

Seeking Implementation of Participatory Democracy for Sustainable Development. Case of the Wilaya Youth Council in Bejaia

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Abstract

Participatory democracy is an integral part of the process of sustainable development. It is in fact the key to a search not only for rational decision-making but also for equity of participation, which was until reduced by a representative democracy or other type of ancient governance.

This search for fairness involves the integration of citizens into decision-making, the search for a consensus, the feeling of belonging develops, and the trust between authority, elected representative and citizen increases.

Bejaia in the search for a sustainable development of its territory decides to make the question of participatory democracy a priority. Through actions undertaken by his Wilaya Popular Assembly and the involvement of the citizen, his case becomes a reference and the search for improvement is very encouraged.

This contribution deals with one of the multitude of actions undertaken by the wilaya of Bejaia in order to consolidate a participatory democracy specific to the citizens of Bejaia. It is the Youth wilaya council (APW Jeune) consolidated by the municipal youth councils, thanks to this action, Bejaia is taking a real step towards sustainable development and demonstrating commitment and innovation in this process.

Keywords: Participatory democracy; Bejaia; Youth wilaya council; Algeria.

INTRODUCTION

Algeria, realizing the importance and the imperative of participation in all sectors, is working on a strategy of research and implementation of modalities of action for involvement, dialogue, debate, the right to information and learning to listen, above all, to the citizen's experience. So we have to take things well upstream through the search for administrative communication leading to public debate and the transition to participatory democracy.

The texts governing the participation of both actors and citizens in the various fields exist and even detail the importance of this involvement. However, their implementation and concretization in the field remains very weak and poses real operational problems. Thus, awareness and the existence of legislative texts in favor of participation do not constitute the conditions for the implementation of participatory democracy.

Indeed, actions that can consolidate these texts and put them into real application are most awaited so as not to have this participatory democracy locked in legislative texts.

Thus, the search for an operational device and mechanism is a necessity and a topical issue in Algeria.

Bejaia, a wilaya of great importance and strategically located in Algeria, has set up a youth wilaya council consolidated by communal youth councils. This action, which is a pure integration of the youth in decision-making and in the search for consensus, is more favorable in the search for a participatory democracy. An action plan and missions have been drawn up for this youth APW which demonstrates a commitment to shared decision-making.

In this contribution, it will be a question of shedding light on this initiative of involvement of the youth, of explaining its process and relating its action plan and its results.

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Participation is defined in several ways but generally, participation is taking part (BEREZOWSKA-AZZAG, 2012), it is the guarantor of the acceptability of the project by its recipients and users, minimizes the risk of rejection of the project and the feeling of exclusion inhabitants.

Participation is not only to involve the public (user and citizen) in the project as many people consider it, but this public is very varied, it can be citizen, shareholders, private or public actors, experts and professionals as well as authorities and private institutions. As a result, participation takes on a much broader meaning than citizen involvement even though it is a key player.

As we have already said, urban is complex, so "it is better to have a lot of knowledge, experience and expertise as it is possible in the complex (and thus uncertain) nature of societal issues and problems" (ELLIOTT J & AL, 2005, P10). So, Building on the problem rather than designing the solution (shared diagnosis), this is the slogan of participation and "without the participatory approach, we risk missing out on some of the reality" (VERDIER Ph. 2009. P75). However, it can go beyond a return of account situations, it allows to arrive at more advanced stages where the choice of the solution itself is to debate in other words a "shared urban project"¹. Participation is then an opening and a policy called "I know how to listen" rather than "I decide everything"; then, the challenge of power and the right to speak but also participatory democracy is that which "... questions more broadly the relationship between knowledge and power" (BACQUE M.H. 2009. P18).

Levels and Degrees of Participation

Several levels of participation have been identified in the project's practices in the various projects, but these levels depend mainly on the objective pursued by the participatory approach. Thus, we can engage a participatory approach to: inform or transmit information, consult, build consensus or arrive at a collective decision.

The most observed level of participation in most countries is the so-called passive participation (MDSFS & ADS 2007), where the user and / or the inhabitant is a mere spectator of the changes that affect their environment and their living environment. He is totally excluded from the decision-making process where he is just informed. Some consider this as a form of participation.

The second level is the so-called active participation or most often called physical one (Ibid), where the population is considered as a means and an instrument (Ibid), to carry out a project of which it was excluded or not during the planning or during the decisions about it.

The population can also be consulted for the choice or evaluation of proposed solutions.

The population can also (in some cases very widespread) transmit and inform the authorities and the decision-making bodies about the needs or wishes to fulfill or improve. However, it cannot decide on the program or project, its formulation or its process. This task is entrusted to another professional. The population only plays the role of informant; this level is the advisory level (Ibid.).

The highest level of participation, and at the same time, the most desired to realize the democratic urban planning, is the so-called decision-making participation (Ibid.). It wants to be pushed to the point where it is the population that carries out the tasks identification, analysis, decision-making, planning, financing (participate by partnership) and evaluation of the project, without, of course, excluding the contribution of professionals.

These levels of participation are varying from scholar's point of view, and even in the professional world. Scholars cannot decide whether 06 or 08 degrees. There are even those who decline only three real degrees of participation. However, the more we get into the degrees of participation, the more the urban project tends towards sustainability, as affirms Ariella MASBOUNGI : "if the consultation is one of the main words of the sustainable urban project, it must be participatory and not only informative ... "(MASBOUNGI A. 2012. P9).

¹ A shared urban project is "the idea that different social groups can share (and not share) the same territory..." (Verdier Ph. 2009. P175). Verdier Ph presents the way to design an urban project shared in his book "The Participatory Urban project, learn to make the city with its inhabitants".

We summarize the degrees of participation as follows:

- Information: where it is a question of informing about the project decided in closed rooms;
- Consultation: gathering the opinion of participants and these opinions can be used (not necessarily) for decision support after analysis;
- Concertation: seeking compromise on choices and prior opinions that stipulates an exchange of information to reach a consensus and a joint decision;
- Dialogue: exchange of points of view, without seeking compromise but rather the construction of innovative solutions;
- Involvement: to engage his responsibility in the project;
- Participation: integrate the project into its design through decision support and even funding;
- Ownership: to appropriate the project and conferring on its own appropriation;
- Accession: total sharing of objectives with co-decision and co-production;
- Co decision and co-management: the association of the inhabitant in the decision and the management of the project;
- Self-management: which means that, it is the inhabitant who makes the decisions on the projects, but also on their budget.

These degrees are reduced in J. P LACAZE to four degrees (LACAZE J.P. 1988). That of the information on the project in a clear way, the one of the consultation or the public inquiries are made for an effective participation. Then the division of the power which constitutes according to him a real participation where the commissions of quarters and the extra-municipal commissions are the leaders of games. Finally the sharing of expertise that is reflected in the multidisciplinary. However, according to ARNSTEIN, these degrees are 8 as shown in the following figure (Fig. 2)

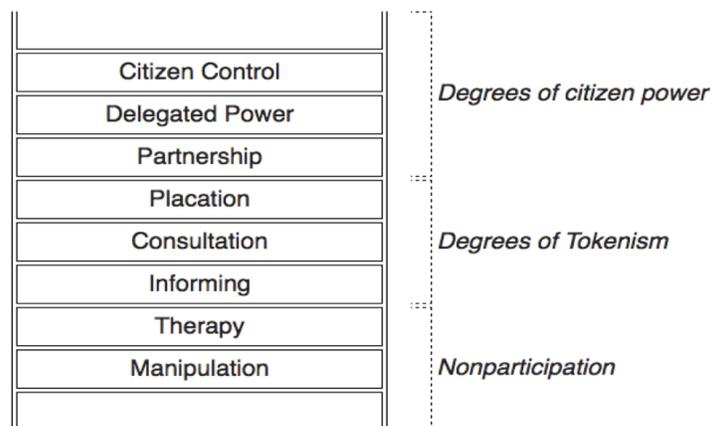


Fig.1. the eight participation ladders according to Arnstein R Sherry

Source: ARNSTEIN R. S, 1996.

Who Participates?

One of the crucial points of participation is the determination of the participants. First, you should know that the participants are divided into two categories: professionals and inhabitants (user or citizens). Thus, for professionals, they will be involved according to their respective areas of knowledge. For the inhabitant, it is necessary that the participants represent the population, but this is almost impossible given the diversity, which exists, then the choice is question difficult, the criteria of choice must be established on good bases (level of study, citizenship, sex ...) so that the sample is as present as possible.

When to Participate?

Participation is integrated into the project in three phases (Fig. 2): development and planning phase, implementation

and implementation phase and finally in the evaluation phase; in other words, participation can be introduced in the various phases of the project life cycle.

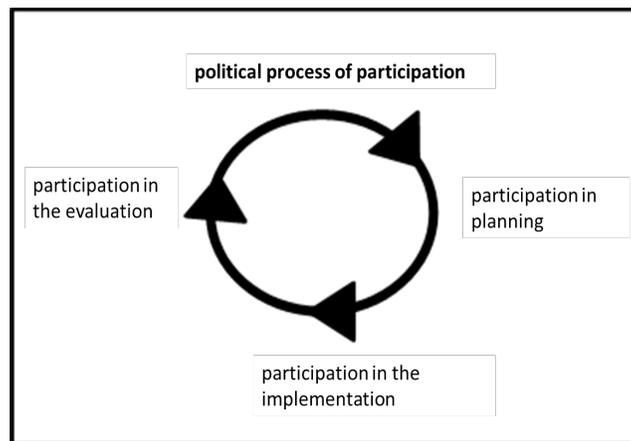


Fig.2. participation in the project phases

Source: ELLIOTT J & AL, 2005. P9

However, if we are looking for the participation time, we have to consider the participant, as we mentioned above. Participants are divided into two categories according to the person or institution to be associated.

In the first place, the professionals who will be associated for a scientific point of view and for their expertise on the urban will benefit the project of their knowledge and their skills. Therefore, their time of participation is either permanent all along the project or be punctual according to need and according to their areas.

Then civil society, so their association time is to be determined by the elected officials, so either it is the opportunity that is to discuss, or it is the content to establish or already established, either the budget to allocate or even the policy to follow.

The elected representative in this case is not considered a participant since it is he who makes the decision (most often except in the case of counter-projects) to implement a participative approach, so he is associated within any way and at all times.

Participation: Constraints and Conditions of Success

After having gone through the question of participation by presenting the levels and the degrees, we combined these elements to produce a toolbox of participation. The following table shows this combination (Table 1).

Table 1: combination of elements of participation

Level	Degree	Approach	Tools	Actors	Objective
Passive	Information	Share decisions already made to residents and external bodies	Posters, websites, presses, TV		inform
Physical and advisory	consultation	Collect the opinions and use them for decision support	Questionnaire, surveys, interview, blog, vote, televoting, focus groups	Inhabitants and internal and external authorities	collect information, and collect opinions; guarantee the feasibility of the project
	concertation	and share reasons, objectives and arguments	Round table; meeting; statement of reasons; TV vote.	The inhabitants, the users but much more the sectorial actors whose policies are confronted and the objectives too.	Search for compromise and consensus, establishment of contract or consultation agreement where the compromise will be official.

	Dialogue	Exchange of opinions and points of view.	Forum, clubs, discussion center, brainstorming meetings	Inhabitants and all concerned actors.	Mutual exchange, constitutions of a collective problem.
decision	Involvement	Commitment and designation of roles	Partnership and signature of contract and convention	Inhabitants and all concerned actors...	empower
	Participation	Join the project	All tools are welcome	All actors	Exchange, commitment, responsibility and compromise research.
	ownership	Presentation of objectives and exchange of points of view	All tools are welcome	All actors	Consensus and ownership of the project
	Membership / adhesion	Gather all the information held by each actor to problematize and solve	All tools are welcome	All actors	Co-design, co-decision, co-development and co-production of the project.

Source: MOUHOUBI N, 2017, page 84-85

It is essential to say that participation is a very important pillar in the urban project. It allows seeing clearly the expectations of the recipients of the project. It not only allows a good elaboration of solutions to the problems of society that are perceived in a different way between inhabitants and leaders, but, even better, allows to use this perception to better conceive the problem. However, some constraints and difficulties are evident in the implementation of the participatory approach:

- Operations may be fragmented due to real estate financing;
- Merging roles and difficulty of managing actors and their games;
- Difficulty of integration and involvement of all actors;
- Divergence of stakeholder interests and difficulty in reaching consensus;
- Difficulty in selecting participants and representing residents;
- Confiscation and monopolization of power by the representatives of the inhabitants;
- Splitting participation by leading to an amorphous consensus;
- The NIMBY attitude² that develops in the individualized society and which poses a problem of fruitless participation;
- The cost of the participation procedure

For a better result of the participation, the objective of the participation must be clearly defined before launching the method of participation, however "... the objectives of the participation remain unclear and the methods little controlled" (BACQUE MH 2009. P23) and participation becomes a waste of time and money for unsatisfactory results. However, it must be said that by injecting participation in the urban project, this redefined the city and it is agreed to define the city as a collective product (INGALLINA P. 2001) and not individual action sum. J. P LACAZE (LACAZE J.P 1988) presents the principles that make participation more effective as follows:

First, the action must stem from the concerns of the inhabitant. A lot of attention to methods and means of communication should be paid (vocabulary, techniques of illustration, ...), organize in the best conditions the public debates (especially the choice of the facilitator) and finally so that the participation is not a waste of time, it is necessary to lead to decisions through an arbitration which can decide between the divergent opinions.

2 Not In My Backyard; an expression specific to the individualization of society

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ALGERIA: BETWEEN REGULATIONS, SPEECHES AND REALITY

Details Far from being a pioneer country in the implementation of participatory democracy, Algeria is at a beginner stage in this field. Not for lack of legislative and regulatory texts governing the rights of citizen involvement and participation, the participation of the actors, but it is rather a question of application of these texts.

Indeed, there are several pieces of legislation that ensure the legal anchoring of participatory democracy; however, it is the methods of action to implement this participatory democracy that is lacking.

In addition, in the Algerian Constitution, there are three articles requiring the participation of citizens in local management. First, Article 14 states, "The state is based on the principles of organization and social justice. The elected Assembly is the framework in which the will of the people is expressed and exercises control over the action of the public authorities "; then Article 16 which states, "the elected Assembly constitutes the basis of decentralization and the place of citizens' participation in the management of public affairs ". Finally, Article 31, which requires "the removal by the institutions of all the obstacles, which impede the development of the human person and prevent the effective participation of all in the political, economic, social and cultural life".

In these codes, an incentive for the participation of citizens in the management of the affairs of their localities exists, however, it has not been established and "To date, many laws are not applied..." as the signal Tayeb Belaïz , Minister of the Interior in 2014.

Following the example of the field of town planning, the involvement of actors and inhabitants in the definition of the living environment and the decision-making concerning the development is also at its beginning, only calls for financial participation of the inhabitants during operations to rehabilitate their homes, looks like what is called participation.

However, Law 90-25 guarantees the participation of the various actors in the development of planning and town planning instruments and this in its article 70 "the procedures for drawing up planning and town planning instruments must guarantee effective consultation between all stakeholders, including user representatives".

Law 90 -29 relating to development and town planning does the same, in its article 15, it requires the consultation of stakeholders (local user associations, chambers of commerce and agriculture and professional organizations) during the development of planning and town planning instruments. Law 01-20 of December 12, 2001 relating to land use planning and sustainable development in its article 2 specifies that the national land use planning and sustainable development policy is initiated and conducted by the State and this in consultation with the economic and social agents of development but also that the citizens are involved in its elaboration and its implementation.

Law 06/06 on the orientation of the city as well as SNAT 2030 strongly support the participatory approach in projects and local management such as the latter (SNAT) provides for citizen participation and a sharing of responsibilities between the various institutional, private and associative actors at all levels (Ministry of Regional Planning, Environment and Tourism. 2008). But the application being lacking, the participation and the dialogue are far from being concretized in the projects of development and town planning but also in the elaboration both of the policy of the development and town planning as in the development of its instruments.

In Algeria, it is more representative democracy that advocates, the citizen is very little (or not) associated with the various decisions that concern their daily life and their city, district or the space in which they live. There is a refusal of any involvement of citizens in the preparatory acts for decisions, whatever they may be (SIDI BOUMEDINE, R. 2013), this refusal is materialized by the comfort of the State services to decide and act among themselves in order to to deliver the material product as well as the administrative decision to citizens "turnkey" (Ibid.).

In Algeria, it is more about representative democracy. The citizen is very little associated with the various decisions that concern his daily life and his city, neighborhood or the space in which he lives. Except a few attempts and examples, which are rare, which can have a form that looks like participation. Some of these examples include:

- El ateuif: Ghardaïa (neighborhood committee): which works for the participation of the inhabitants of the district in the local management as well as the common affairs;
- Co-city Algiers (city committee): which is one of the few existing city committees in Algeria and which focuses on both social and urban issues of the city of Algiers

- Four web Taref (website): a website dedicated to promoting the participation of citizens in decision-making for their living environment.

These examples, which are few, are most often attempts to make the voice of the citizen heard through assemblies or associative committees. These attempts emanate from the citizen himself, either by expressing concerns, expectations and demands, or by challenging decisions taken without his knowledge by public authorities by holding demonstrations.

This scenario observed in Algeria is most often that of the Bottom-up organized in associative actions, but which are rare. It should also be noted that the top-down scenario is even more so. In fact, very few communities or municipalities create and animate sessions, workshops or meetings to involve citizens in decision-making. An example of this scenario was observed in the commune of El Khroub in Constantine. This commune has engaged and organized a council where the citizen is associated and where it is a question of discussing and debating projects, initiatives and decisions. The initiative named this council “the citizen parliament” to give it a more positive connotation. The citizen feels able to impose and weigh when making a decision. This refers to the participative as well as the decisional dimension of this action described as innovative.

BEJAIA AS A CASE OF STUDY

The wilaya of Bejaia extends over a territory that covers 322,348 ha, it is a coastal region of the Center East integrated between the mountain ranges (Djurdjura, Bibans and Babors) and the Mediterranean with a coastline of more than 100 km. Due to its natural and landscape wealth and its strategic position (figure 3). it represents a competitive and very attractive territory (SNAT 2030).



Fig.3. territory of the wilaya of Bejaia

Source : ANDI. 2013

It is made up of 19 Daïras and 52 Communes with a total population of 915,835 inhabitants in 2020 (PopulationData.com. 2020).

POPULAR ASSEMBLY OF YOUTH OF THE WILAYA OF BEJAIA (APW)

The policy of the wilaya of Bejaia, which tends towards the implementation of participatory democracy, has designed and implemented a project on the creation of a popular youth wilaya assembly or (the youth APW). This is how this Bejaia youth advisory council body was set up in 2017. The implementation of this participation pilot project began with the creation of youth advisory councils in each municipality, including the 52 municipalities of the region. wilaya of Bejaia.

The main objective of this project is to enable the youth to fully live their citizenship and to get involved in decision-making in areas relating to their life as citizens.

APW JEUNE is a youth advisory board. It is a tool for learning democratic dialogue and active citizenship. Thus, it brings together youth from the wilaya of Bejaia under 25, whatever their socio-economic situation, their educational level or their municipality of residence.

This council is primarily responsible for transmitting the concerns, needs and interests of youth and this with practical proposals transmitted directly to The APW of Bejaia, associations as well as all the actors who can meet these needs.

Thus, it works in the form of the design of small development projects around themes such as the environment, culture, education, rights, leisure....

This YOUTH APW involves a real work of participation through the involvement of the various actors of the wilaya, namely the Senior APW, the CCJs of the communes, associations, the APCs ... The youth APW's mission is to :

- Express the needs, expectations and remarks of youth, on what is happening or not, in the wilaya.
- Exchange and debate between youth and other local actors, to meet youth from other municipalities as well as other wilayas to promote youth initiatives.
- Participate in the emergence of innovative projects for the benefit of the wilaya of Bejaia and youth. In this way, learning about democracy is concrete and real.

Thus, its main role is to bring local authorities closer to citizens and civil society, in order to open up possibilities for clarifying potential misunderstandings concerning the strategic choices of the wilaya, thus moving towards more transparency and dialogue. This will have the consequence of preventing disputes due to a misunderstanding, or even to poor communication, thus supporting the application of the appropriate regulations (municipal code, wilaya code, etc.)

The youth APW has made commitments in the achievement of their objectives, in absolute transparency and consultation, using active listening combined with concrete actions.

The Actions of the Youth APW

The action plan of the youth APW focus on various sectors of civic life. Thus, the actions that fall within the program of this advisory council include:

In the Environment and Climate sector

Inspection and environmental quality control outputs at the level of our wilaya.

- ECO-AMBASSADOR project.
- Awareness campaigns
- An annual conference on sustainable development and environmental protection.

In the Heritage and Tourism sector

- Scientific and work outings to identify the entire territory of the wilaya and its heritage.
- A Wilaya review of Tourist, historical and heritage sites

In the social entrepreneurship and development sector

- Round tables and meetings on Start-ups and innovative activities of youth.
- An annual seminar bringing together all active youth as well as the CCJs of the wilaya of Bejaia

In the Associative Movement, Culture and Sport sector

- An Annual Youth Forum brings together the associative movement and all the young actors in society.
- Wilaya competitions in these themes in order to strengthen the spirit of innovation and the discovery of our young talents.
- Meetings, round tables, municipal and wilaya coffee meetings for the youth.
- Multidisciplinary training sessions for elected young people and other young people from the CCJs of each municipality.
- Project of YOUTH AMBASSADORS of the wilaya of bejaia.

In the scientific and digitalization sector

- Worked alongside associations, science clubs, universities and all the players concerned to identify the innovations and talents of our young people.
- Work on the digitization of all sectors by offering new technologies (especially those carried by our young people from the wilaya of Bejaia).

- An annual conference devoted to this theme to see new scientific and other technologies.

In the Social sector and religious activities

- Organization of solidarity operations for the profiles of young people in need in each municipality.

- Outings in the 52 municipalities of the wilaya of Bejaia.

Project Implementation

The municipal code in its articles 2, 11, 12,13,14,26 encourages citizen involvement and the search for dialogue and participation. On this basis, the wilaya youth council begins first with the communal youth councils which operate on a smaller scale than that of the wilaya, namely the commune. This logic of decentralization calls for more participation but also ensures more efficiency and bringing together decision-making spheres and the citizen.

Thus, the first step in the creation of the wilaya's youth advisory council is to act on this small scale of the commune through the creation of a youth advisory council at the level of each commune. Then it is a question of bringing together these councils by creating a collective of communal councils in the form of a wilaya council called APW JEUNE. However, the supervision of this project and its progress is actively monitored by APW during all its phases (APW Bejaia. 2019).

In the design phase of the project and before the creation of municipal councils, information, popularization and awareness-raising work was carried out. This work was not only addressed to young people but also to the authorities who will be involved in the project, including the Communal Popular Assemblies. It was then a question of creating these young CCJ municipal councils, this creation was done simultaneously with the sensitization of young people to the interests, tools and practices of citizen participation. Thus, these young people sensitized and having integrated the process, organize themselves the elections of the CCJ and this by designating the electoral body but also their representatives by universal suffrage.

Following the creation of the young CCJ municipal councils, the latter can begin to exercise as a constructive and consultative actor with their involvement in the municipal popular assemblies by being present in the meetings and assemblies while carrying out their role of consultant. They also work in the organization of events for the awareness of other young people.

In another level of management and the decision-making sphere which is the authority of the wilaya, it is a question of creating from these communal advisory councils an advisory council of the wilaya of young people (APW JEUNE). This action in itself represents a real exercise in participation and the search for consensus by bringing together all the consultative councils of the communes and to achieve universal suffrage for the designation of elected officials in the wilaya consultative council. These elected officials will be able to choose a President who will also choose his two deputies.

In these two levels (municipal, wilaya), any young person (middle school, high school, university ...) in the age range between 18 and 26 years old can participate while respecting the gender parity. As for the number of elected officials, it was defined in transposition with the number of elected officials of the People's Assembly of the wilaya of Bejaia (senior), namely 43 elected.

The term of office of the APW JEUNE is set at two (02) years, this period allows young people to take ownership of their role and the functioning of the board SUPPORT work is done on the profile of the wilaya's youth advisory council. It is first of all a work of coordination between the seniors and the juniors with a feedback and a coming and going of information and sharing. This coordination is ensured by the president of the youth and associative movement commission.

Finally, this council is supported by the (senior) elected representatives of the APW Bejaia but also by expert trainers in the fields and areas of intervention of the council.

ACTION'S REPORT

Since its installation as a youth structure at the level of the wilaya of Bejaia, the APW young has organized training, workshops, outings, meetings on several themes (leadership, communication, management ...) for the benefit of 150 young people from the wilaya of Bejaia from the associative movement and the municipal youth councils. This being in view of strengthening the skills of young people on issues of implementation of common rights mechanisms and the general interest through a constructive democratic debate.

Also, APW young was a stakeholder in the projects initiated by the APW of Bejaia, Call for associative projects, competition for the village and the cleanest district in Bejaia, caravan of solidarity during this period of confinement.

Despite the current health context due to Covid 19, the young APW has launched training and information outings at the level of the municipalities of the wilaya of Bejaia where it has provided support for young people in the establishment of CCJs at the level of their communes 120 young people from 5 communes took part in this action.

CONCLUSIONS

Now firmly anchored in the social landscape, the mission of APW JEUNE is a key player in the integration of young people in the territory it covers. Driven by values of commitment and the quality of the service provided, in permanent contact with the economic environment and local integration players, our structure is an essential interface, for the young people it supports, on issues of access to training, information also to employment.

Faced with the major challenges of the participation of young people in the affairs of their localities and their inclusion in decision-making in a changing young, social and economic world, we must demonstrate adaptability and responsiveness. This observation, shared by all, has led us this year to engage in an innovative approach with the implementation of a major reflection on our structure project.

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