

An Approach to Community Participation Evaluation Framework

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Abstract:

Evaluating a community participation exercise has been in the frontline of challenges faced by planners, policy-makers and academicians. In this article, a theory-driven approach to Community Participation evaluation framework/mechanism is presented and outlined. Counting on that our theories determine what we measure, the methodology underpinning this article depends on critical analysis and evaluation of how community participation is being evaluated in 1) traditional Community Participation literature and practices; 2) Third World oriented Community Participation literature and; 3) contemporary Community Participation literature and practices. The developed framework focuses more on the procedural aspects of participation, stranding to its objectives. This article concluded by outlining a five-components framework through which Community Participation can be evaluated and measured. It is also concluded by arguing that; the approach presented can work nicely in both developed and developing world.

Keywords: Community participation; participation evaluation; urban planning; developing countries; theory of community participation

مستخلص:

يعتبر تقييم المشاركة المجتمعية في التخطيط العمراني من أهم التحديات التي تواجه المخططين، متخذي القرار والأكاديميين على السواء. هذه الورقة تناقش وتقتراح الية وهيكل لقياس كفاءة المشاركة المجتمعية في التخطيط العمراني. اتبعت هذه الدراسة منهجية التحليل النقدي حيث اعتمدت الية التقييم المقترحة في تكوينها على هيكل نظري يستند الي نظريات وأسس تقييم المشاركة المجتمعية المعروفة وسط المجتمع الأكاديمي والمهني وتشمل (1) ادبيات وممارسة المشاركة المجتمعية التقليدية والقديمة (2) المشاركة المجتمعية في دول العالم الثالث و(3) المشاركة المجتمعية المعاصرة. في ختام هذه الورقة يقترح الباحث هيكل خماسي لتقييم المشاركة المجتمعية في التخطيط العمراني. ركزت الالية المقترحة في تكوينها على الجوانب الإجرائية للمشاركة المجتمعية رغم طرقها لأهداف المشاركة. يجادل الكاتب في ختام هذه الورقة أن الية القياس المقترحة تصلح لقياس المشاركة المجتمعية في مشاريع التخطيط العمراني في الدول النامية والمتقدمة على السواء.

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1. Introduction

The challenge of finding a context-sensitive, yet, reliable Community Participation (C.P) evaluation framework has been in the frontline to challenges faced by planners, researchers and policy-makers. The necessity of endorsing such framework is generally agreed upon by the work of several community participation theorists as well as practitioners. Among those are Rowe & Frewer, 2000 [1], Innes & Booher, 1999 [2], Innes, 1996 [3], Aubel, 1993 [4] and Bahreldin & Ariga, 2011 [5]. While the necessity of such framework stems from the lack of agreed-upon criteria to measure the success and failure of any participation exercise, many researches exhibited the difficulties aligned to building community participation evaluation frameworks that can be used efficiently and effectively at different contexts.

Indeed measuring community participation is not an easy task. Community Participation Evaluation (CPE) requires both an agreed upon “Scale” as well as “a benchmark” of which the quality of participation process can be measured upon. Both of those requirements are very subjective and generally based on people’s culture, level of understanding, timing, homogeneity, and of course the type of projects subjected to the evaluation process. This signifies that finding a common Community Participation Evaluation Framework (CPEF) is as difficult as finding acceptable criteria of success to the issues identified above. Thus, it would be naïve to downplay both the complicated nature of the community participation as a process as well as the difficulty of attaining efficient and trusted evaluation methodology or commonly accepted measures of success.

2. Literature review;

2.1 The dilemma of community participation evaluation

Evaluation of participation exercises is important for all stakeholders. In general, the concept of community participation evaluation is relatively new. Laurian & Shaw, 2008 [6] argues that CPE emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000 and has not coalesced around agreed on principles or methods. According to this notion, Beierle, 1998 [7] argues that the state of participation evaluation had not progressed. The two statements above stimulate that although C.P has been with us for some time already; it is evaluation is still far behind. As for Beierle, 1998 the two decades of CPE were simply not enough to realize significant breakthrough. At this point,

Rosener, 1978 [8] argues that lack of knowledge about participation effectiveness is related to that few actually acknowledge its complexity. As the author agrees with Beierle, 1998, he believes that these twenty years were generally enough to point out the major challenges associated with community participation evaluation theoretical aspects as well as its application.

2.2 The importance of community participation evaluation

Conferred with the complicated nature of participation as well as the frequent changes in the society, four main reasons in which the importance of CPE can be manifested can be identified. The four reasons are

1. Given the frequent failure of C.P practices, their evaluation is thus necessary to improve practice [9]. Community participation evaluation is essential to accumulate knowledge and learns from our previous mistakes.
2. Evaluation is an essential step in many planning models. Rational-adaptive planning model for instance makes it necessary to conduct evaluation as part of the planning processes itself as a requirement to guide the next step [10].
3. Applied literature on community participation lacks sound evaluation [11]. This exhibits that this field still needs to be studied and touched.
4. The fourth yet more context driven importance is that public authorities in general might not focus too much in evaluation. Developing new projects might deem more profitable and important than evaluating an implemented project.

2.3 Challenges to community participation evaluation

Concealing divergent, often confusing views related to its meaning, purpose and practice, the word “participation” is very vague and has brought up many controversial and contradicting debates. For instance, Desai, 1995 [12] stated that; the term “community development” was the word used to represents participation during 1950s and 1960s. In fact, until 1970s, the definition used by United Nations for community participation was actually the same definition of community building; it was until 1979 that United Nation defined participation as *“sharing by people in the benefits of development, active contribution to development and involvement of people in decision-*

making at all levels of society" [13]. In the same sense, the word "Machizukuri" in Japan stands for "community building" [14] but it has been widely used to stimulate community participation and involvement. The same dispute goes for the Sudanese words of "Nafeer" and "Fazaa". The two words though literally mean "the collective work done during the war time" but they are widely accepted terms for community involvement and participation [15].

The examples above state that measuring participation might be as debatable as the concept itself due to the lack "*... of appropriate benchmarking against which the quality of participation exercise might be compared*" [16]. Similarly; Lack of "*... definition and criteria of success in participation*" as noted by Laurian & Shaw, 2008 [6] is also regarded as a key obstacle to community participation evaluation. Several scholars and scientists summarized these challenges and obstacles. For instances, Rosener (1981) [8] listed four problems related to evaluation

1. First, the participation concept is complex and value laden.
2. Second, that there are no widely held criteria for judging success and failure of an exercise.
3. Third, that there are no agreed-upon evaluation methods.
4. Fourth, that there are few reliable measurements tools.

The challenges and limitations mentioned above signify that reaching a successful and efficient community participation evaluation framework requires overcoming the challenges that are related to identifying factors of C.P success, those challenges are:

- a. What to measure?
- b. And, how to measure?

2.4 Community participation evaluation approach; structure and definitions

Overcoming the challenges associated with identifying criteria of community participation evaluation (what to measure?) as well as the methodology of evaluation (how to measure?) is not easy and requires critical thinking and

theoretical exploration. Thus, the author opts to use Albert Einstein philosophical ideals quoted in Seng, 1990 [17] as, “*Our theories determine what we measure...*”

Einstein philosophy provided strong ground for developing an approach to community participation evaluation framework that is built upon community participation theories. In other words, identifying what need to be measured in a community participation process should be linked to how theories interpret participation itself. Nonetheless, applying this philosophical approach in Developing World might face some challenges generally associated with conducting research in developing contexts. Such challenges includes but not limited to

- a. There is generally very little literature on C.P in the developing world context.
- b. Accordingly, most of the commonly cited theories of C.P were originated from a western context. Thus, they might not respond to the cultural and social values of the Third World communities.
- c. Evolving from a development philosophy, participation models applied in many of developing countries are largely influenced by international development agencies. Such example includes participation model supplied and used by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), United States Aid Program (USAID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The above limitations imply that the forthcoming approach to community participation evaluation framework should be able to overcome the weaknesses availed by the context of this research. In this regard, albeit the author understands Einstein philosophy as applicable and worthwhile, he argues that CPE in the Developing World context requires “contextually-driven” measures to be capable of providing efficient results. Lack of C.P tailored to Developing Countries suggests the necessity to invent creative approach of applying Einstein philosophy in that specific context without compromising its unique settings and identity. Therefore, rather than using Third-World oriented community participation theories (that barley exists); it

can be proposed to look at what constitutes theory. In other word, in the absence of participation theory in Third World, it is needed to study how theories evolved and emerged. In this regard, it would perhaps be useful to look at researches as well as projects associated to C.P in Third World; this has can be delivered through investigation of published and unpublished literature that touch up on C.P in this context.

3. Discussion; an approach to community participation framework

The approach presented in this article is based on the procedural aspects of the evaluations, stranding to the tangible outcomes. Focusing on procedural aspects of evaluation provides space for all stakeholders to learn from each other while improving process outcomes. Thus, as explained in the previous section, the approach presented is grounded on two main criteria:

- a. Community participation theory
- b. As well as results of researches and experiences in Third World.

These two factors are thus explained henceforth

Community participation theory

This part examines some of the commonly used C.P theories at the contexts of C.P evaluation. This includes the study and analysis of both the traditional /old community participation theories and ideals i.e. Arnstein [18], Choguill [19] and Turner, 1977 [20], as well as contemporary C.P literature including communicative turn in planning. The latter includes literature from Innes and Booher [2], and Beierle and Cayford, 2002 [21] (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Results of other researches and experiences on C.P in relation to Third World

This part examines several researches, projects and papers on community participation in developing countries. It also includes the study of some practical C.P projects developed by international non-governmental organizations and development agencies in the Third World context.

Based on the two criteria mentioned above, three different groups of literature, theory and projects to be investigated were identified. These groups as well as the literature associated are exhibited in Table 1.

Table 1: The three groups of literature and theory that define author's approach to C.P evaluation framework

Traditional C.P theories and Literature	Third-World oriented Literature	Contemporary C.P literature
Arnstein, 1969 [18]	Moser, 1989 [23]	Innes and Booher, 1999 [2]
Checkoway, 1984 [22]	Aubel, 1993 [4]	Rosener, 1982 [8]
John F. C. Turner, 1977) [20]	Choguil, 1996 [19]	Beierle and Cayford, 2002 [21]
	Fisher, 2000 [24]	Laurian and Shaw, 2008 [6]
	Rowe, 2004 [26]	Petts, 2004 [30]
	Bahreldin & Ariga, 2011a	
	[5] & b [27]	Rowe, 2004 [26]
	White, 1996 [28]	Kellert, 2000 [31]
	Eltahir, 2005 [29]	
	Johnsona et al., 2003 [25]	

3.1 Traditional community participation theories and literature

This category includes traditional C.P literatures that have placed clear footprints in the development of C.P both as a theory as well as a practice. In general, this part focuses on literature prior to the 1990s. A part from the frequently quoted article of Arnstein's, 1969 "Ladder of Citizens Participation" [18], this category includes John Turner's 1976 book of Housing by People [20] and Checkwoy's 1984 article of "Two Types of Planning in Neighborhoods" [22]. The three articles mentioned above exhibits community participation as a process strongly related to the power/control of the participant and their respective capacities. Figure 1-A summarizes the extent that this group understands the process of community participation.

3.2 Third World oriented C.P literature

The second group of literature studied focuses on the Third World context. With minor exceptions, most of the literatures investigated here are dated after the year 1990. This raises an argument whether C.P in Third-World countries has generally evolved as late as 1990s. Literature examined in this category is; the famous World Bank report of 1989 by Moser [23], Choguill's, 1996 New Ladder of Citizens Participation [19], the United Nations experience on community participation based on Fisher, 2001 [24], Johnsona et al., 2003 work on natural resources management and community participation [25], Rowe & Lynn, 2004 article on "Evaluating Public Participation Exercises: A Research Agenda" [26] and Bahreldin and Ariga, 2011a [5], 2011b [27] articles on C.P in the Sudanese context.

Figure 1-B provides a summary of how CPE is understood in the second group of literature examined.

3.3 Contemporary literature on community participation

The third category focuses at contemporary C.P literature. This includes literature that supports the recent transformation of the planning schools of thought generated by the Communicative turn in planning. Together with the Rational Adaptive Model of planning, Communicative-planning proponents did emphasize on participation evaluation. The communicative turn in planning was also accompanied by changes of the conceptual understanding of the evaluation tools. In this regard, theorist of communicative planning & communicative rationality, "i.e. Judith E. Innes and David E. Boomer" were the leaders of developing the consensus building and adaptive rationality framework for measuring community participation. The summary of how communicative rationality of planning understands community participation and participation evaluation is shown in Figure 1-C.

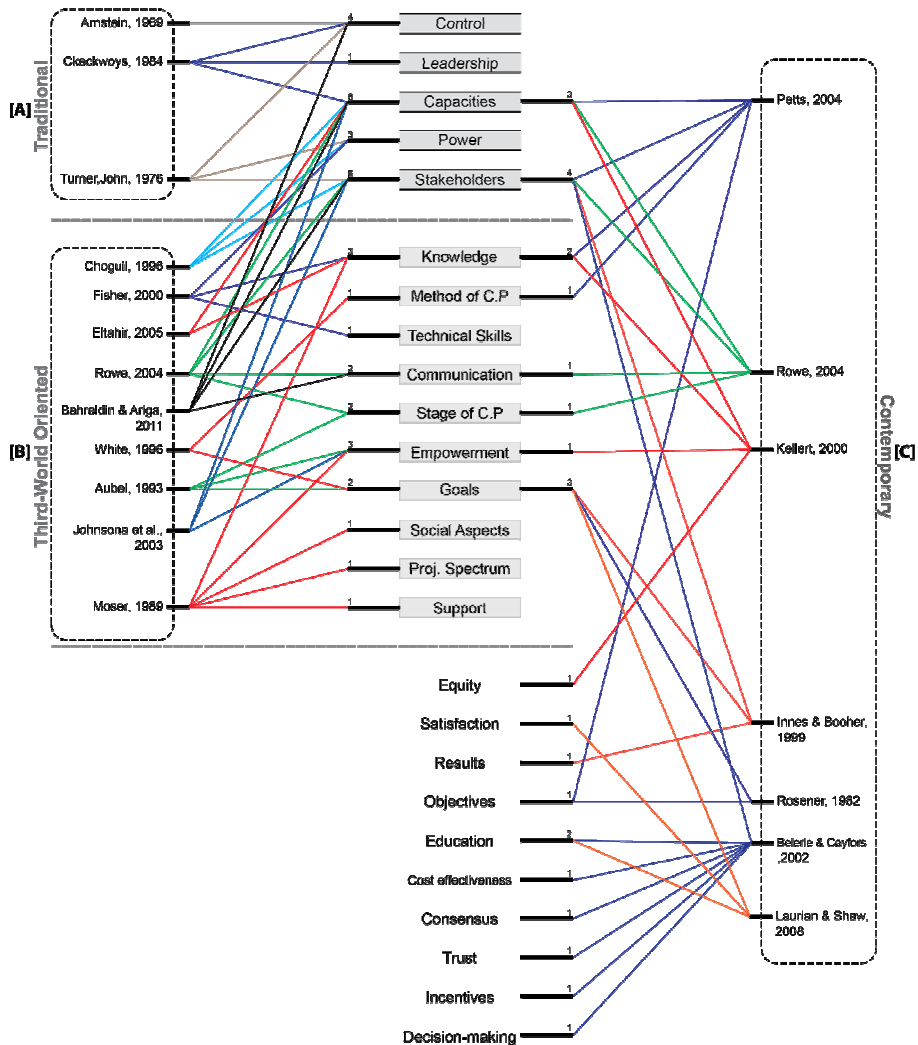


Fig. (1)The spectrum of evaluation criteria provided by different literature examined.

To recap this review, the results of the three groups of literature examined as shown in Figure 1, exhibit how the concept of community participation and participation evaluation are differently translated and understood. In this regard, Figure 2-A illustrates that community participation evaluation in the traditional participation literature was measured based on five factors identified as 1) The level of control of each participant; 2) the leadership; 3) capacities of participants; 4) power practiced and; 5) the spectrum of stakeholders involved.

Some of the factors previously mentioned preserves their significance on CPE in the second group (Third World-oriented literature) especially factors like level of participants' control, participants capacities and the spectrum of stakeholders participating in the process. Third World-oriented literature also illustrates several new factors to C.P evaluation. The most compelling are: 1) the level of knowledge among the participants; 2) the stage in which participation is taking place; 3) communication among different stakeholders and; 4) the goals of the participation process itself.

On the other hand, contemporary literature on C.P has contributed several new factors to participation evaluation. As shown in Figure 2-C, contemporary C.P literature contributed about ten new criteria through which participation can be evaluated, i.e. level of participants' education, objectives of participation, level of satisfaction among stakeholders, etc. In this regard, the low frequency value of the factors contributed by this group as shown in Figure 2-C hypothesis that, factors contributed do not have a consensus among C.P scholars.

Figure 2also shows how each of these three groups differently contributed to the formulation of CPE Agenda. The two common evaluation factors shared among the three groups of literature reviewed are;1) the spectrum of stakeholders participated in the process and; 2) stakeholders' capacities

(technical, financial, etc.). The latter statement confirms that although collaborative planning theorists claims that there has been a paradigm shift in C.P at the beginning of 1990s, factors that drive the process of CPE did not change.

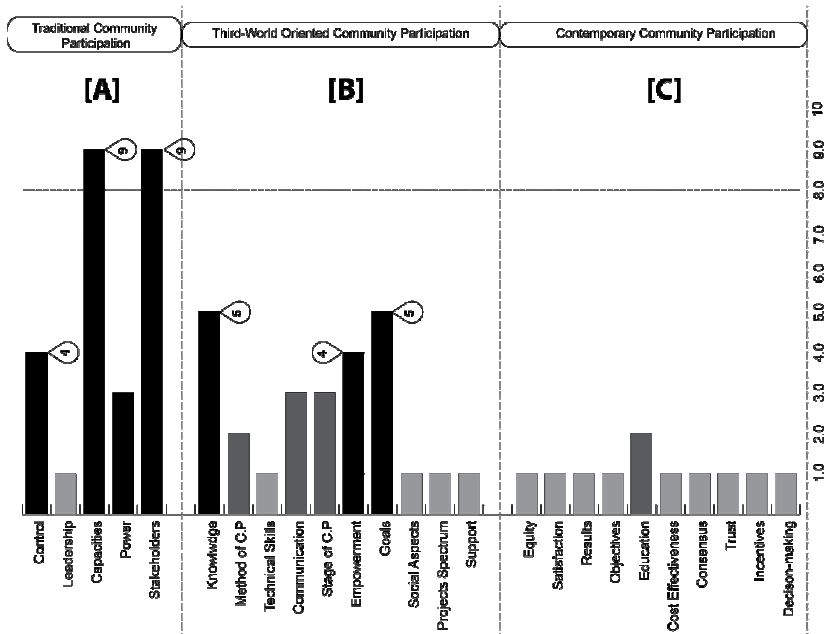


Fig. (2)Contribution of the examined literature on providing participation evaluation factors (based on the new factors contributed by each group and their frequency)

Although Figure 2 shows the most commonly used evaluation agenda among the three groups examined, it would be naïve to consider the highest values as the most important criteria. The reasoning behind this is that, the diagram presented shows a sample of overwhelming literature on C.P. Thus, the author opts to find focusing on the “Sprit” and the “meaning” of the each evaluation factor to be more logical and value laden than frequency measurement. Grouping similar participation evaluation factors under a

shared “spirit” and “meaning” yield general understanding of the concept behind their existence rather than their specific purpose (generality versus specialty). As a result, six agendas or themes of evaluation can be observed. These themes encompass the understanding of C.P / evaluation as;

1. A mean to enable people to influence decisions and have more control over their issues (level of control).
2. A process by which efficiency and criteria of success depend on the participant’s capacities (technical, knowledge, economical as well as cultural capacities).
3. To ensure good communication among stakeholders at different projects stages.
4. As an issue that is very much linked to the participants culture as well as their understanding of the ethics of working together.
5. A tool to involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the process as well as a tool being used in large spectrum of projects.
6. A process that is evaluated/conducted and managed according to its goals and objectives.

Considering that the author focuses on the procedural aspects of C.P, the sixth’s category in Figure 3 (Outcome/goal oriented factors) will not be considered in the structure of this evaluation framework. In this regard, the six criteria shown below constitute a framework that is believed to be capable of providing reliable, relatively inclusive (not necessary comprehensive) evaluation framework for C.P in both Developed and Developing Countries.

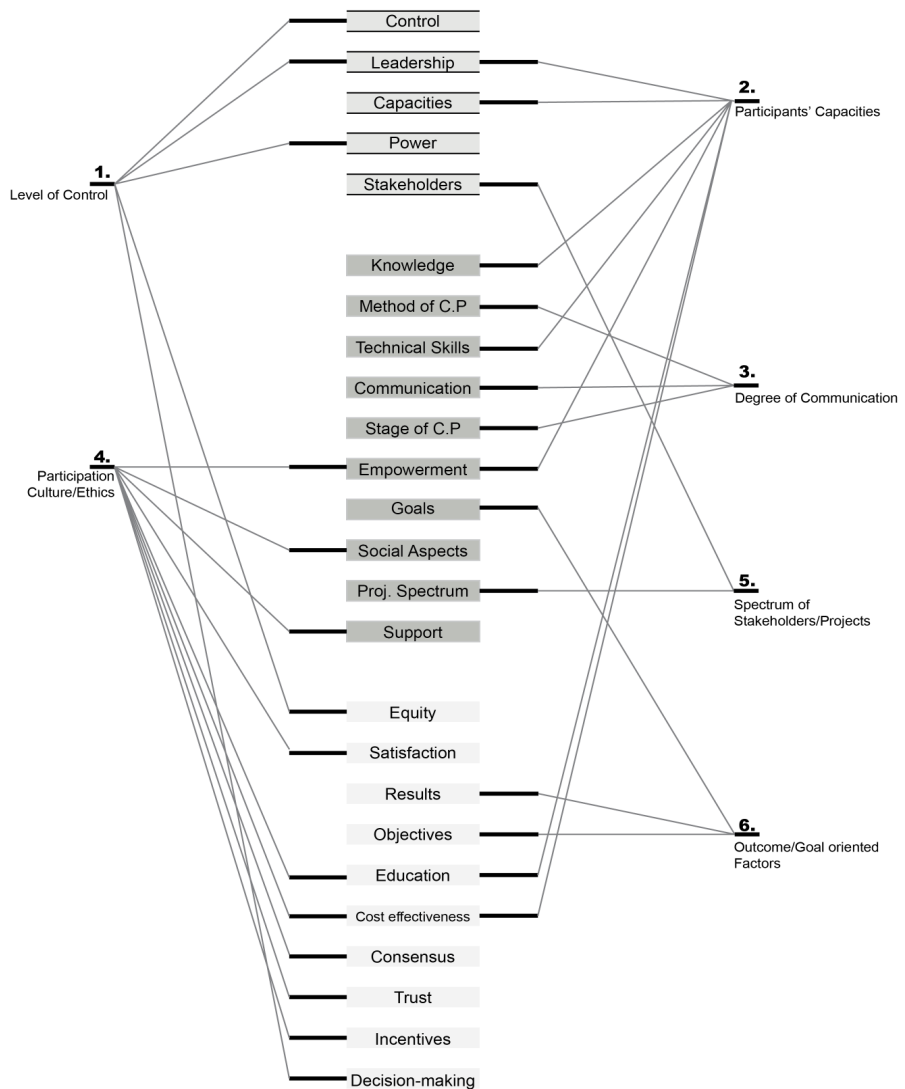


Fig. (3)The six agenda of evaluation (based on literature examined)

The framework presented in Figure 4 is general to fit a wide variety of participation evaluation exercises. It also encompasses all the three factors of success necessary for evaluation framework as identified by Beierle, 1998 [7].

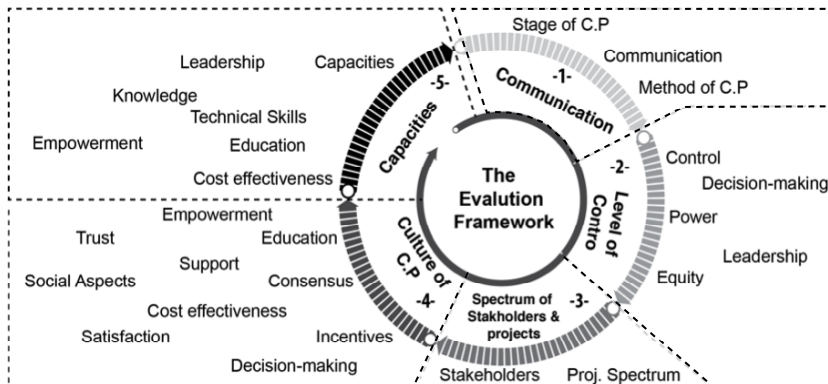


Fig. (4)The five-element evaluation framework as composed from literature and theories studied

4. Conclusions

The approach presented in this article suggests that framework elements are intertwined/overlap each other. The overlap mentioned is signified as in Figure 1 in which a single evaluation criterion/category does expand a cross several groups.

While implementing this framework it is required to understand that applying the five evaluation Agenda/themes presented here in a participation evaluation exercise does not necessarily mean encapsulating participation evaluation measures to the five-framework elements. Understanding this will ensure possibilities of evaluating the evaluation framework itself through a parallel intangible factors analysis. Understanding this will also guarantee room for further and future improvement to this framework.

One of the expected limitations to this approach and the framework lies on its Composition. Little literatures on practical projects were used in its composition and development. In other words, C.P theory is taking the lead

in developing this framework. The limited number of Third-World oriented community participation evaluation literature partially drives the limitation expected here. Nonetheless, the expected limitation can only be testified through the actual application of this framework in real case studies. In this regard, this article encourages practitioners and researchers to further testify the efficiency of the framework presented through applying it into real projects.

In conclusion, the presented framework provides several factors of success as being comprehensive as well as localized. It is also flexible in the sense that it utilizes the spirit of the evaluation factors rather than their specific meaning. Therefore, unlike many participation evaluation methods exhibited in this article, the author argues that the approach to the evaluation framework presented is capable to work efficiently in both developing and developed world.

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