PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

A study of community and citizen participation in development and policymaking in Stockholm, Värmdo and Bortkyrka municipalities in Sweden

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 3

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 3

Problem Statement ........................................................................................................ 5

Why focus on Stockholm County Local Municipalities ................................................. 7

Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 8

Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 9

Significance of this Research ........................................................................................ 9

Literature Review ............................................................................................................ 9

Historical Evolution of development communication Theories .................................... 10

Participatory Theory ....................................................................................................... 12

Methodology ................................................................................................................... 14

Philosophical Background ........................................................................................... 15

Overview of the Research Design .................................................................................. 17

Sampling ......................................................................................................................... 17

Participants Selection ..................................................................................................... 19

Participants ..................................................................................................................... 19

Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 20

Interviews ....................................................................................................................... 20

Documents and websites Reviewed .............................................................................. 22

Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 23

Limitations and Delimitations ....................................................................................... 24

Ethical Consideration .................................................................................................... 25

Research Findings .......................................................................................................... 25

Discussions ..................................................................................................................... 32

Implication ....................................................................................................................... 34

Recommendations ......................................................................................................... 36
Conclusion

Appendix

Reference
Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore and analyze the application of a participatory development approach in Stockholm, Bortkyrka, and Värmdo local municipalities in Stockholm County in Sweden. The reason for chosen municipalities in Sweden is because Sweden is relatively an advanced country with an established infrastructure and democracy to necessitate an advanced level in participatory development approach. This study examined participatory strategies and interventions within the context of development communication and how they are used to engage citizens in community-based development initiatives. I used a participatory theory to answer the following question “To what extent do local municipalities apply a participatory approach in their community development initiatives?

By applying appropriate methods, a comprehensive understanding of how municipalities apply a participatory approach in development initiatives was explored and analyzed. The study findings indicate that participatory development approach is still unclear, and it is at a rudimentary stage in the municipalities studied, and that although community participation in development initiatives in the municipalities align with the concept of development communication, there is still a lack of comprehensive appreciation of participatory development in the context of communication for development (ComDev).

Therefore, the lack of clarity on how participatory approach is understood and applied plays a fundamental role in retarding the realization of the full potential of participatory development approach.

Key words: Participatory approach; development communication; municipality; communication, communities.

Introduction

Governments and international development policies today have shifted from a top-down approach of development that have been criticized on both theoretical and practical grounds (Stein, and Harper, 2000: p. 68) because of the hierarchical and narrow perspectives of development, to more participatory approaches that are meant to enhanced community involvement in development initiatives and policymaking. These participatory approaches are
processes designed as strategic interventions initiated to make sure that communities and citizens take part in development initiatives and policies that affects their lives and that of their communities. However, government’s officials, academics, practitioners and others working in the field of development may have different perceptions of what the defining characteristics of participation in development communication are (Servaes, J. (ed) 2008), and different ways of defining it.

Communication for development (Servaes, 1999; 2002), development communication (Wilkins, 2008), and communication for social change (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte, 2006) might mean different things to different people. These concepts are different approaches of defining the field concerned with the role of strategic intervention efforts to overcome social problems common to many. Communication for development or development communication is defined in this context as “intentionally and strategically organized processes of face-to-face or mediated communication aimed at promoting dialogue and actions to address inequality, injustice, and insecurity for the common good” (Enghel, 2011), resulting to social change.

Development itself encompasses participatory and intentional strategies designed to benefit the public good, whether in terms of material, political, or social needs (Wilkins, K. 2008). This has long been recognized as pivotal to a healthy and an inclusive society that “stresses the importance of cultural diversity of local communities, and of democratization and participation at all levels, that is, international, national, local and individual; a strategy not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional receivers” (Servaes, J., & Malikhao, P., 2005). However, a greater and more effective integration of communication into development programs is only possible if its strategic values, for example, the enhancement of people’s capacities to participate are widely recognized. In most cases, government or development agencies give less attention to those intervention strategies necessary to enhance communities and citizens capacities and skills to engage in development initiatives or policy making. For example, e-participation in which citizens are provided with internet technologies to interact with service providers, social media, dialogue, consultation community radio etcetera.

More often ‘communication strategies are expressed in too generic a form in project designs
such that the role of communication is underutilized, giving only implicit and common sensual roles to communication without associating it with specific mandates on contents, channels, forms, actors, timing, based on firm theoretical underpinnings’ (Inagaki Nobuya, 2007: p. 3). This is not an uncommon practice according to Inagaki because international assistance programs are perennially strained by limited budget and human resources. Hence, most development initiatives, whether in developing or developed countries seems to fail because the aspect of participation is not enhanced in development processes. This has been acknowledged by organizations that major development projects had failed because communities were not involved in their formulation (Rahnema, 1992: p. 117). For example, the limited role of community’s participation in local development project processes often results to the failure of development projects after the projects ends because community’s in many cases cannot sustain project continuity base on the fact that they don’t feel like they have ownership of the projects. This is why government, municipalities, development agencies, politicians’ etcetera should be interested in participatory approach because it leads to more successful development projects such as in major community housing projects.

Therefore, there is a need for governments and organizations to have a clear understanding of development communication and a structured approach in identifying and incorporating a participatory approach in development policies, irrespective of whether development is undertaking in developing or developed countries. Hence, the focus of my Master degree project in Communication for Development is to investigate how participatory development strategies are applied and implemented in policy formulation in Stockholm county municipalities, specifically Stockholm municipality, Borkyrka municipality and Värmdo municipality by analyzing strategic questions such as who is participating, how and in what forms are citizens interacting with decision makers, and whether or not development communication strategies are included in their policy documents. These questions are strategic because they give an understanding of how governments interact with their communities and how communities participate in community development initiatives.

**Problem Statement**

Since from the early 1960s, development organizations have acknowledged that the failures of major development projects were as a result of lack of involvement or participation of the beneficiaries (Rahnema, M., 1992: p. 117), more specifically in developing countries. This
spurred a search for alternative approaches to development that focused more on ‘people-oriented’ (Brohman, J. 1996: p. 203) because of the concern that development projects require to put “people as agent, or creators, of their own histories” (Stein, S. and Harper, T. 2000: p. 69). The approach that came to have a broad consensus and belief, and universally recognized within most participatory theorists was the participatory approach, but the setback has been to develop tools, strategies, and the knowledge to help apply this approach (Mathur, 1995: p. 153; Gerrit, 1997: p. 2) on a practical level, for example, tools like internet platforms, and strategies like dialogue and consultations. Participation in theory gives people equal chances to get involved in decisions that affect their lives and wellbeing (Burke, 1968), and also, participation is considered to be a viable way for citizens to train themselves in working together, enabling them to learn how development works and also learn to value and appreciate cooperation as a problem-solving method.

Government, international development agencies and other stakeholders involved in the business of development nowadays still portray that they are actively engaging people and communities in community development initiatives to enhance their participation in order to collectively define trajectories of development that is inclusive. Irrespective of these rhetoric and assertions, the real effect or impact of participatory approach on people and communities who are the beneficiaries is still unknown (Eylers and Foster, 1998: p. 101). Further, the extent to which participatory approach engages the beneficiaries, and the ability of this approach to reveal problems facing the beneficiaries and involved them in the decision-making process is a concern (Nelson and Wright, 1995; Cleaver; 2001).

Participation, which necessitates listening, and moreover, trust, helps in reducing the social distance between communicators and receivers, between teachers and learners, between leaders and followers as well as facilitate a more equitable exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences (Servaes, J., & Malikhao, P. 2005). Listening in this context is not limited to those at the receiving end. It must involve the governments as well as the citizens, the poor as well as the rich, the planners and administrators as well as their targets. Therefore, participation requires that all groups, whether the poor, disabled, illiterates, literates etc. should be able to take part in an open and accessible participation platform where they can carefully reflect and debate matters, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions to a problem, and aim to arrive at a decision or judgment based on not only facts and
data, but also on values, emotions, and other less technical consideration (Nabatchi, 2017).

Because of the uncertainties in knowing how the participatory approach actually benefits communities as mentioned above, and also because development failure in developing countries has been and is still attributed to lack of involvement of local communities and citizens who are the direct beneficiaries, my research project is to investigate the experiences and knowledge of development communication in local municipalities. My focus is to investigate the extent to which local municipalities in Stockholm County understand development communication and how it is applied in their development initiatives and in their policy framework and decision-making. I am also interested in knowing how local governments perceive and define development communication. In order to gain an understanding of the process, it is therefore conceivable to investigate how local authorities in Stockholm municipalities actually understand and apply development communication approaches, especially participatory approach in their development initiatives.

**Why focus is on Stockholm County Local Municipalities**

In terms of ICT’s use in the world, Sweden is amongst countries in the world where internet diffusion rate is high. By 2008 accessibility to internet was over 80% in Sweden (Findahl, 2012). But in comparison to Estonia in terms of e-participation, Sweden is ranked at 15 while Estonia is ranked 8 (Joachim, Å., Hille H., Magnus, E. J., Martin, K. (eds.). 2013: p. 12) even though internet diffusion in Estonia is 77% of its population (Ibid: p. 20). Because ComDev is a field of study that emphasizes the use of information communication technologies to facilitate community participation in development initiatives in order to promote positive and social change, e-participation is one of those strategies that enables participation in community development initiatives because it entails the use of information communication technology tools to facilitate interaction between development stakeholders and its communities.

Hence, the reason for choosing Sweden and Stockholm County local municipalities (Stockholm, Bortkyrka, Värmdo) in particular is twofold. First, Sweden is considered to have a relatively advanced technical infrastructure and democracy that might indicate that it has an advanced level in participatory development approach, but in essence the Swedish government has not taken anything like a clear position on the issue (Ibid: p. 11), and
secondly, if it is considered that citizens engagement or participation requires that people be provided with different strategies or tools to interact with the government on matters of community development, e-participation should be one of those strategies. But unfortunately, e-participation initiatives, amongst other participatory initiatives, at the local level in Sweden are found to be few in number, and practice in this area has so far developed in an uneven manner (Ibid: p. 12). For example, from the notable and ambitious examples of e-participation initiatives in Sweden, such as in Kalix, Malmö, Vara and Sigtuna, Stockholm county municipalities are not among (Ibid: p. 12). This is not to say that there are no participatory initiatives in these municipalities because Värmdo municipality is among the only six out of a total of 290 local municipalities to have implemented e-petitioning (Ibid: p. 14), but because these municipalities are found in an economically viable, politically and culturally diverse County in Sweden. These municipalities are also accessible to me in terms of data collection and verification.

**Purpose**

People and communities in local municipalities in Stockholm might be facing different realities in terms of their participation in local development projects and policymaking processes because of different socioeconomic, political and culture characteristics of both the citizens and the local municipalities themselves. In some municipalities, there is homogeneity in culture, demographic, race and economic standards. In other municipalities, there are diversity in cultures, demographics, race and economic standards. Amongst the local municipalities themselves, there are those with substantial economic resources more than others.

Based on these disjuncture, in conjunction with the different levels of citizen capabilities and abilities to participate in developmental decisions in the various municipalities across Stockholm County, makes it very complex to understand the level of participation of communities in development and decision making in the respective municipalities. Local authorities must have the ability to understand and share the feelings for the citizens, and the knowledge of development communication strategies that can best engage people and communities in decisions and policymaking. This thesis applies a qualitative case study that will answer the question in the framework of this study. And the aim of this qualitative case study is to understand how the different municipalities engage with their communities using
participatory development approach.

**Research Questions**

1. To what extent do local municipalities apply a participatory approach in their community development initiatives?

**Significance of this Research**

The long-term goal of this research is to contribute to the knowledge base about the best strategies to formalize citizen engagement or people powered development that can refocus the way municipalities engage citizens in all development initiatives and projects that affect their lives and adopt new approach to citizen participation that can be incorporated into cities development policies. Specifically, this study focuses on development communication administrators, staff members or agencies in municipalities responsible for designing and execution of citizen engagement policies, and how they respond to their respective communities and citizens’ concerns. Citizen engagement is defined herein as processes that are put in place by governments and organizations to unlock citizens capacities to learn, decide, be informed, act, deliberate and engage at all levels of decision-making that shape their lives and their communities. The objective of this particular study is to provide a comprehensive review of development communication literatures and municipality’s practices in relation to development communication strategies and outline a conceptual framework for communication for development.

The findings from this study will be valuable to development practitioners, government, organizations, as well as related stakeholders in designing communication for development processes.

**Literature Review**

Development communication or communication for development is a widely studied topic since the 1960s to understand the best approaches to engage people and communities in development initiatives. However, models and theories of development communication have undergone major shifts in the last 50 years (Inagaki, 2007). The theoretical shifts did not follow a simple unilineal evolution, where a new theory would replace an old one, but was
characterized by parallel development and convergence of divergent approaches (Waisbord 2001). Despite a broad study of the general theoretical concepts that underpins development communication, community’s and citizen’s participation in development is still a cause for concern.

This section will review the historical evolution of development communication theories in the context of the different theoretical approaches that underpins development in order to understand how the theories are linked, and the importance of this study in the field of development communication. The first part of this section gives a brief historical overview of the different theoretical approaches that have spanned the concept of development from the 1960s. Then focus on participatory theory, which is the main theoretical approach used in this study and discuss why this approach is preferred as opposed to other development theories.

**Historical Evolution of development communication Theories**

The historical evolution of development communication theories was theoretically and ideologically informed by the modernization paradigm, which tried to resolve Third World problems by facilitating the transformation through information transmission in mass media of pre-modern and backward attitudes and practices of traditional societies into modern, rational and Western ways of life (Mowlana and Wilson 1990). Modernization paradigm was the dominant approach in academic circle from around 1945 to 1965, supported by the transferring of technology and the socio-political culture of the developed societies to the ‘traditional’ societies (Servaes, J. (ed) 2008: pp. 2-22). During this period development was defined as economic growth (Ibid).

This period coincided with the beginning of the Cold War when the United States and the former Soviet Union were trying to expand their own interests and assert influence over developing countries (Ibid: pp. 158-179). As a result, they both started to promote opposite versions of ‘modern futures’ to the so-called Third World (Servaes, J., & Malikhao, P., 2005: p. 92). Modernization was then viewed as a “model that prioritized top-down, one-way dissemination of modern ideas through mass media channels and was premised on a notion that mass media messages have direct impact on the attitudes and behaviors of the receivers” (Servaes 1991). This model is demonstrated in the (Daniel Lerner, 1958) thesis of “empathy” and “passing of traditional society” concepts that are focused on discarding traditional beliefs
and embracing change.

As years went by, modernization theory seemed to impact on subsequent development communication theories, and it was criticized for disregarding the importance of interpersonal channels in the process of adopting new ideas in development. Modernization theory’s emphasis on the information transmission model of communication was systematically adopted in a highly influential diffusion of innovations theory of (Everett Rogers 1962, 1971, 1983), which has served for many decades as a popular theoretical basis for development communication initiatives (Inagaki, N. 2007: p. 6) that recognized interpersonal interaction. But although diffusion theory recognized the importance of interpersonal channels in the process of adopting new ideas, the both, diffusion and modernization theories are similar because an affinity can be seen in the diffusion theory’s assumption that diffusion is essentially a one-way (though, multi-step) information transmission from the sender to the receiver (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981). And the fact that diffusion theory assumes that the innovations are, and should be, created or defined by development experts, shares the paternalistic conception of development just like modernization theory (Inagaki, N., 2007: p. 6).

As the dynamics in relation to the theories shifted and became complicated, development communication researchers started focusing on other previously unanalyzed areas, such as communication mechanisms taking place within families, neighborhoods, village councils and other local contexts (Ibid). According to Inagaki, as the attention of researchers became more focused on research in interpersonal communication, it also provided a theoretical basis to design intervention strategies that could systematically cultivate and use locally based change agents. This argument invariably laid the foundation for strong intellectual debates for alternative development communication approaches during the 1970s and 1980s that coincided with the diffusion scholars’ self-criticisms of the modernization paradigm (Ibid).

The debates regarding alternative development communication approaches led to the realization in the 1970s and 1980s that, development interventions should be more people-oriented (Brohman 1996: p. 203), instead of the mechanisms espoused by modernization and diffusion theorists. As alternative development theories that put people at the center of development started emerging, “participation” was perceived as one of the tools of economic

Although there are different reasons why and from whom the concept of development communication originated, among the earliest pioneers in the field we now call development communication in the form of participation was a United Nations unit called the Development Support Communications Service (DSCS), which operated under the aegis of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Servaes, J. (ed) 2008: pp. 96–157). It was from Development Support Communication Service that ideas about a distinctive approach to communication as part of development interventions started to pop up (Ibid) as a result of the realization that the beneficiaries of development (people) were not involved, or their involvement was limited in the actual development processes, which accounted to the failure of development initiatives (FAO 1990; Egger, 1995: 105). Hence, development practitioners and scholars started to redefine their perspectives about appropriate development intervention strategies.

As mentioned above, development practitioners and scholar doubled their efforts and zeal to look for alternative approaches that are people-oriented (Brohman, 1996) as opposed to top-down development strategies. As a result, in the 1970s an alternative development approach called participatory approach emerged (Friedmann, 1992; Chambers, 1997). This approach ‘valorized some or all of the following themes: the participation of the intended beneficiaries in different or all of the project-cycle stages, horizontal dialogue rather than vertical information transmission, cultivation of trust and mutual understanding rather than persuasion, local-level actions rather than national-level programs, local knowledge, the role of development specialists as the facilitator and equal participants rather than decision makers, communication process rather than specific outcomes, and the use of communication to articulate deep-seated social relations’ (Nagaki, Nobuya, 2007: p. 7).

**Participatory Theory**

Participation has become the dominant approach in all development initiatives, and is recognized by the World Bank, by acknowledging that a meaningful social change in any development initiative cannot be achieved only by external experts involving in development processes (World Bank, 1996: p. 7), irrespective of whether development is taking place in developed or developing countries. This approach allows development initiatives to be able to
incorporate local communities as part of the development process without being dominated (Rahim, 1994: p. 118) upon. The approach is also significant today because it allows people and communities to define and become subjects of their own development rather than becoming objects of technologically processes involved in development (Thomas 1994: p. 49).

Despite the ambitious direction in which participatory approach strengthen community’s and citizens participation in development processes, the approach still faces operational challenges, for example “a potential pitfall of joint decision-making in a group of stakeholders representing diverse social positions and technical backgrounds is the power imbalance among actors that threatens the integrity of a participatory strategy” (Inagaki 2007: p. 13). This is evident, as pointed out by Inagaki, in the study of a community partnership project to improve healthcare services in South Africa (El Ansari and Phillips 2001). In the study (Inagaki 2007, p. 13) asserts that the ‘author found out the different ways in which certain groups of participants were not involved in decision-making process. And the study revealed that inputs from youth, people with low income, the elderly, and community members with low education were overshadowed by inputs from academics, elites and formal agencies. Inagaki showed that, based on the study findings, different groups or participants in the project felt varying degrees of sense of project ownership, which in turn led to uneven levels of commitment on coalition building efforts among participants. In addition, some stakeholders felt uncertain about the very meaning of forming community partnerships, citing the lack of clarity in the relationships among partners’. In another example by (Campbell and MacPhail 2002) on HIV prevention program Inagaki pointed out that the authors found that a participatory HIV prevention program for youth failed to achieve a relevant level of participation among young peer educators in the project decision-making. The primary reasons cited by the authors according to Inagaki pointed to the incompatibility of a participatory model with certain institutional contexts. In this particular example, the primary site of the project, a school, favored didactic communication controlled by one actor (the guidance teacher) who made decisions for student peer educators in a vertical, directive way (Ibid).

Despite the approach potential shortcomings there is clear evidence that participatory approach in development communication has gained the mainstream status among recent
empirical literature (Ibid). Among development projects examined so far, there are more participatory projects than projects built on the modernization or diffusion theories (Ibid, p. 13). Hence, my selection of this approach as the main theoretical approach is based on the above argument.

This thesis examines participatory development in the context of selected municipalities in Stockholm because of the contrasting structures of the municipalities in terms of cultural diversity and economic development. Also, the decision to choose Stockholm local municipalities in a developed country is to compare the idea that development failure in developing countries is as a result of the failure to engage local communities and citizens in development processes. In this study, I am not doing a comparative analysis, the basis is to ascertain in the context of a developed World whether communities and citizens are actually participating in development and policy initiatives.

**Methodology**

The primary method used to conduct this study is based on qualitative approach because this approach generally allows the discovery of meanings people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). And the purpose of this research is to explore Stockholm local municipality’s experiences and knowledge of development communication, specifically participatory strategy in their development initiatives.

This method is particularly suitable for this study because the primary aim of the study is to explore (Stake, 1995) in details how development communication strategies are design and implemented based on the experiences of the municipalities under investigation. So, understanding the problem from the perspective of the municipality that design development communication strategies is important in understanding the problem itself (Patton 2002) since the different municipalities under investigation are different based on their sociopolitical, economic and cultural context.

Secondly, because of the effectiveness of qualitative approach in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of any particular population or individuals under investigation, and its focus on obtaining a truthful description
of how a problem or situation is experienced by those who live it, by privileging their experiences and striving to locate researchers and those providing information and data on an equal plane (Denzin, N. et al. 1994), the approach serves the purpose of this study.

Thirdly, qualitative study allows the researcher to explore phenomena, such as feelings or thought processes that are difficult to extract or learn about through conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin 1998). In my study, I explore participant’s perceptions and lived experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006) about how municipalities strive to engage citizens in all development policies.

Also, qualitative methods have the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue, that is, the often-contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, whose role in the research issue may not be readily apparent.

The importance of qualitative method as compared to quantitative method in this study is based on the fact that quantitative method or statistical analysis simply does not fit the problem under investigation (Creswell, 2007) because the problem entails exploring experiences and meanings participants ascribes to societal problems.

The flipside of this approach is that it runs the risk of influencing participants and the results outcomes (Nancy K. Farber, 2006). Otherwise, the approach is flexible, can be modified, and can be applied in a broad range of purposes (Bryman, 2012).

**Philosophical Background**

This research is based on a philosophical assumption drawn from a constructivist perspective. This perspective, and other social constructivist, believes that people seek understanding of

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1 Qualitative Research Methods: A data Collector´s Field Guide:  
the world in which they live and work in their own ways by developing subjective meanings of their experiences (Crotty, 1998). Since this research involves participants with different realities and experiences, and my goal is to understand or make sense of how the different municipalities apply participatory approach in their development initiatives, it is important to explore a complexity of views, experiences and meanings, rather than limiting the research into a few categories and ideas. Hence, this research reflect on the following constructivism assumptions: (1) The fact that human beings construct meaning as they engage with the world they are interpreting, qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions, so that the participants can share their views; (2) humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives; (3) the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community (Crotty, 1998).

Constructivism perspective is particularly important for this research because “most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction” (Stake, 1995: p. 99). Constructivism is a belief that knowledge is made up largely of social interpretations rather than awareness of an external reality (Ibid). Hence, the study is conducted based on participant’s interpretations, and the primordial goal was to explore the different ways in which participants understood participatory approach and how they interpret their experiences and knowledge of participatory development. The different participants experiences were based on the way they constructed reality, and the extent to which decisions about participatory initiatives were made and applied pointed to a constructivist worldview.

Interpretative theoretical perspective was applied in this study as a framework to analyze and make sense of the different ways in which participants interpreted their respective experiences and knowledge about participatory development. The study focused on understanding how participants understood and interpreted their interactions with communities and other stakeholders in their respective municipalities, and to what extent their interactions guided their decisions regarding participatory development. According to an understanding of interpretive theory by (Esterberg, 2002) that says, generally rather than researchers beginning with a predisposed assumption of how the world works, they should put themselves in the World inhabited by those they study, I tried immersing myself in the context of participant’s perspectives. This is because the emphasis was to understand how participants constructed
and interpreted (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997) their respective experiences and knowledge of development communication.

Because of the strong arguments by constructivists as stated above, I relied on using the approach to find out and to understand how participants perceived, and the kinds of experiences they have using participatory development approach based on (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Jones, 2002) assertion that the focus of constructivists researchers is to understand and reconstruct the meanings individuals hold about the phenomenon they study by examining in details their lived experiences (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

**Overview of the Research Design**

A qualitative research design was applied in the collection and analysis of the study data. The initial stage was based on the perspective of (Creswell, J. W. 2013) which focused on conducting a review of existing documents and material that gave context into how development communication strategies are designed in the various municipalities in order to have a general understanding of how municipalities work with citizens, through actions like contacting, informing, deliberation, consulting, and involving them in decision-making. The case study was Stockholm County in which purposive sampling was used to select municipalities suited for this study. The local municipalities selected were Stockholm, Bortkyrka, and Värmdö local municipalities. Thirteen unstructured, open-ended and non-directive questions were designed for participants to answer.

**Sampling**

A purposive sampling was used for the selection process because the study intended to understand the problem in the context of individual municipalities experiences, so, the selection reflected the likelihood of generating useful data based on the uniqueness and context of the municipalities in question. Purposive sampling is defined as a type of non-probability sampling, where “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, J. A., 1997: p. 88). This means that the selected municipalities for this
study were likely to have an impact on participants’ view of the topic. Hence, participants selected to take part in interviews belonged to the different municipalities with first hand understanding of citizen engagement policies that could yield good data for this study.

The advantage of using purposive sampling was that it made it easier to determine municipalities with a likelihood of providing accurate and relevant data for the research question (Oliver, P., 2006). The disadvantage came from the fact that the decision could be subjective, which might have resulted to possible bias and validity of the research conclusion (Ibid). In order to minimize bias, I made sure that the objectives and epistemological basis of the study corresponded uniformly, and the criteria used for selecting the purposive sample (Ibid).

There was also an issue of reliability of my sample that could come up based on consistency problem because studies might not have been done on the same municipalities before. This involves administering a test or measure on one occasion and then re-administering it to the same sample on another occasion (Bryman, 2012). Responses from participants could also be influenced by the circumstances, period, place and time I carried out this study, especially considering that different political parties with different political ideologies control these municipalities. More importantly, as the period of study precedes the general elections next year, the responses from participants might have been swayed to reflect the upcoming elections. Responses could change if this same study is conducted with the same participants in different circumstances, periods, places and time. Responses could also be influenced by historical contingencies of participants involved in the studies, and municipalities in question.

However, Bryman asserts that, the discussion of validity and reliability is potentially misleading, because it would be wrong to think that all new measure of concepts are submitted to the rigours of validity and reliability. In fact, most typically, measurement is undertaken within a stance described by (Cicourel, 1964) as “measurement by fiat”, which means measures are simply asserted. Fairly straightforward but minimal steps may be taken to

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ensure that a measure is reliable and/or valid, such as testing for internal reliability when a multiple indicator measure has been devised and examining face validity. But in many if not the majority of cases in which a concept is measured, no further testing takes place (ibid: p.173).

Participants Selection

After I selected my preferred municipalities as described above (See pages 7-8), I sent emails on November 5, 2017 to Stockholm and Bortkyrka municipalities respectively, and another email on November 9, 2017 to Värmdo municipality. These emails were sent using enquiry email option found on these municipalities contact addresses on their websites. In these emails I informed them of my research topic, purpose, my university, and why I would like to conduct my research in their municipalities. I did a follow up of my emails by phoning all the municipalities to confirm whether they received my emails or not. They acknowledged receiving my emails and were interested in taking part in my research topic, and also assured me that they will contact me by email with the information of those to who will take the interviews. On November 15, 2017 Stockholm and Bortyrka municipalities sent me emails with their participant´s names, roles and contact addresses and telephone numbers. On November 20, 2017 Värmdo municipality sent me an email with the names, roles, contact address and telephone numbers of their selected participants.

I contacted all the prospective participants on the same dates I received emails from their municipalities to arranged for interview dates, time and venue. Participant from Bortkyrka agreed to have an interview on November 27, 2017 in the municipality head office in Tumba from 11 to 12 pm. Participants from Värmdo agreed to have an interview on November 28, 2017 in the municipality head office in Gustavsberg from 11 to 12 pm. Participant from Stockholm agreed to have an interview on December 6, 2017 in Stockholm State house in Stockholm city from 13 to 14 pm.

Participants

The names of participants were kept anonymous because these participants still have to maintain their jobs while interacting on a daily basis with their communities. Hence, participants were designated with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4. Participants 1 and 2 were assigned to Värmdo municipality and participants 3 and 4 were assigned to Stockholm and Bortkyrka.
municipalities respectively.

**Participant 1:** An Election coordinator in the municipality and also involves in arranging public meetings that are related to democratic participation in the municipality. This participant has been working in this position for the past 5 years.

**Participant 2:** A Strategic urban planner in the municipality involved in neighborhoods development. This participant has been working in this position for the past 8 years.

**Participant 3:** A Democratic Strategist for the past 2 years in the municipality.

**Participant 4:** A Strategist and Development official in all policy areas and also works in an overall sense in development communication in the municipality.

**Data Collection**

This study was conducted using qualitatively unstructured interviews by using different sources of evidence to ensure that the study was as robust as possible (Green, C. & Elmore, 2006; Yin, 2009). In this case I collected data focusing on face-to-face, open-ended questions approach to encourage participants to respond freely and openly to queries (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Esterberg, 2002; Kvale, 1996), and to enable an understanding of participants personal experiences, value assumptions, beliefs and their perspectives (Mathison, 2005) regarding participatory development strategies in their respective municipalities. I also explore links to the municipality’s websites and reviewed project documents that could help to clarify or substantiate participants’ statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and to provide thick description of the cases (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). More information about the websites and documents is found on page 23 under “Documents and Websites Reviewed”.

**Interviews**

Open-ended interview questions (See questions in Appendix 1) reflecting the theoretical background of this study were formulated and emailed to all participants for a preview of the interview questions because they requested it before the interview. The reason for requesting the questions before the interview was to have a preview of the questions, and also to be prepared. This seemed to have increased participants self-esteem before the interviews, and also reduced their social anxiety because this study presumably was the first of its kind in these municipalities based on my conversation with the participants. This was evident from the way the participants were prepared, excited, confident and interested in the study during
my interviews with them.

On the other hand, participants might have structured their answers before the interviews, which might have influenced the outcome of the research. Notwithstanding, because there were many follow-up questions, participants pre-structured answers might not have swayed the outcome of the research that much.

There were all together 13 open-ended questions. The first interview took place on November 27, 2017 in Bortkyrka municipality building in Tumba with participant 4. The second interview on the 28 took place in Värmdo municipality building in Gustavsberg with participant 1 and 2. There were two participants in Värmdo municipality because they shared the responsibility of implementing community engagement projects in that municipality. The third interview took place on December 6, 2017 in Stockholm State House with participant 3. The interviews were meant to last for 30 minutes each but lasted for more than forty-five minutes in all of the interviews because of followed-up questions both from me, and because of intervening conversations that arose in-between the interviews as a result of the interests shown in the research from participants.

All the interviews began by first asking participants concerns if I could use a voice recorder to record the interviews. As all participants approved my request, I went further with the audio recordings to make sure all the interviews were recorded for proper accuracy of transcripts (Merriam, 1998). I then introduced myself and the university I am from, and also the research purpose and objective. The interview began with an introductory question where participants introduced themselves in terms of their role and longevity in their respective employments. Preceding questions allowed participants to answer questions and follow-up questions pertaining to their local municipality’s participatory development initiatives, and their personal experiences regarding participatory approaches to development within their municipality’s policies. Concurrently, I took down important points on a piece of paper during the interviews.

This approach of collecting data is important because it gives room for flexibility in relation to how interviews conversations can be diverted by researchers to important focus of interests in their studies. Hence, qualitative unstructured interviews are particularly suited for this study because they explore particular topics broadly. On the other hand, as this particular
study required me to interview participants from different municipalities and possibly different political ideologies and beliefs, it might have been difficult to analyze and synthesize the data across participants base on the fact that each interview was unique without similar set of follow-up questions ask to all participants.

I began transcription just after the first interview on November 27, 2017 and finished the whole process by December 15, 2017. For accuracy purposes, the audio recording was reviewed several times.

**Documents and websites Review**

In order to clarify or substantiate participant’s statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from the interviews, and to provide a thick description of the study (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002), I reviewed documents and links to websites of the municipalities under investigation. Participants from Stockholm and Bortkyrka municipalities sent me links to their websites for a review. I also reviewed Värmdo municipalities website to substantiate whether information on the website correspond with answers given during the interview. These links are listed on Table 1 and can also be found on Appendix 2. Participant from Borkyrka municipality provided me with important participatory projects documents relevant for this study and also meant to corroborate the interview. These documents are in Swedish, but I tried to translate them as much as possible using google translate and also asked assistance from my Swedish friends who helped translate them for proper understanding of the contents. The original copies of the documents in Swedish are attached in Appendix 3. The title of the documents is “Dialogprocesser i Botkyrka kommun under 2000-2014”, and sub-titles are:

- Löpande forum för dialog (English translation; Ongoing forum for dialogue)
- Dialog inom storre projekt – utvecklingsprogram, stadsdelsutveckling mm (Dialogue within major projects – development programs, district development)
- Dialog inom mindre projekt – park, cykelbanor etc. (Dialogue within Smaller projects- parks and bicycle tracks etc.)

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<th>Municipality</th>
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Table 1: Links to Stockholm, Värmdo and Bortkyrka municipalities websites with information about participatory development approaches.

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<th>Municipality</th>
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  • The guidance for participatory development: [http://www.stockholm.se/medborgardialog](http://www.stockholm.se/medborgardialog).  
  • The mobile application which can be used for error reporting: [http://www.stockholm.se/TrafikStadsplanering/Felanmalan-och-synpunkter/tycktillapp/](http://www.stockholm.se/TrafikStadsplanering/Felanmalan-och-synpunkter/tycktillapp/).  
  • [http://international.stockholm.se/governance/city-governance/](http://international.stockholm.se/governance/city-governance/)  
| Värmdo       | • [http://www.varmdo.se/underwebbar/gustavsbergsprojektet.4.776f48cd15c62501acb323a.html](http://www.varmdo.se/underwebbar/gustavsbergsprojektet.4.776f48cd15c62501acb323a.html)  
  • [http://www.varmdo.se/kommunochpolitik.4.63e5311513f7b9eaf4e1b86.html](http://www.varmdo.se/kommunochpolitik.4.63e5311513f7b9eaf4e1b86.html) |
| Bortkyrka    | • Kreativa fonden/The creative fund: [https://www.facebook.com/kreativafonden/](https://www.facebook.com/kreativafonden/)  

**Data Analysis**

A qualitative data analysis approach was applied in this study because it is a process of making sense of research participants’ views and opinions of situations, corresponding patterns, themes, categories and regular similarities (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: p. 461). And also, qualitative data analysis tends to be an ongoing and iterative process, implying that data collecting, processing, analysis and reporting are intertwined, and not necessarily a successive process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007: pp. 99-100). Based on this reason, and as espouse by (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I immediately began with the process of data analysis after the first interview by identifying patterns, in order to facilitate subsequent data collection because this process ‘lacks a clearly series of procedures’ (Bryman, 2012: p. 581).
A thematic analysis was applied from the patterns identified in this study to analyze the data because this method can be used to encode qualitative information from all qualitative methods, that is, it can be used to process, analyze and interpret information regardless of the ontology or epistemology of the research topic, and increases the ability to communicate findings and interpretation of meaning, allowing complete understanding of the phenomenon\(^3\).

Thematic analysis was based on (Cresswell, 2009: p. 185) six steps qualitative data analysis process. (1) I reviewed the entire audio transcripts and put them into a word document format. (2) I read through the data in detail in order to be familiar with the data. (3) Important themes that were identified in the data were noted as they appeared. Also, phrases and words of relevance to the study highlighted in order to be used at a later stage. I noted down all the main themes generated from the transcript pages as I read through the transcript. (4) I start generating important themes from the data using the coding process. I reviewed the coded themes to be sure if the patterns are coherent. (5) I organized the themes into thematic categories so that they represented overall findings from the participant’s interviews responses. (6) I interpreted the meaning of the data from each of the coded themes by inferring from what participants said and what they meant in relation to their experiences of participatory development.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This study provided rich, and detailed data about participant’s experiences and knowledge of participatory development in Värmdo, Bortkyrka and Stockholm municipalities. The results reflect the experiences and knowledge of participants in the studied municipalities, hence, the results can be generalized or limited only to an extent that qualitative data can (Rothe, J.P. 1993). And also, the fact that data collection depended on participants based on what they could share during interviews, the data collected was limited to participants own perspectives, experiences and knowledge, as reflected in what (Patton 2002) refers to as “perceptual data are in the eye of the beholder”. Also, repeated interviews that are longitudinal in nature are often preferable and necessary for gathering information about deeply felt experiences and/or

\(^3\)Boyatzis, R. E. (1998).
life transitions (Kirby, S. & Mackenna, K., 1989). In this study it was not possible to conduct repeated interviews based on the fact that it took concerted efforts and time for participants to schedule appropriated interview times because of their prior work commitments.

In terms of delimitation, this study concentrated on municipalities that are structurally different in terms of sociopolitical and economic and cultural reality. The reason being that the study is meant to explore experiences and knowledge of development communication from diverse perspectives. Also, the participants in this research were development communication or employees responsible for developing participatory development initiatives in their respective municipalities. Rather, if communities, citizens or beneficiaries of development projects were the focus, the end results would have been different.

**Ethical Consideration**

Ethical issues were taking seriously to conceal participants anonymity and confidentiality. Before the interviews all participants were freely consented to participate in the study and were well notified through emails and on the day of interviews about their obligations and responsibilities, and also the reason why the interview and research was being conducted. They were also assured beforehand that they can decline at any time if they don´t want to participate.

Consenting, especially in regard to participants identity is a very crucial ethical element in research, so assurance was given to all participants about how their personal identities and information they gave would be protected. Also, information gathered during the interviews from participants were solely meant for the research. Hence, information gathered from participants was used solely for the purpose of the study.

**Research Findings**

Participants who took part in this study made up of 5 municipal administrators from three local municipalities in Stockholm (see section for participants). There were two females and two males. The two females were from Värmdo municipality and the males were from Stockholm and Bortkyrka municipalities respectively. They had an average experience of 4.5 years in their respective jobs. One participant has approximately 2 years in his current job;
two participants have between 5 and 8 years’ experience in their current jobs; and one participant have 10 years working at an administrative level.

The themes that emerged from participant’s interviews reflected the views, perception and experiences of all the participants that took part in this study. Although some participants gave detailed responses in all themes than others, all participants gave a contribution that was more than average in all the themes. Therefore, all participants contributed in all aspects of the research. The themes that emerged from the data collected are as follows:

1. Knowledge and perception about participatory development.
2. Extent of citizen engagement and participation in development.

**Theme 1: Knowledge and perception about participatory development.**

When asked about their knowledge and perception of participatory development communication as defined during the interviews. There was unanimity and divergence in the responses. All participants were conversant with the concept of participatory development because they all agreed that their jobs are related to designing strategies to engage with communities. So, they all have knowledge about participatory development. When further asked of their knowledge about participatory development as it is applied in development communication, participants responses differed in relation to their understanding of development communication. *Participants 1 and 2* responded that they work with participatory community development initiatives all the time, but development communication seems to be new to them. *Participant 3* responded that he has no previous knowledge about development communication in the context of how it is applied in development initiatives. *Participant 4* responded that he has some knowledge about development communication because he had once thought of enrolling in the program. He went further to say his current knowledge and experience about development communication comes from working in the department of societal development where they regularly talk about the role of communication in development, both in the concrete projects they work with and communication in a more strategic sense.

When asked as a follow up question about participants jobs in relation to participatory development, *participant 1* responded that she works as a coordinator for elections, and also work with public meetings that involved strategic participatory questions in elections.
Participant 2 said she works with the municipal administration unit as a strategic urban planner, that is why she got involved with public meetings and communications in some projects regarding urban planning. Participants 1 and 2 said that in principle their work is more of a participatory development approach. Participant 3 said he works as a strategist with questions regarding participatory democracy at the city management of Stockholm municipality. Participant 4 said his original background is in the music industry but had worked in the last five years with questions related to participation, democracy and equality. Participant 4 further acknowledged that currently he works with strategy and development in all policy areas and he is one of the officials that works in an overall sense of development communication in the municipality.

In terms of participant’s perception of the extent to which participatory development is practiced in their respective municipalities, all participant acknowledged that they need to do more to improve participatory development in their respective municipalities. Their responses were as follows:

Participant 3 said: our municipality have not done much in terms of integrating participatory development in our overall policies framework. At the moment our municipality is collaborating with other smaller municipalities to enhance the municipality capacity in participatory development approaches. Participant 4 said his municipality still has a lot to do in terms of the relationship between participation in the formal democracy and participation in other developmental domains, but in an overall sense of community participation his municipality has diverse ways to enhance community participation in development initiatives and policy formulation. Participants 1 and 2 said they think they can do more because they have the documents and structure in place. The setback is the lack of coordination between politicians and they who implement participatory development on the ground. The politicians want to do more by directing them what to do.

**Theme 2: Extent of citizen engagement and participation in development.**

Participants were asked as a follow up question specifically how they view the way their communities and citizens are engaged in major decisions regarding major projects in their municipalities, for example, when planning to develop a new neighborhood or a community
housing project. All participants said their communities are engaged in community development initiatives but sometimes at different stages of the projects. All participants also pointed out that politicians sometimes influence decisions on which community engage strategy to be applied. Some participants mentioned that they apply different participation strategies depending on the input needed from their communities, and the stage at which the development initiative is, for example, these participants said in some projects community consultation and dialogue takes place at the conception and initiation phase to get feedbacks on the viability of the projects. And some said their communities are engaged consistently in any development initiative, but in most cases engagement with the communities is just for formality because sometimes decision is already made. Basically, all participants acknowledged that their municipalities have platforms to engage their communities and citizens in decisions that affects development. Participant 1 made the following comment by saying:

There are many ways and it depends on the level you are in the project. Right now, we are planning Hemmesta, the second biggest town in Värmdo municipality. There we have arranged four public meetings, we try also to use the webpage (social media) to communicate about it. The municipality also engaged the community of Gustavsberg in a lengthy consultation and dialogue when the municipality wanted to construct a road through a school in Gustavsberg. At the end the project was cancelled because the community objected.

Participant 2 commented that another way their municipality engages with its community and citizens is to arrange workshops where representatives from the community dialogue on important development initiatives. For example, the participant said:

Our municipality held a two days’ workshop with 20 community representatives divided into groups. They played a special game that was meant to come up with concrete ideas for societal issues, and this game was meant for representatives to come up with ideas to develop Gustavsberg central town.

Participant 2 further commented that in order to make sure all opinions and suggestions are taken into account when deciding on any projects that affects the livelihood of citizens in their municipality, they put up posters on sign-posts within the communities to invite everyone to attend public dialogues and consultations. They also use social media platforms like Facebook
and internet to communicate with communities. Further, insofar as they want to engage all communities in dialogues and consultations, it is not always about what they think and want to do, the politicians also have some very strong vested interests in what they do. So, in many cases politician’s direct community dialogues and consultations, and which groups they have to talk to. They acknowledged that they deal with these directives all the time, and sometimes they feel their knowledge and expertise is not used.

Participant 4 commented that his municipality has a formal platform with different responsibilities and strategies to make sure that communities and citizens are involved in consultations, dialogue and participation in the municipalities activities. For example, the participant said:

They have different structures in this platform: the structure for electoral participation is to increase citizens participation in elections by engaging citizens in electoral education; the dialogue forum called ‘medborgaförslag’ (citizens suggestions) where local politicians meet with people living in Bortkyrka to get more information about what is happening on the ground; in addition they have six dialogue forums in Bortkyrka municipality (in Alby, Fitja, Hallunda/Norborg, Tulinge, grödinge, Tumba); a youth council (undomfullmäktige) to encourage young people to get interested and involved in politics and local development; a platform called ‘medborgapaelen’ where citizens use internet to ask questions about issues of concern to them; a structure to dialogue with prioritized groups like the disabled people; and a structure for other minority groups. All these structures and their functions are also devolved to district administration with each district having a representative. The aim of these different structures is to make sure municipal administration interact and get views and opinions of people living within the municipality. Further, the participant said they have strategies to make it easy to interact with communities. In the area of democracy they have “democracy developer” at the head office and district level to coordinate and get the communities involved in democracy, they also have civic center (medborgarkontoret) where citizens get all information regarding the municipality and the city as a whole, they also have a cultural department that helps the community integrate on cultural issues, they also have “creative Bortkyrka” to stimulate ideas of any kind to empower associations, networks and individuals. Finally, in order to improve youth participation in the municipality’s projects, we have employed the
youth leader in the municipality head office to bring feedback from the youths and also take feedback from the municipality administration to the youths on issues of concern to them and the community as a whole.

Participant 4 further commented that beyond the structures put in place to engage communities they usually have dialogues within projects, both big urban projects and small-scale projects. For example, participant 4 said:

If we are conducting a new development program in a certain district or when we conducted the overall comprehensive plan for the municipality, we did a lot of dialogues with people living in Bortkyrka. For instance, with the comprehensive plan we had dialogues running for more than one and a half year. We had everything from workshops, to discussions and to exhibitions.

Participant 4 also said that:

there are too many dialogues and too many projects so that people don’t really understand what is the purpose of a certain project, what is the purpose of a certain dialogue. And when they go to a dialogue sometimes there are only three people who show up on a Monday evening, their feeling is like the official is just ticking the attendance box to go and confirm with the politicians that the dialogue has taking place. All the dialogues that are being conducted within certain projects are not from a very formal aspect, it is not very clear how participation takes place in these forums, in what way is it transparent because an important question is how does an official decide on whom to invite to participate in a dialogue and whom not to invite, and how do officials decide which project needs a dialogue, and which one does not need a dialogue. For example, in 2013 the housing company called Bortkyrkabyggen wanted to sell apartments in Alby, it was highly criticized by the tenants and also from the people living in Alby. A network called ‘alby not for sale’ was formed, and their basic question was “why does the company sell the apartments, and why did they not have a proper dialogue before they took the decision to try to attract investors, and why in this case they didn’t use all the tools they have for participation”? The participant said, the big interesting question in this case was not the tools itself, it’s when the politicians’ choses when they want something to be called inclusive democracy or participation. Argument from the politicians after criticism from the community was
that, why should they go out and ask for dialogue when they felt that they already have a mandate to sell properties. So, it makes it difficult sometimes to understand what participation is all about if it is not applied in all projects because municipal officials in some cases decide on which project citizens should be consulted.

Participant 3 commented that most of their projects are devolved to the districts level because the municipality is big, comprising of 14 districts. In some questions regarding development projects, the main office in “Stockholm City House” decides what kind of methods are to be used by giving the districts a “toolbox” of ideas to choose from. But in general, the districts decide on which methods or strategies of participation they apply in each project to engage with their communities. In the case of participation in general, participant 3 said:

We undertake a yearly participatory budgeting with the districts. This year we are having participatory budgeting with three districts. But this participatory budgeting involves only the main office administrators and the district offices administrators, not communities. When it comes to city planning, there are lots of consultations and dialogue with the communities all through from the early phase to the implementing phase. But in many cases the consultations and dialogue are just information meetings, because in many cases decisions are already made before the consultations. So, what the communities say do not really affects the final decision. But also, it depends on the particular project and the district concern. For example, there was intensive community participation in a project called” Samverkan Östberga” (Östberga Cooperation). Through consultations and dialogue, opinions and suggestions from tenants’ associations and community members were taking seriously during the entire process of this project. Also, Stockholm City House regularly arrange dialogue meetings between politicians and marginalized groups to get their problems, for example, women’s groups, girls between 13 and 25, immigrant’s groups, and youths organizations. In order to intensify our engagement with our communities, we have social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook. Next year the municipality will be developing a program for online consultations and social dialogue with all our communities.
Discussions

This study investigated the extent to which a participatory development approach in the context of development communication is applied in three local municipalities in Stockholm County in Sweden. The question that needed to be answered for this study is as follows:

1. To what extent does local municipalities apply a participatory approach in their community development initiatives? From the overall findings for this study, there are three areas that were consistently mentioned by participants to show the extent to which local municipalities understand and apply a participatory approach in their development initiatives. These areas were: knowledge and experience of development communication, perceptions about the role of governments and politicians, and perceptions about how communities are engaged. Although development communication is at the forefront of the Millennium Development Goals because of its capacity to make development initiatives scalable by employing different communication techniques and devices that address varying spatial requirements for local, regional, national and international levels of action, and can create a favorable ecology for development programs by re-linking and facilitating interactions between economically, politically and culturally disconnected groups and ideas (Inagaki, Nobuya, 2007), there is still a shallow knowledge of development communication in local governments. Research participants repeatedly pointed out that their municipality’s still have a lot to do to arrive at a formal platform or gain a deep knowledge about development communication. Understanding development communication in a formal way, for example, having a department in the municipality specifically responsible for development communication would give development administrators with the necessary knowledge and tools required to accomplish development communication initiatives, rather than thinking communication plays only a supportive role in assisting the core development efforts (Ibid). By having a formal knowledge of development communication practitioners would start to recognize communication as the objective in and of itself, seeing that communication empowers people (Melkote 1991).

Also, there is a wide range of experiences showed by participants in this study in regard to how their municipalities engage with their communities. Participants in this study acknowledged that their municipalities allow them to engage in direct consultations and
dialogue with specific groups or devolve responsibilities to district levels, but they lacked the autonomy and discretion to decide on their own. In general, allowing project administrators the autonomy and discretion to engage freely in consultations and dialogue with communities without authoritative orders from decision makers can enable them gain extra knowledge fundamental in the implementation of appropriate participatory interventions and plans for future development initiatives that aligns with the definition of development communication which is an ‘intentionally and strategically organized processes of face-to-face and/or mediated communication aimed at promoting dialogue and actions to address inequality, injustice, and insecurity for the common good’ (Enghel 2011). Long-term sustainable development is achievable when development administrators involve communities in development processes that affect their livelihoods. Notwithstanding, this study also found out that participants participatory development approaches in engaging communities, for example, in consultations and dialogues aligns with development communication literature. This is evident, as stated in data collection section, that participants to a large extent applied a participatory approach in the form of consultations and dialogues in engaging their communities in development initiatives.

The fact that participatory development requires that benefactors should be involved in development initiatives that affect their livelihood entails that project administrators should consult and dialogue with development benefactors during the processes of any development initiative. However, research participants alluded that government officials and politicians are consistently dominant and have attitudes of authority to override and decide on which projects should be participatory, and which one should not be participatory based on their political interests. As a result, research participants felt that centrality of authority and politician influence derails their efforts and exert substantial influence on determining who to participate and who not to participate in consultations and dialogues regarding local development initiatives. Hence, the centrality of authority and politicians influence is supported by what Inagaki asserts as an “institutional politics and culture, perceived notions of communication, organizational mandates, and other factors pertaining less to the substantive issues of strategic communication, have profound influence on programmatic and budget decisions” in development initiatives with a participatory development focus.
Furthermore, based on the findings that showed that municipalities do engage with communities to enhance their participation in development projects, a fundamental question important to answer is: To what extent are communities systematically engaged?

As stated by the participant from Stockholm municipality, that ‘but in many cases the consultations and dialogue are just information meetings, it is not certain whether what the communities say really affects the final decision, because in many cases decisions are already made’. In similar terms, the participant from Bortkyrka municipality had a concern about the procedure of consultations and dialogues that takes place in his municipality and questioned whether these procedures are effective by saying ‘there are too many dialogues and too many projects so that people don’t really understand what is the purpose of a certain project, what is the purpose of a certain dialogue. And when they go to a dialogue sometimes there are only three people who show up on a Monday evening, their feeling is like the official is just ticking the attendance box to go and confirm with the politicians that the dialogue has taking place’.

The participant from Bortkyrka perception was that it would look illogical to say that a participatory process has taken place when only three people show up for a consultation or dialogue meeting and official recognize the outcome of the meeting. What generally came out from participants is the idea that, in order to achieve a participatory development, it is important to have some kind of a clear and coherent approach of participation, that could enable a systematic approach in engaging with communities.

**Implication**

This study reveals the complexity related to operational challenges that entangles the potential success of participatory development in general. Operational challenges entails, for instance, potential pitfalls of joint decision-making in a group of stakeholders representing diverse social positions and technical backgrounds is the power imbalance among actors that threatens the integrity of a participatory strategy (Inagaki, Nobuya. (2007)).

In all the cases studied, it is evident that there is a power imbalance between decision makers and development administrators that threatens a comprehensive application of participatory approach. There are identical ways in which decision makers in all the municipalities studied influence the application of a participatory approach in development processes. It was
discovered in the study that decision makers, for example, politician’s decisions in most cases overwhelmed those of development administrators. Base on this, participants felt like their input in participatory projects in communities is not worth of their endeavours because they think they are not given the chance to have a sense of ownership of the projects they are engaged in. This by implication might results to less commitments in engaging with and forming meaningful coalitions with communities.

Also, some participants felt like they are uncertain about the very essence of participatory development, citing the lack of participation from the community in most of their meetings because of minimal attendance in consultations and dialogue meetings. As mentioned in the findings, participant from Bortkyrka talked about many consultations and dialogue meetings, but less participation from the communities.

Also, although the three cases studied talked about engaging their communities through consultations and dialogue on issues of development in their municipalities, the question to be asked in the context of development communication is “what constitute participation”? At what level of development initiative process do citizens participate, this is very crucial when talking about participation. While all the studies showed a level of community participation in development initiatives, none of the studies actually showed at which level community’s participate in development project. What was evident was that all the studies talked about consultations and dialogues, but what was not clear was at which level these participations took place. For example, was it at the decision-making level, implementation level or the evaluation level. Not including the community in any of these levels has an implication in the way participatory development is viewed in development communication perspective.

Further, the lack of knowledge of development communication as a separate field from development in general was consistent in all the studies. Understanding development communication as a separate field that deals with strategic interventions and techniques that can enable development administrators to pursue specific project outcomes could be of utmost important in enhancing a participatory development approach in municipalities.

The study also reveals the extent to which different municipalities understand and applies a participatory development approach. In the context of the range of participatory platforms, the
reality seems to differ between the different municipalities. Bortkyrka seems to have a wide range of participatory platforms and a different level of understanding of participatory development approach. For example, Bortkyrka municipality employs the youth leader in their main office in order to get feedback on the concerns of youths to enable the municipality to design appropriate participatory policies. It might be as a result of Bortkyrka’s long-term experience dealing with a multicultural community with a low standard of living that needs a lot of intervention initiatives to promote community participation as compared to Stockholm and Värmdo municipality.

Notwithstanding, despite the implication of participatory approach in the municipalities studied, participatory approach is gaining momentum in development initiatives. In all the municipalities studied, there are evidence of participatory approach in all the projects they mentioned. I also found out how they converge other components of participatory interventions with others. For example, using the social media to complement consultations and dialogue on issues of urban planning and development in all the municipalities showed a sign of progress.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of these research that incorporates a review of documents and material relevant for these study, it is recommended that municipalities:

1. **Adopt and incorporates development communication as a principle and policy in the municipality development objectives.** As the study reveals, and also supported by a review of other development communication models and strategies, municipalities should embark on clear standards of community participation approaches that are void of hierarchy. These standards should not be put in place only for specific projects or issues, they should be incorporated in the municipality process of governance. Also, the city should adopt a culture that improve participation practices that reflects both the needs of the municipality and community.

2. **Municipalities should create comprehensive platforms for community participation.** Across the World governments have realized the urgency in shifting from a top down policy approach to a more open and horizontal participatory process (see introduction). This process is vital because it engages the community and other
stakeholders involved in a timely fashion throughout consultations and dialogue pertaining to any development initiative. Outcomes of any decisions in this type of a platform reflects a representation of communities and decision makers ideas. Bortkyrka municipality is a step further in the right direction in trying to come up with a comprehensive community participation strategy where specific department have specific roles in engaging with the community.

3. Municipalities should device innovative social media strategies to implement community participation. Social media tools have the capacity to connect individual and communities in real time and space. When communities know that they are actively participating in real time with each other, not just with the authorities on substantial decisions common to them, they can make a profound difference in community development. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative that communities and citizens be conversant about what issues are important in their communities and how these issues can impact on their daily lives; communities should appreciate that their voices can be head and be sure that they can transmit their voices into actions regarding their concerns; and communities should have a reliable, well design, and an implemented platform where they can connect with other community members who face the same challenges. Social media, with its embedded tools can enable communities engage in issues that affects them, and also can enable municipal governments know the concerns of communities. If implemented as a policy, social media has the potential to improve community participation because it can help municipal government know more about issues affecting communities. All the municipalities studied use social media, but the extent to which it is implemented is not clear. Stockholm city is planning to implement in principle a new social media planform for social dialogue. Municipalities should clearly define, in principle and policy, the role of social media in participatory development. It should be clear, in terms of policy and principle how social media can be used to make service delivery transparent and accountable.

Conclusion

Participants who took part in this research shared in many ways their experiences and understandings of how their municipalities interact with communities. Their different
experiences and perspectives of participatory development that they recounted repeatedly showed the complexity and challenges involved in applying a participatory development approach in a context where there is no clear definition of the concept of participatory development. Some participants pointed out their anxieties in respect to how their endeavours in engaging with communities are disenfranchised or are overshadowed by government authority, decision makers or politicians who in many cases decides on what kind of projects they should apply a participatory approach and which one they shouldn´t.

While all participants agree that their municipalities employ some participatory strategies to enhance community participation in decision-making, they also recognized that participatory development is still at a rudimentary stage in their municipalities, and that a lot is being done by the municipal administrations to fully incorporates participatory approach in all their development initiatives, and also acknowledged the urgency in which it is important for their municipalities to create a holistic participatory development approach that could enable and avoid fragmentation in the way participatory development is coordinated.

Notwithstanding, this research was meant to understand from the perceptions and experiences of participants in regard to how municipalities apply a participatory development approach in their development projects. So, the findings from this research reflects the perspectives of participants who took part in this research. In order to gain more knowledge about participatory development in local municipalities, more research needs to be done on local communities and citizens in order to get their perspectives on this topic. Community´s perspectives on participatory development could have a positive bearing on how local government engages with communities because they are the ones constantly faced with issues of development, and also, local knowledge could be vital in complementing theoretical knowledge.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview Questions
1. Introduction
   a) How long have you been working in your job position?
   b) What is your background in Development Communication?
   c) How can you describe your experiences working in this role?
2. Have you an extensive knowledge in participatory Development?
3. Does your city council have approaches that allow citizens and communities within the municipality to participate in policy-making? If so, can I have a link to your website to read the policy document that incorporate development communication in the municipality’s policy?
4. Can you give me some examples of participatory projects implemented so far in your municipality, and examples of groups and communities that have been involved or participated in the process?
5. What are the measures put in place to make sure everyone who lives in the municipality have a say in decisions that shape their lives? For example, when deciding on immigrant’s integration or constructing new municipal housing, does the municipality dialogue with all stakeholders concerned on a practical level or on emails, social media and other communication platforms?
6. At what level (eg. data collection, keeping records, research and development, project implementation) does your municipality involves citizens, community groups, local associations and individuals in project design and implementation? Some examples.
7. How often does the city council interact with community members and local association to dialogue on matters that affect their wellbeing?
8. Does the city have platforms to communicate (not just sending information, but interacting) with citizens and groups in the municipality? If yes how?
9. Does the city have marginalized groups and communities? If yes, how does the city help these groups to make sure they participate in the municipality’s decision-making (Some of these groups might not have access to information platforms such as internet, social media, or don’t know how to access your municipality website to get appropriate information).
10. What does the city provide in terms of community empowerment programs to empower its citizens and community? Do you have some examples? For example, leadership training programs.
11. Does the city council have social media platforms to interact with its citizens and community? If yes, do you have an idea of the number of followers as a percentage of the population in your municipality? What kinds of information does the communication office relay to citizens through these platforms, and do your office take into consideration opinions posted on social media?

12. How far do you think the municipality has gone in relation to citizen’s participation in decision-making?

13. What is your overall experience on how the municipality engages everyone living in your municipality in decision-making?

Appendix 2: websites links

From Stockholm municipality

Hi,

Here are the links I promised to send to you

The project in Östberga

http://www.stockholm.se/Fristaende-webbplatser/Stadsdelssajter/Enskede-Arsta-Vantor/Samverkan-Ostberga/

The guidance for participatory development

http://www.stockholm.se/medborgardialog

The mobile application which can be used for error reporting

http://www.stockholm.se/TrafikStadsplanering/Felanmalan-och-synpunkter/tycktilapp/

Here’s some other links that might be useful for you

http://international.stockholm.se/governance/city-governance/

http://vaxer.stockholm.se/tema/medborgardialog-och-samrad_/dialog-och-samrad-i-stadsbyggnad/

Links to websites from Bortyrka Municipality
Dear Joshua,

Thank you so much for the meeting and an interesting interview. Please see below for the internet links that I mentioned to you.

Kreativa fonden/The creative fund [https://www.facebook.com/kreativafonden/](https://www.facebook.com/kreativafonden/)


UNESCO-LUCS (might be of interest for you to know about) [http://unescolucs.se/](http://unescolucs.se/)

Changers Hub (an independent organization) [http://www.changershub.se/](http://www.changershub.se/)

Good look with finalizing your research project and your future initiatives

Visit this link for information about demoracy and participation in Botkyrka. Here you will also find Botkyrkas strategy for democracy and participation.


**Links to websites from Värmdo municipality**

[http://www.varmdo.se/underwebbar/gustavsbergsprojektet.4.776f48cd15c62501acb323a.html](http://www.varmdo.se/underwebbar/gustavsbergsprojektet.4.776f48cd15c62501acb323a.html)

[http://www.varmdo.se/kommunochpolitik.4.63c5311513f7b9eaf4e1b86.html](http://www.varmdo.se/kommunochpolitik.4.63c5311513f7b9eaf4e1b86.html)

**Appendix 3**

Documents from Bortkyrka municipality

**Dialogprocesser i Botkyrka kommun under 2000–2014**

Löpande forum för dialog

riggat men svårt att locka medborgare förutom Grödinge df som normalt besöks av många. Protokollförs.

- Ungdomsfullmäktige
- Stadsdelsspecifika ungdomsråd: Alby ungdomsråd, Eldsjälgruppen i Alby
- Medborgarpanel – digital.
- Samråd med utpekade grupper, löpande. Funktionshinderrörelserna lokalt, finskt samråd, romskt samråd, pensionärsråd. På deras agenda kan stadsbyggnadsfrågor dyka upp.

Dialog inom "större" projekt - utvecklingsprogram, stadsdelsutveckling mm

- KS/2015:296 - Storvreten strukturplan/dp-program: möten, en lokal, evenemang, fokusgrupper, rapport
- Brunna (2013–2014?) strukturplan/dp-program
- Alby stadsbyggnadsidé (antogs 2014) dialog i två steg: fokusgrupper, lokal i centrum, modell, bjöd in till workshops, designdialog
- Översiktsplan: antogs 2014, dialog 2011 rapport ”Samtal om framtiden”
- Fittja planprogram: dp-program, använde också samma mtrl för utvecklingsprogram för Fittja
- Alby utvecklingsprogram, antogs 2009 (dialog 2007 och 2008)
- Tullinge utvecklingsprogram
- FÖP Flemingsberg (enklare samrådskaraktär, två kommuner involverade, Botkyrka-Huddinge)
- Riksten – (2004?)
- Friluftsplan för Lida/Riksten (2004/2005?)
- VA-utbyggningsvär Kaggamra-Sibble (2010/12?)
- Trygghetsvandringar 2015–2016 i alla stadsdelar
- Tumba skog dp?
• Trafikplan för Botkyrka kommun 2002–2012 - dialog i Tumba, Tullinge och norra kommundelar

**Dialog inom ”mindre” projekt – park, cykelbanor etc.**

• Albyskolans tomt 2014
• Folkhälsopark Alby
• Idéhuset Tullinge – Detaljplanering, projektering av hus, och diskussion om verksamhetens innehåll
• Belysning/parkstråk/dagvattenpark Tullinge (Gata-park2010???)
• Gångbana Katarinabergsvägen 2016, dialog inför och efter (projektledare: Jennifer Hillejed)
• Malmtorpsvägen 2015–2016 (medialt uppmärksammat)
• Säkra skolvägar 2002, dialog med skola, elevråd, rundvandring med föräldrar
• Upprustning av Fittja äng i två etapper
• Dagvatten Norra
• Nedläggningen av Albyskolan
• Löpande stormöten i Alby om aktuella frågor som arrangeras av områdesutvecklaren
• Biblioteket i Alby
• Stadsbyggnadside Alby
• Fritidsgården Albyshjärta
• Dennis Latifi, områdesutvecklare Alby, har mer exempel och material om det efterfrågas.

**Reference**


Nabatchi, Tina (2017). “Engaging citizens: A game changer for development”. Worldbank’s group Mooc online lectures on Strategies for Recruitment and Participation. https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:WBGx+CE01x+1T2017/courseware/4588e1b95fd14c6c8a427c3d5e50af2c/b5e3c11e7fec4b4ab259695dd4fe508a/?activate_block_id=block-v1%3AWBGx%2BCE01x%2B1T2017%2Btype%40sequential%2Bblock%40b5e3c11e7fec4b4ab259695dd4fe508a


Qualitative Research Methods: A data Collector´s Field Guide:

http://www.ccs.neu.edu/course/is4800sp12/resources/qualmethods.pdf.


http://www.communicationencyclopedia.com/subscriber/uid=1124/tocnode?id=g9781

4.

