedagogy*. Otherwise, how can one have a process of “self-diagnosis”? For that purpose we have designed the general device or method called “*WORKSHOP*”, which is understood as a pedagogical device for the full involvement of the selected participants. In order to achieve this process of total involvement and active participation it is necessary to resort to particular methods and didactic tools that provide and generate, because of their careful design and their timely and pertinent use, the above-mentioned *PARTICIPATION*.

This is a “pedagogy of full participation” that requires the creation of a propitious climate of trust and dialogue, a logical order of the process, the application of pertinent tools, the specialized conducting by a coordinator, a flexible but at the same time careful time management and a strict systematization of what has been produced.

Thus it was decided to carry out the citizen consultation on a massive level, but following in a strict manner the theoretical framework of popular education and Participatory Action Research (PAR).

In the way of summary, we present the following general scheme of the workshop process.

**Figure 1: Summarized scheme**

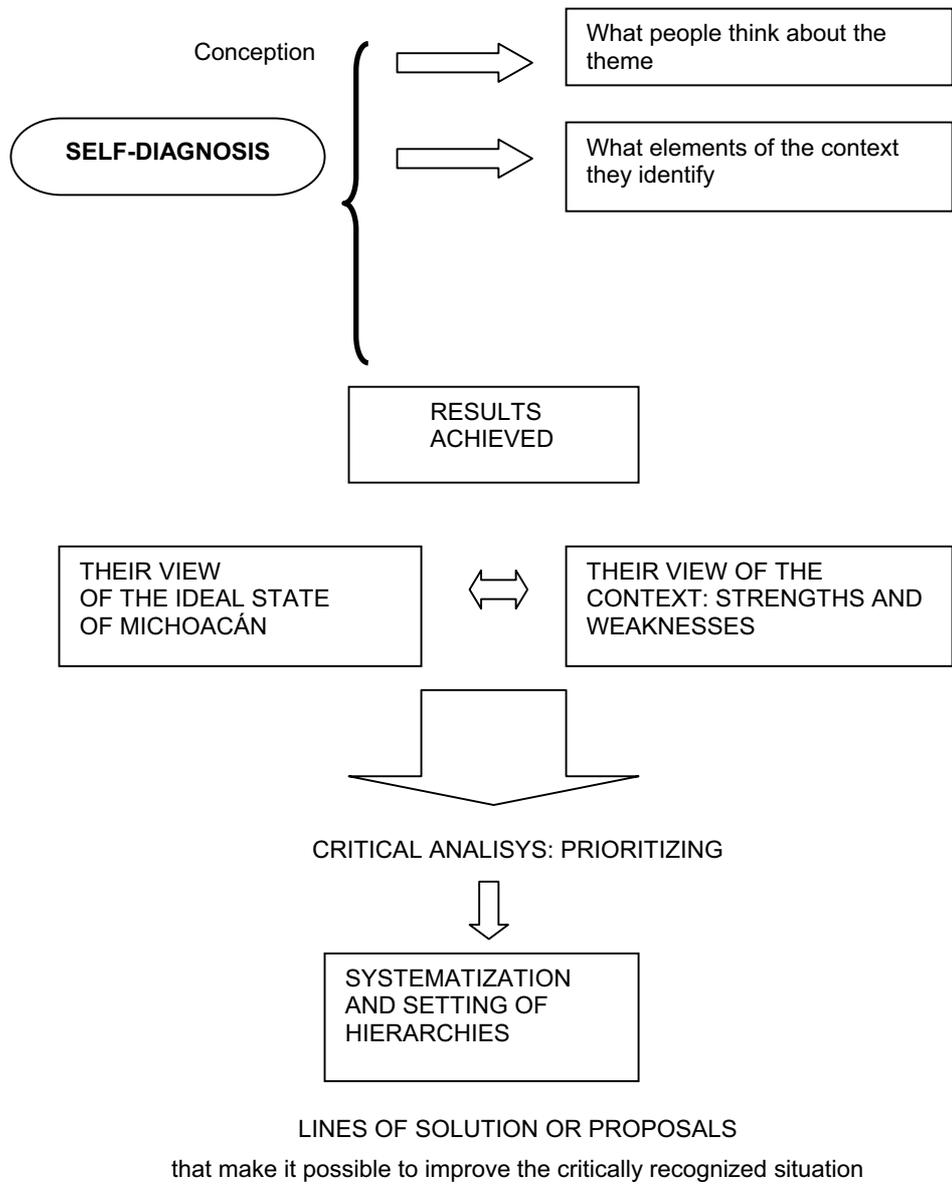
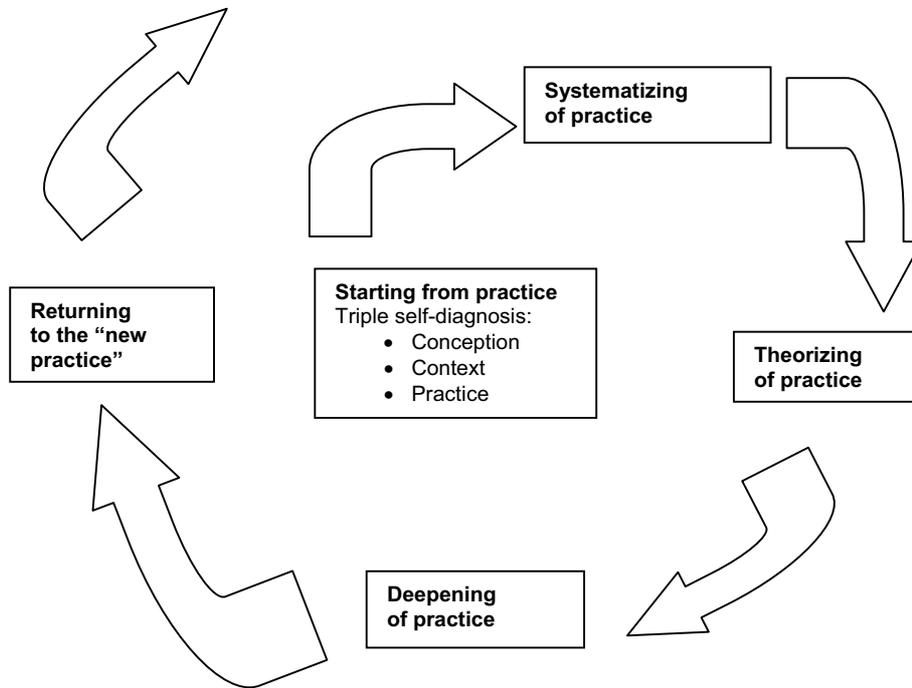


Figure 2: Methodological scheme



### 5. The concrete proposal: The Workshops for Self-diagnosis and the Working out of Proposals: "TADEPs"

As one can see, the methodological issue assumes a relevant role, as it will make it possible to "bring down" the theoretical, ethical and political assumptions to the field of what is really possible: *what* can and must be done and *how* one should go about consulting the citizens.

As a first approach, it was suggested that the "consultation" should be made in a deliberative manner, starting from the call to implement innovative and truly participatory "pedagogical-political spaces." For that purpose, a strategy was designed that would be based on the carrying out of the "work-

shops for self-diagnosis and the working out of proposals” (TADEPs), the workshops that would be carried out under the ethical-political, epistemological, methodological and pedagogical principles highlighted above and that, as indicated, had to be adapted to the possibilities and requirements of a massive process to be implemented in a very short period of time.

As a matter of fact, the first contacts and conversations took place in March and April. The commitment materialized in May. The consultation was designed and carried out in July and August and was systematized in September and October. In other words, the general process was carried out, in all of its stages, in a period of only seven months.

Therefore, taking into account the great cultural and ecological diversity of the state of Michoacán as well as the fact that its regions have different levels of economic and social development, consultation mechanisms were designed in which the citizens in general would voice their opinions *on the basis of their territory*, whereas the specific actors and/or experts would bring their proposals by *themes and sectors*. In this way the citizen consultation was carried out, as already mentioned, through the “TADEPs” in order to consult the citizens based on the framework of their territorial, communal, institutional and thematic views, in a significant and truly representative manner.

On the basis of the theoretical-methodological framework described above, the so-called TADEPs would be made up of a pre-established number of 50 participants selected according to criteria of a pattern worked out by the different government agencies and by the organizations of civil society and in accordance to their level of representation.

In order to call them together, each one personally received in the place where s/he lived (regardless of how far located) an envelope with her/his complete name, personally delivered by a public employee. This implied a great effort of logistics and cooperation between several government agencies.

That envelope contained the following:

- A letter of invitation signed by the state governor in which he invited the person to participate, expressed the importance of the consultation and thanked the person in advance for his/her participation.
- The general program of the TADEP.

- A “participant’s manual” designed and printed especially for the consultation, containing the directions on some tasks that each participant was expected to fulfill.
- An evaluation form.
- Cards with printed questions that should be answered in advance by the invited person, together with her/his reference group.

*a) Types of workshops*

**TYPE “A” WORKSHOP: “TERRITORIAL”**

The following people were invited to this type of workshop: representatives of the political-administrative authorities (municipalities), members of communal, social and civil organizations and prominent citizens *from a specific territory* formed by a group of two to five municipalities (“micro-regions”) according to population density, proximity and affinity in terms of context. In some micro-regions two or more workshops were held because the conditions of the particular zone required it. This was the case of Morelia, the state’s capital, for instance.

FORTY-FOUR WORKSHOPS of this type were carried out. They called together 1,823 citizens who represented 72% of the called ones.

**TYPE “B” WORKSHOP: SECTORIAL**

To these workshops were invited representatives of the different sectors of production, social, cultural, political etc. life of the state. The sectors were grouped in 14 workshops. Most of them took place in the capital, but occasionally a workshop was held in another population center that better represented the sector’s interest. 269 persons participated in them.

**TYPE “C” WORKSHOP: THEMATIC**

Using criteria similar to the previous type of workshop, in this case persons involved in particular “themes” of special relevance (gender, human rights, environment etc.) were invited. 24 such workshops were held, attended by 523 participants.

## TYPE “D” WORKSHOP: MIGRANTS

As mentioned above, Michoacán is one of the states with the largest number of immigrants in the United States. For this reason, the effort to consult these migrants from Michoacán who are settled in the American territory requires a special mention. Through contacts established with the “migrant clubs” that exist in that Northern country, five TADEPs were carried out in North-American territory, plus one workshop in the state of Michoacán itself. 281 persons participated in these six workshops.

### *b) The moderators of the TADEPs*

From the very beginning of the process we got in touch with the organized civil society of the state of Michoacán. It was a premise and “condition” of our proposal to the authorities who were co-responsible for the process that this sector should have an active part in the consultation and the subsequent stages. This was the only policy that was consistent with the very spirit of the administration’s will. How can you talk of and generate citizen participation without the participation of the most committed sectors of civil society?

Therefore, the moderators of the TADEPs were members of those organizations. Thus they were outside of the government structure, but were extensively familiar with the state’s environment and experts in the use of “participatory methodologies.” In this way, trust was created in the participants because of the political “neutrality” of the moderators and at the same time the very nature of the process was preserved.

To ensure the correct development of the TADEPs, three workshops on methodological training for both “moderators” and reporters were held. This work implied the inclusion of representatives of that sector, democratically elected by the members themselves, in the tasks of precise methodological definition, in systematization and in the follow-up tasks after the consultation.

It is important to point out that this process facilitated the creation of a “coordinating agency” of NGOs to respond to the consultation’s demands and requirements. At present this coordinating agency has been changed into the “Alliance of Civil Society for Citizen Participation”, which brings to-

gether 23 NGOs. This does not mean that 100% of the state's organizations are part of this alliance. It is just a very dynamic representation of that sector that does not close its doors and does not exclude the participation of many other NGOs with a different profile.

*c) The methodological development of the TADEPs*

The conceptual model of design and methodology of the TADEPs was the same one for all types of workshop. But in the case of the "thematic," "sectorial" and "migrant" ones, *the questions had to be understood and answered from the perspective of the corresponding "thematic axis."*

As mentioned above, each participant received a personal invitation and the necessary work material. The directions indicated that some tasks had to be done before the date of their respective TADEP, such as the task of collectively answering, together with their reference group, the printed cards that were in the envelope. These answers would be the main material for the work done during the workshop itself.

The cards of different colors contained the following questions:

Three cards to answer "what are the three most important things that would turn Michoacán into the best place to live?", "What should the government do to achieve this state that we long for?" and "What should the citizenry do to achieve this state?"

Three other cards of different color asked about the three main factors of the economic context that would favor the achievement of that ideal state.

Three cards that asked the same question in relation to the social aspects, both positive and negative ones. Ditto for the political and cultural aspects.

Summarizing:

They were asked to identify the "dream" of the ideal state of Michoacán. They were asked to point out the government's responsibility for the fulfillment of that dream. Ditto for the citizens' responsibilities in that fulfillment.

Then they were asked for an analysis of positive and negative factors of the social, economic, political and cultural context which favored or hindered the fulfillment of that dream and the exercise of the government's and society's responsibilities.

These cards should, as mentioned above, be answered in advance, and in a collective way by the reference group to which the individual belonged.

On the indicated day and hour the invited representative went to the indicated place carrying that material and met the other 49 invited representatives who had done the same things.

In the indicated place and on the indicated day for the development of the TADEP, the moderator (from civil society) and the reporter (from the government structures) facilitated the introduction, the explanation of the goals to be achieved and the methodology to be followed.

Then the coordinator moderated the group process of sorting the cards by simple affinity of content. This was obviously done by following the “steps” suggested by the questions on the cards: first those about the “dream,” then those about the responsibilities and finally those related to each element of the context, and so forth.

It is understandable that the process of socialization of each participant’s cards and of the search for criteria for the agreement on the sorting gave rise to a very complex and deep debate about the indicated items. Thus this consultation process really generated active participation in the deliberation, produced dialogue, implied the exercise of democratic values, of tolerance, etc. For this reason, we have always stressed that beyond the results themselves such a consultation generated an educational and “pedagogical balance” of great importance for the future of the policies of citizen participation.

Once this heavy exercise was concluded (after several hours of work), the participants themselves, through a criterion of ascribing “points” or “votes” granted to each participant and by making use of their votes and in front of the newly constructed “cardographs”, had to attribute valuations to topics or columns of cards that as a group they considered to have priority.

This was a way of “closing” or “limiting” the very extensive thematic universe that had been created. By doing it through criteria of valuation of priorities, the group as such expressed together a more complete view that implied a progress in the debates and the search for agreements. This is what we call a process of “theorizing”, since it implies a critical distancing from the original personal criteria, which are now enriched by everything that was

expressed and by the processes of collective systematization which obviously produce a knowledge of a higher order.

Finally the last task asked the participants to collectively work out proposals for the solution and/or promotion of each one of the identified priorities. It was not always a matter of “solving problems,” since there were also priorities of improving certain strengths that had been found. For this reason, and in order to avoid the paternalistic or “clientelistic” connotation that is usually subjectively present in the relationship between society and the government (on both sides), the word “problem” was not mentioned in any of the cards or directions. The words used were always “things,” “elements,” “situations”... but not “problems.” This is not because one would not think that life is in fact full of problems, but because LIFE does exist in spite of all. Mainly in the countryside and the indigenous communities this life is full of cultural richness, natural resources, very positive values, habits and customs. All that undoubtedly “sails” in the midst of storms of a context that is clearly problematic, difficult, marginalizing... but never eliminates life, which resists in spite of all and expresses itself in other codes.

Therefore, in the consultation’s results we find both real problems and very significant strengths which otherwise, in a traditional research approach, would certainly not have surfaced... simply because the participants would not have been asked about them.

The elements of the situational diagnosis expressed in the “cardographs”, together with the definition of priorities and the set of proposals (recorded in writing), were faithfully collected by the reporter with the help of the coordinator or facilitator by making use of the “notebook” we had designed for this purpose.

In this way, as we closed the workshop (7 to 9 hours later) we had the first faithful memory of initial systematization. The latter, after being revised, was signed by the reporter himself/herself, the workshop’s coordinator and the representative of the municipal administration, which was always present. In this way, and before the eyes of everybody, the will and decision not to change anything in the obtained result became evident. And this strengthened people’s trust in a process of true consultation, without manipulation by the government or the politicians.

*d) Evaluation*

At each workshop an evaluation form (included in the material used) was filled in by each participant. The results that have already been systematized indicate that more than 80% evaluate the process in an extremely positive way.

**6. The systematization**

The results of each workshop were systematized, in a first version, in an immediate way while the workshop was being carried out, according to a described procedure and by using a special format designed for this particular case. In the systematization each reporter recorded in a summarized manner what had been expressed by the group at each stage of the TADEP. For that purpose people made use of what had been expressed by the participants in writing, thus avoiding the possible subjective interpretation of the reporter. In this way it was possible to “standardize” the records of the texts in segments that could be captured in a computerized data base developed by the IT personnel of the SEPLADE itself. In its analysis and interpretation, this base produced the themes prioritized by the participants to be included in the PED.

Of course the IT media imposed their own characteristics and required the development of a system of data base, its design and implementation, as well as the development of the computer programs for the data exploration, which meant a considerable amount of codes. The SEPLADE has now at its disposal a true base of knowledge, skills and abilities to interpret the complete results of the Citizen Consultation. It has the ability to respond to practically any manner of classification, order, category, textual content, point of origin, incidence, even through “query trees” similar to the search engines for the internet.

This unprecedented effort of development with cutting-edge technology, installed in times of highly limited financial resources, applied to the case of the citizen consultation can now show truly impacting and complex results, with a potential for future development that has not been exhausted, since the possibilities of its applications are really very rich.

## 7. Other components of the citizen consultation

Since the TAPEDs were carried out through special invitations extended to persons who were significant because of their social role or representation, other resources were made available to the citizens of Michoacán. Thus any ordinary citizen who was willing to do so could give her/his contribution, which would be incorporated into the consultation.

### *a) Consultation mailboxes*

A specialized company was hired to install, operate, collect and systematize “mailboxes” or “ballot-boxes” in which people could put ballots designed in a form that was compatible with the TAPEDs. These ballots contain ten questions by “closed” options and one “open” to the citizens’ proposals. The mail boxes (162) were put in crowded places in all municipalities of the state of Michoacán. The citizens who wanted to do so could express their opinions and proposals by filling in the ballots and putting them into the mailboxes. The amount of responses that came in was of 42,685. The results of the systematization were incorporated into the computerized common base of knowledge.

### *b) Internet*

The web page of the government of the state of Michoacán ([www.michoacan.gob.mx](http://www.michoacan.gob.mx)) received a link that showed a questionnaire whose format and content are identical to the one used in the consultation through mailboxes. Thus those who wanted and could participate through this technological medium accessed the resource and participated in this way. Of course the number of responses, 678, is smaller than in the other means of participation, but they have been equally incorporated into the knowledge base.

### *c) Telephone, fax*

Finally, a phone number was published through which people could send proposals or suggestions by fax. This form of communication was practically ignored.

## **8. Tasks and work and support materials**

To manage to overcome the suspicion and generalized apathy of the population in relation to this kind of exercise, which were the product of the farce and modes described above, was not an easy task.

It is true that the “political capital” of the new administration, backed on a broad support received by the governor in the election, represented an important strength. But we thought it did not necessarily guarantee the actual support that our proposal required.

For this reason, a “Strategy of Communication” in all available media was designed and implemented in cooperation with the government’s General Coordination of Social Communication. This implied the execution of a corporate image, mottoes, products for radio stations, TV stations, printed material, etc. It obviously included the definition of the times, paces and densities of the contents. In our view the impact of this campaign was very important to create the favorable “climate” for the positive response that we ended up having.

But we also devoted ourselves to the preparation of the support material for a successful implementation of the consultation. Thus, always in cooperation with the General Coordination mentioned above, we designed and produced the “Working Manual” for the TADEPs mentioned above. This material indicated in a graphic and simple way the tasks that each participant should fulfill before and during their respective TADEP. The cards containing the questions to be answered in advance were designed and printed.

In order to disseminate and debate the methodological proposal, we prepared Power Point presentations. We used them in meetings with the staff of the SEPLADE, of other secretariats, and for the presentation to the governor and his broadened Cabinet.

## **9. Application, supervision, accompaniment**

During the stage of the consultation’s application there was a field supervision and an indirect supervision of the process of the TADEPs. It should be pointed out, for instance, that the territorial TADEPs (44), which encompassed the consultation to the 113 municipalities of the state, took place

within five days only, which means that nine such workshops were developed every day.

This decision also created a very favorable climate in the state, since each one of the TADEPS had the participation of well-known citizens from the region as well as of the municipal authorities. The newspapers and radio stations in each region provided for a broad coverage of the events, thereby generating a favorable synergy that reinforced the campaign in the media.

#### **10. Design of materials for return and socialization**

“Memories” of the TADEPs were designed and worked out in order to inform about what had been accomplished. They should be given to the participants at new sessions of “return, follow-up and evaluation.” These sessions have been delayed. We are in the process of holding them by incorporating them into a new consultation on the “exercise of government” that will take place soon and will follow in general terms the structure of the TADEPs.

A video that informs about the experience has also been prepared and is available. The General Coordination of Social Communication was directly in charge of the script and the production of the video itself. Power Point presentations have also been prepared to inform about the results and the follow-up strategies.

#### **11. Interpretation and summary of the consultation**

The consultation had three significant sources of information: the TADEPs, the mailboxes and the web page.

In a very clear way, the three resources lead to a view of the state of Michoacán, to an analysis of the context, to an interpretation of strengths and weaknesses and to a series of proposals that are surprisingly coincident, regardless of the different modes that each device had to use in terms of methods and working tools. This gives the results an unquestionable validity.

An analytical reading allows us to say that the most often mentioned themes are:

- Employment

- Security
- Education
- Environment

As a consequence, when they refer to the actions that the government should implement in order to fulfill that, they mention with logical consistency the following ones:

- Creation of employment sources
- Support to the rural areas
- Support to education
- Fight against corruption
- Protection of natural resources
- Generation of spaces of citizen participation

The relevant incidence of the support and encouragement of citizen participation should be highlighted, as this is an element that will be reiterated in other chapters, as we shall see.

In the same sense, when referring to the role that the citizenry and civil society must take on, they express the following:

- Citizen participation
- To support democracy
- To cooperate with the government in relevant tasks
- Environmental protection
- To denounce the acts of corruption and/or ineffectiveness on the part of the government and consequently to assume an ethical behavior (to influence the public administration)
- To cooperate in the creation of jobs

For that, they express their strengths in a very consequent way. If we interpret the data dynamically, we have the following:

- Their own culture (identity, sense of belonging, knowledge, etc.)
- The state's own population
- Its natural resources
- Present democracy (understood as legitimacy of the present government, alternation, plurality...)

As we can see, the citizenry grants the government the opportunity. But it sends a message that it wants to participate in the tasks of governing on the basis of who they are and what they have: their culture, the strength of their identity, their resources. All in a favorable and hopeful political environment.

When talking about the weaknesses they find in the context, they consistently express the following:

- Lack of jobs
- Insufficient and low quality education
- Corruption
- Administrative ineffectiveness
- Insecurity

Finally, the proposals they make (which are extremely numerous, very varied and rich) coincide in three great areas:

- Education
- Culture
- Citizen participation

We can conclude that the citizens unambiguously have perfect clarity about what are the state's main problems.

Therefore, the “dream” of the Michoacán they expect as a future construction expresses in the form of longings precisely the antithesis to the difficulties and problems they perceive: jobs, education, security, citizen participation, etc.

But the most interesting element of all is that in their demands they emphasize that they want to be participants in the construction of the longed for state. There's no ambiguity in their message: they explicitly demand it when they ask the government to create or strengthen spaces of citizen participation, when they offer their own participation as a strength, when they emphasize participation once again in their proposals.

If we add to that the other elements of their strengths and commitments, such as their own identity, sense of belonging, resources and knowledge, they are telling us that in the development model that they expect the present ad-

ministration, to which they continue offering a vote of confidence, to promote, they and their culture must be taken into account.

In other words, they understand themselves as active social actors, as actors of solidarity, as protagonists and as committed actors, not merely as “passive beneficiaries” of the state policies.

The fact that this position could be gathered, which is clearly expressed in the consultation beyond any subjective interpretations, is an element of particular relevance that should be considered in the preparation of the PED and the development strategies, plans and programs derived from it.

For this reason, one must think of “trans-sectoral” strategies that approach the situations or themes from a holistic view, as it is expressed in the very name of the plan and as is demanded in the population’s message.

In that and for that, the citizens’ participation is an ineluctable factor.

The “pedagogical balance” generated as a result of the consultation is there. It does exist, and is a capital of incalculable value for the exercise of a government that wants “to govern from and with the people.”

For that purpose a process of follow-up has been designed and implemented.

## **12. Follow-up process**

### *a) Creation of the “Pátzcuaro Task Group”*

In order to continue the process generated by the consultation, and in agreement with the SEPLADE, a “task group” was created, a group made up of staff from different areas of the SEPLADE itself, from the Secretariat for Social Development (SEDES), from the Center for Municipal Development (CEDEMUN), from the COORDINATION OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, of members of the ACADEMIA and of CIVIL SOCIETY. This group, named “Pátzcuaro Group” after the name of the city where it met, called on *persons* who, beyond their own institutional responsibilities, had participated in the consultation process, were familiar with its philosophy and methodology and could, therefore, craft the design of the “follow-up strategy.”

*b) Drafting of the “Strategic Follow-up Plan”*

The “Pátzcuaro Group” members were invited to participate in an intensive workshop (February 6-8, 2003). Through the proposal of “participatory strategic planning” this group designed the “Strategic Follow-up Plan” for the consultation process.

This instrument consists of *eight lines* that are in accordance with the set goals and has been, through the actions that were planned, the guide for generating the initiatives that intend to materialize what has been agreed upon in its lines and goals.

*c) Process of Application*

For the purpose of applying the Plan, working teams (committees) voluntarily made up of the participants themselves have been formed. Under the responsible leadership of some of them, the work has been carried on with different paces and levels of progress.

Along the way these committees have been reorganized, “sub-committees” have been created with the purpose of integrating the tasks in the best possible manner and new persons have joined the group, while others have left it.

The group has been meeting on a monthly basis in sessions of information about the progress and/or the difficulties in the achievement of what was planned, of reflection and analysis of the political context and of conceptualization, based on the practice itself, of the nature, implications and range of the group itself and its Strategic Plan.

One of the main difficulties for a better performance of the group’s responsibilities has been its “informal” and unprecedented character. For this reason, certain tasks that demand information, representativity, etc. have become difficult. For this reason, from the very beginning the acknowledgment and support of the SEPLADE itself and the governor have been asked for. This was finally achieved on June 20, when the governor gave the orientation to incorporate into the group other government officials of a very significant level and institutional weight.

This has opened the way for a restructuring of the “Pátzcuaro Group”.

### **13. The group’s restructuring: “Participate”**

As a result of the agreement made with the governor, the “Pátzcuaro Group” met on June 26 and July 10 for an intensive workshop in order to revise its goals, lines of work, its new makeup, its reorganization and its new identification.

The group decided to identify itself as “PARTICIPATE: Agreement between Government and Society for Citizen Participation.”

It was also decided to incorporate new institutions and persons in the spirit of what had been agreed with the governor and to create the figure of an “executive coordinator” to facilitate the tasks of daily follow-up.

Through this strategic initiative the process of the consultation’s follow-up and the strengthening of citizen participation has found a better direction and political-strategic rationality.

### **14. Critical and self-critical appraisal of the process**

When we designed the mechanisms of citizen participation, we talked about a process constituted of three adjacent and sequential stages:

At the first stage we would carry out “the citizen consultation”, according to the elements mentioned in other documents, using particularly the organizational resources provided by the SEPLADE and by CIVIL SOCIETY.

At the end of the first stage the consultation results would be used as one of the three inputs for the preparation of the PED. Besides, the second stage would start with a phase of “methodological support in strategic planning” for the events of construction of the strategic plans of the different government agencies. This offered the guarantee that at the level of dependence the programs would be aligned with the consultation’s results.

After the conclusion of the second stage a third stage would begin: the “follow-up phase” to turn the methodologies of citizen participation into regular and constant processes, so that the consultation wouldn’t be a historical event, but a governmental custom.

Therefore, since the first documents, it was anticipated that if the consultation were successful, an immediate evaluation and follow-up session or device should be implemented in order to discern the follow-up strategies according to ethical, political, programmatic, legal and budgetary criteria. The instruments for this stage would be designed and proposed at that moment.

### **15. The events in reality**

The sequence we describe turned out to be a somewhat mechanical view of the order of events. Actually what we have called the second stage acquired its own energy even before the citizen consultation had been completed.

As a matter of fact, even before that first stage had been completed the processes of strategic planning were started by the government agencies and took place in parallel to the final steps of the citizen consultation. For practical reasons the intervention of the SEPLADE's Planning Department was not proposed, and for this reason there was no occasion to establish a common methodological framework for the construction of the strategic plans by each agency.

Having had the absolute approval of all people involved, the process of "returning" the consultation to the participants (an action that had been widely promised) has been inexplicably delayed, which is a product of bureaucratic processes that still permeate the assumed will to change.

It is true that we are about to reach that goal. But the unnecessary delay has affected, in our view, the manifest credibility and trust put by the citizenry through their enthusiastic participation in the consultation.

We hope that the strategy of "return", in connection with the honest process of evaluation to which the government will soon submit itself through the new "consultation" of the citizens, will remedy and restore the political-pedagogical capital, an "asset" that is indispensable to go on promoting multiple programs and projects designed to deepen substantial democracy.

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