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*The dream of citizen participation:
institutional dilemmas in the
democratization of the collective
territory*

The promotion of citizen participation in decision-making in the public sphere fulfils the double function of increasing the efficacy and efficiency of public politics, and of strengthening people's rights by improving equity and social justice, and by reducing social conflict (Involve, 2005; Nelson & Wright, 1995). The renovation of government institutional framework and the real transference of power from formal authorities to citizens are required for participation to be effective (Sánchez, 2009). The modification of administrative logics is the greater challenge in the State modernization, which implies that civil servants should transfer to people the capacity to exert influence in decision-making, and should reduce the exploitation of participative mechanisms for accomplishing political objectives (Ruano, 2010). This

transference of power generates resistances and conflicts at the level of the government system's boundaries, since granting greater levels of participation demands making the institutional action more flexible and adaptable (Gandrup, 2009). Consequently, the development of projects that encourage participation should include an institutional transformation backed by the authority's political will, not only in a discursive way, but also as a 'project driver' (Dalsgaard, 2010).

This paper analyses the dilemmas and conflicts in the generation of participatory management practices at the local level. Based on an action-research project (Long, 1999) conducted by a group of researchers in coordination with professionals of the Community Development Direction of the Municipality of Santiago, Chile, this study examines the systemic challenges to transform the collaboration links between the institution and the community. This participative action-research lasted one a half years, and it was developed through successive stages, in which several municipality's professionals were involved depending on the emerging goals of the project. During the process several socio-analytic methods were employed, such as organizational role analysis (Newton, Long & Sievers, 2006), listening post (Khaleelee & Stapley, 2013), and group sessions to analyse the main 'emergents' (Miller,

1995; Pichòn-Riviere, 1985). The use of these methods sought to encourage a reflective-critical perspective through the generation of alliances and dialogue on the institutional and territorial reality.

This paper explores the scope, limits, and possibilities that the promotion of citizen participation has in managing the shared territory wherein they live. In particular, the study delves into the institutional dilemmas involved in the challenge of implementing a new kind of bond with the community, and the strong resistances experienced both within the municipality and in the link with the citizens. The historical, political, cultural, and institutional spheres are taken into account to explore and develop hypotheses that explain the unconscious dynamics that hinder the transformation process of participatory management practices (Burns, Hambleton & Hoggett, 1994; Lawrence, 2008; Voronov & Vince, 2012).

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