



Participatory local strategic planning: experience sharing based on a Portuguese case study

Eduarda Fernandes

Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão, Centro de Investigação em Gestão para a Sustentabilidade,
Instituto Politécnico de Leiria

Ana Sargento

Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão, Centro de Investigação em Gestão para a Sustentabilidade,
Instituto Politécnico de Leiria

Ana Sofia Lopes

Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão, Centro de Investigação em Gestão para a Sustentabilidade,
Instituto Politécnico de Leiria

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Outline

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Motivation and research purposes

Current national and international context has triggered a fast dissemination of participatory governance initiatives

- The new wave of structural funds that has been prepared to be allocated to regions and municipalities has created a momentum for local government actors to consider new and more effective mechanisms of local governance, especially in what concerns to local strategic planning for the period 2014–2020
- In fact, stakeholders' engagement in planning is a mandatory requirement in order to apply to the majority of funds

The authors of this research have been invited to participate as facilitators of the work being developed since June 2014, by a group of local stakeholders of Ansião, called “Agenda Ansião 2020”. This board was created to build, in a participatory way, the county's Strategic Plan for 2014–2020

Motivation and research purposes

This research
has two main aims

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graph TD; A["This research has two main aims"] --> B["To provide some insights on the experience that is being carried out in this county, highlighting some specific methods that have been put in practice to ensure stakeholders' engagement;"]; A --> C["To make a preliminary evaluation of the methods used, envisioned to support future improvements, also in similar initiatives being applied by others"];
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To provide some insights on the experience that is being carried out in this county, highlighting some specific methods that have been put in practice to ensure stakeholders' engagement;

To make a preliminary evaluation of the methods used, envisioned to support future improvements, also in similar initiatives being applied by others

Participatory local governance models

By participatory local governance we mean any mechanism (more or less formal) that promotes the involvement of individual citizens and / or civic organizations (representative of the key local stakeholders) in the public policy decision-making process (Andersson & Van Laerhoven, 2007)

PG mechanisms can be applied at different phases of the policy cycle

- Participatory planning and implementation
- Participatory monitoring
- Participatory evaluation



Participatory local governance models

Benefits

(Ackerman, 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Landry & Angeles, 2011; Callanan, 2005)

- Increasing local government responsiveness and accountability
- Agency problem can be partially solved by decreasing information asymmetry: it improves both policy makers' information about citizens' preferences and citizens' knowledge about government actors' decisions and actions
- Giving voice to citizens in between elections
- Acknowledging citizens' expertise on different local matters
- Creating a greater sense of compromise and engagement on citizens

Risks

(Landry & Angeles, 2011; Bland, 2011)

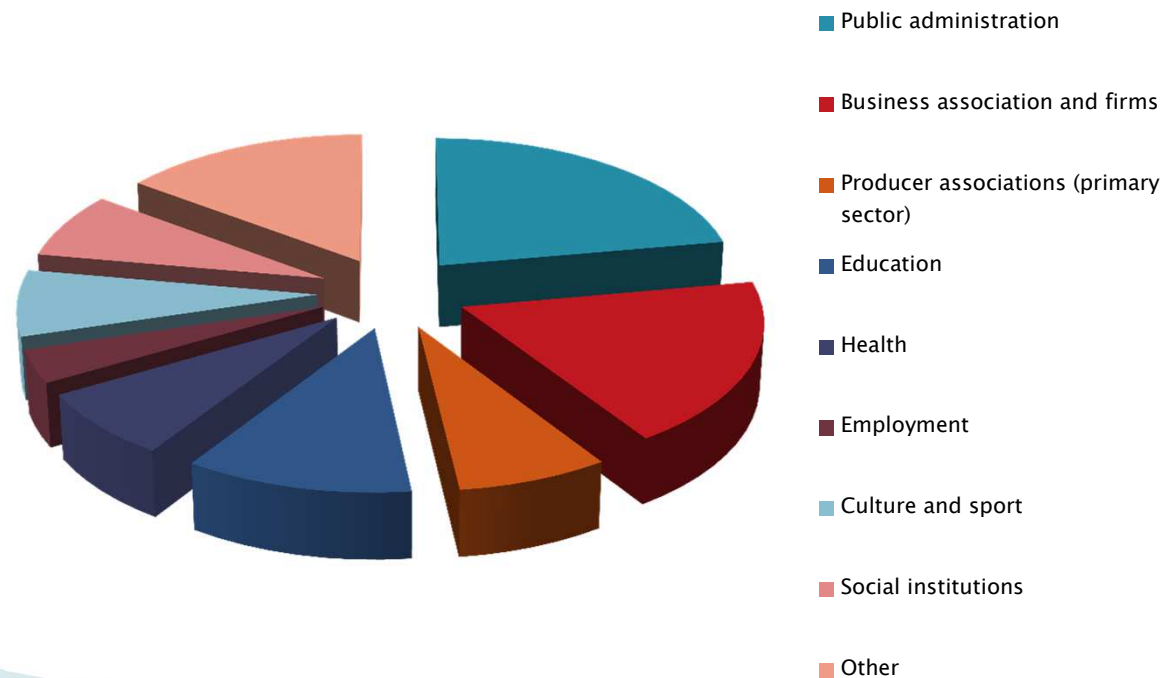
- Prolonged decision-making process
- Overstated stakeholders' expectations
- Danger of privileging some specific groups of civil society – with better means, better capacity or privileged information, making the supposedly open process to become a channel for uneven influence over local policy decisions
- Danger of becoming merely a tool for increasing promoter's popularity

The case of Ansião

The group

Agenda Ansião 2020

- 27 members from different areas that have in common the deep knowledge of the problems of the county, as well as a significant experience and an important role in civic participation



The case of Ansião

The role of the external team

In spite of the high level of experience in the field, this stakeholders' group lacked the technical expertise to the strategy development and to coordinate the decision-making process

In this sense, our main contribution is to provide a framework designed to encourage and manage the participation of all members, ensuring equitable influence in the process, promoting the sharing of knowledge and the construction of new ideas.

Additionally, it is also a challenge to build consensus, departing from the diverse opinions, into a unique view for the Ansião development strategy

The case of Ansião

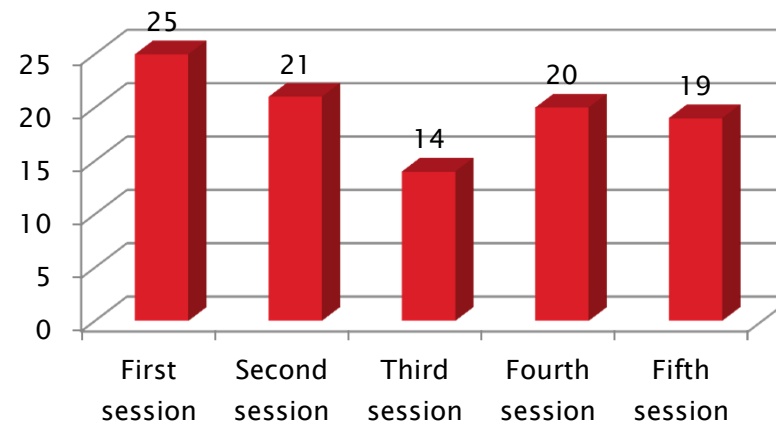
Characterization of participatory format used

6 work sessions, from June 2014 until October 2015 (final report)

Average duration of workshops: 2 hours

Frequency of meetings: quarterly

Number of participants:



The case of Ansião

Practices applied for stakeholders' engagement

1. Diagnostic

- presentation of quantitative indicators and receiving participants' concerns

2. Construction of the vision for the county (and strategic goals)

- group dynamics

3. Identification of the specific goals and main challenges

- problem tree analysis

4. Identification of activities to achieve the specific goals

- rotating idea building

5. Indicators, targets and promoters for the proposed activities

- presentation, discussion and validation
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The case of Ansião

Construction of the vision for the county (and strategic goals): Session 2

Participants were divided in 3 thematic groups (each with seven, on average), according to the sector/ areas they represented and stated concerns (session 1);

Written individual contributions were asked (for vision and two strategic goals) and then posted in the wall for visualisation by all members

3 proposals were selected through voting; posterior discussion, facilitated by IPL team member, allowed building consensus about the vision for the county.

Finally, the 3 groups were gathered in the same room and the 3 visions shared. Participants were given the opportunity to comment each other's
Vision / Strategic goals

The case of Ansião

Construction of the vision for the county (and strategic goals): Session 2

Group 1



AGENDA ANSIÃO 2020
Sessão 2 – 12 de setembro de 2014

GRUPO 1

Objetivo
+ Construir uma visão partilhada para Ansião, definindo um conjunto de ideias fortes, claras e objetivas, que traduzam a realidade que se espera viver em 2020, acompanhado de um número limitado de macro-objetivos que orientarão a ação coletiva.

Orçamentação por sessão
Debate e análise de temas comuns

Viver em Ansião

Em 2020, Ansião será...

Uma referência Sub-Regional ao nível da qualidade de vida e do dinamismo empresarial, valorizando os Recursos endógenos e garantindo a coesão social.

Esta visão é estruturada em torno dos seguintes macro-objetivos de desenvolvimento

Ansião como marca	Captação de investimento e oportunidades de negócio
Valorizar os Recursos endógenos	Plano populacional positivo

Aspectos positivos Aspectos a melhorar

Group 2



AGENDA ANSIÃO 2020
Sessão 2 – 12 de setembro de 2014

GRUPO 2

Objetivo
+ Construir uma visão partilhada para Ansião, definindo um conjunto de ideias fortes, claras e objetivas, que traduzam a realidade que se espera viver em 2020, acompanhado de um número limitado de macro-objetivos que orientarão a ação coletiva.

Orçamentação por sessão
Debate e análise de temas comuns

Em 2020, Ansião será...

Um território com sustentabilidade, com capacidade de atrair e fixar população, qualificação e inovação (Iniciativa e Inovação)

Esta visão é estruturada em torno dos seguintes macro-objetivos de desenvolvimento

Carreiras diversificadas para captar empresas e gerar emprego e dinamizar a economia local	Preparar a região, potenciando as vantagens ecológicas e criando valor partilhado
Realizar a qualificação de todo o território e obter o consenso das áreas locais e promover os valores, tradições e cultura	Promover o empreendedorismo e a inovação

Aspectos positivos Aspectos a melhorar

Group 3



AGENDA ANSIÃO 2020
Sessão 2 – 12 de setembro de 2014

GRUPO 3

Objetivo
+ Construir uma visão partilhada para Ansião, definindo um conjunto de ideias fortes, claras e objetivas, que traduzam a realidade que se espera viver em 2020, acompanhado de um número limitado de macro-objetivos que orientarão a ação coletiva.

Orçamentação por sessão
Debate e análise de temas comuns

Em 2020, Ansião será...

UM TERRITÓRIO SUSTENTADO, ~~COM~~ INOVADOR, COMPETITIVO COM QUALIDADE DE VIDA E COESÃO SOCIAL!

Esta visão é estruturada em torno dos seguintes macro-objetivos de desenvolvimento

Formação com foco na formação de competências necessárias do mercado	Ser modelo de inovação em áreas físicas (AGRO + FLORESTA + TURISMO) AMBIENTE
Garantir o crescimento e desenvolvimento do território através de inovação e empreendedorismo	Manter e desenvolver um tecido de serviços e comunicações de qualidade

Aspectos positivos Aspectos a melhorar

The case of Ansião

Identification of the specific goals and main challenges: Session 3

3 groups carried on working on separated rooms

Brainstorming to identification of the problems / challenges most important for strategic vision's achievement

Debate to choose 2 or 3 critical problems

Problem-Tree-Analysis (PTA), to identify main causes and consequences

Stakeholders engagement in problems identification
(complementary to quantitative diagnostic)

Establishment of cause-effects relationships

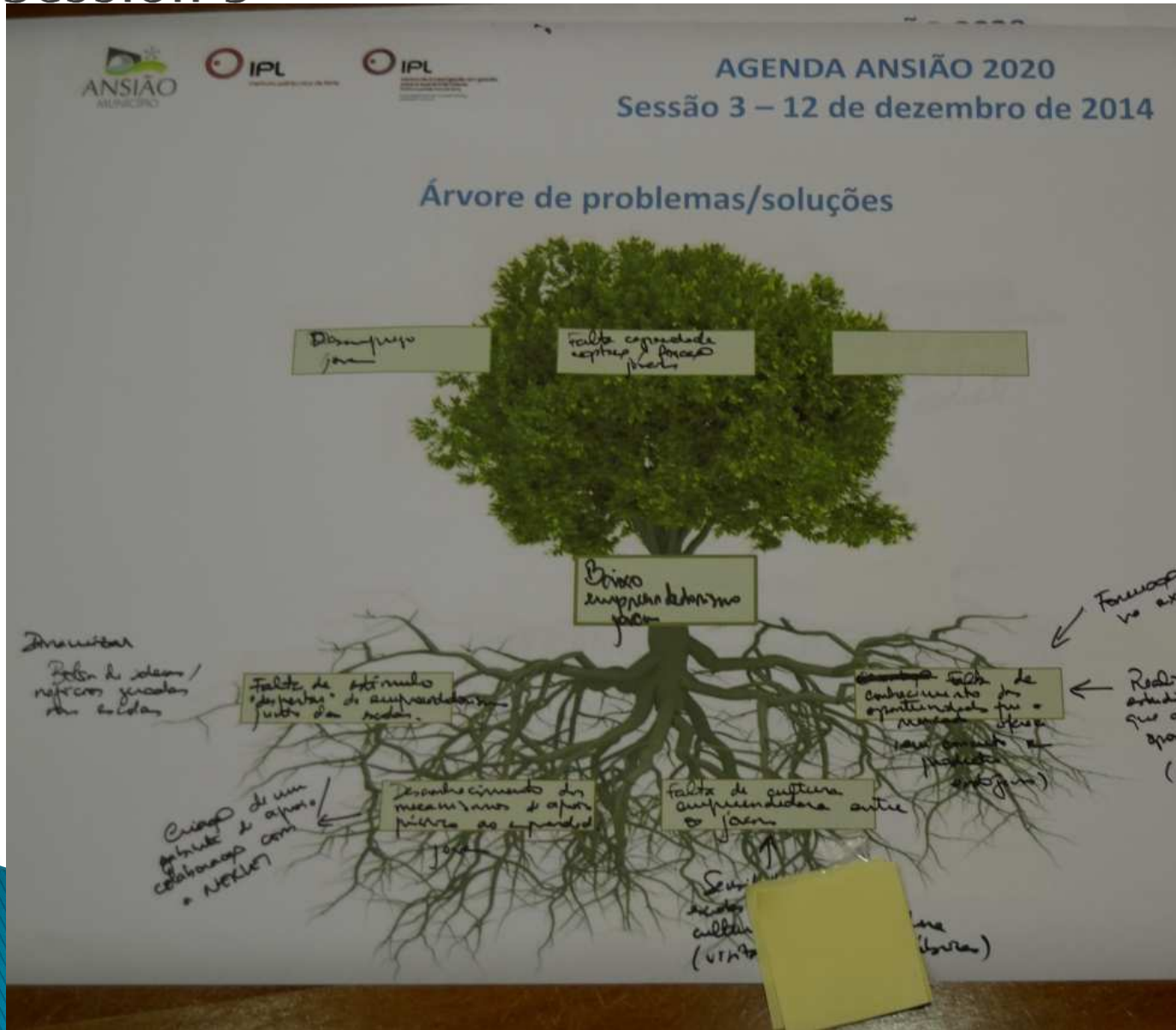
The case of Ansião

Identification of the specific goals and main challenges: Session 3

Impacts

Goal

Activities



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Identification of activities to achieve the specific goals for the county: Session 4

Participants were asked to think about the possible activities to achieve the specific goals identified in the previous session using a methodology of “rotating” ideas building



Firstly, each group received one of the nine worksheets with the specific goal, so that a set of activities could be suggested



Afterwards, each worksheet was passed on to the remaining groups, in order to be commented



The main advantage was allowing for all group members to contribute and validate each others' ideas

The case of Ansião

Additional considerations about the methodology for stakeholders' engagement (IPL external team)

The group was always conducted by one or more IPL team member, that started giving a brief explanation of the goal and main concepts involved, in order to surpass one of the main difficulties: participants' misunderstanding of concepts involved

The division in smaller groups (in some sessions) allowed for higher engagement of all elements of the group and to overcome the difficulty in reaching consensus

In between sessions, all contributions were analysed, summarized and organized by IPL team

A summary report of each session was produced and sent to the initiative promoter to be forwarded to all the group members

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Preliminary evaluation results

Questionnaires

Total of 26 questions

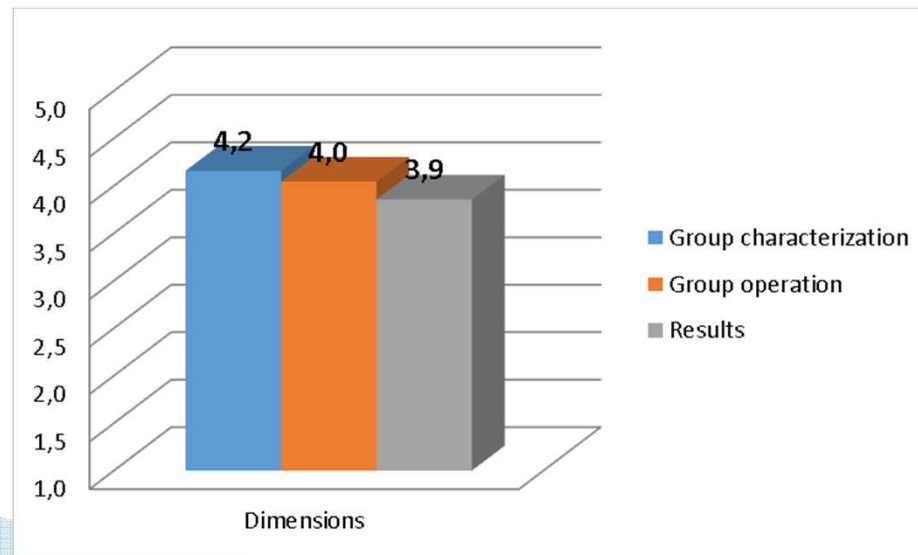
Using a 5 points Likert scale (agreement with statements)

3 dimensions

Group characterization

Group operation

Results



The case of Ansião

Preliminary evaluation results

There were no “1” cases

The average given to each question was always higher than 3.5

Consensual answers (low standard deviation)

Those who participated in a higher number of sessions also gave a higher value concerning the “Results” dimension and are also those who state having a higher propensity for public engagement



The case of Ansião

Preliminary evaluation results

Most positive aspects (average > 4; standard deviation below its average value)

- **Group characterization**
 - Group composition (relationship with the remaining members, relevant skills of the other for civic participation, group representativeness); 3 questions; average 4,30
 - Stated motivation: “My participation in the group was mainly driven by the contribution I can give to the development of Ansião” = average 4,22
 - Self evaluation of skills: “Experience in previous civic intervention has been important for my contribution in the group” = average 4,11

The case of Ansião

Preliminary evaluation results

Most positive aspects (average > 4; standard deviation below its average value)

- **Group operation**
 - External facilitator team: “The fact of the sessions monitoring being conducted by an external and independent team was positive” = average 4,39
 - Methods: “The methods used allow for all group members participation” = average 4,22
 - Effort required: “The work that was asked me in each session was appropriate to the aims” = average 4,11
- **Results**
 - Replicability of this practice (availability to participate again; practice to be adopted in other municipalities): 2 questions; average 4,17


The case of Ansião

Preliminary conclusions and recommended improvements

Overall, it has been recognized as a positive initiative

- All stages of the Strategic Plan were accomplished, with the active participation of members
- The Activity Plan is well defined (activities, targets and promoters)
- Positive evaluation (questionnaires)

Recommended improvements

- Ensuring control over the communication flows with members established between meetings; not always in time, weakening feedback from participants
 - At the beginning of the process, explain the importance of participants' stability (the same person per institution in all sessions)
 - More suggestions?...
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Thank you for your attention!
eduarda.fernandes@ipleiria.pt, ana.sargento@ipleiria.pt, analopes@ipleiria.pt

