

## Sustainable Territorial Design - Introducing Multiple Scale Participation as Critical Factor Project Uniqueness, Acceptance and Specificity

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### Abstract:

It is increasingly acknowledged that the implementation of integrated approaches focused in design for territories in low-density areas demands innovative methods to ensure sustainability and inclusivity. This study investigates the significance of integrating multiple public participation methods - ranging from questionnaires, to focus groups, charettes and interviews - into territorial planning, assessing their contributions to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. Considering that low-density areas often face challenges such as depopulation, economic stagnation, and environmental degradation, the involvement of local stakeholders through participatory methodologies, planners is critical to better understand the unique dynamics and needs of these communities. While questionnaires and interviews enable the acquisition of specific information regarding the intervention area, focus groups act as a platform for stakeholders - including residents, local authorities, and multidisciplinary experts - to collaborate, share knowledge, and propose tailored-made solutions. This process ensures development strategies economically relevant, promoting job creation and supporting small-scale, sustainable industries; socially responsible, fostering a sense of ownership and trust, enhancing equity, and empowering marginalized voices, thus contributing to the cohesion and well-being of the community; and environmentally sound, identifying critical natural resources and prioritizing their preservation, ensuring that design proposals align with sustainable land-use practices and climate resilience.

The study highlights the need for implementing multidisciplinary approaches, combining expertise from design, urban planning, sociology, anthropology and economics to develop holistic and integrated solutions, bearing in mind that such approaches enable a deeper understanding of the interconnections between economic viability, social equity, and environmental sustainability, in design for territories projects. The research concludes that incorporating public participation and focus groups into territorial design not only improves projects' relevance and effectiveness but also strengthens the capacity to achieve balanced and sustainable outcomes in low-density areas. This paper advocates for institutionalizing participatory frameworks as a cornerstone of sustainable design for territories policies.