

# In Search of Good Governance Actors Games and Involvement of the Associative movement

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## Abstract

Citizen engagement is widely seen as a crucial component of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making. The citizen's role is also deemed very significant in many transformation and development processes, such as the structure and management of cities. During the past ten years, the wilaya of Constantine has experienced a significant operation to reconstruct housing sites in peril. This initiative included all six dairas and twelve communes of the wilaya, with a total area of 718.21 hectares containing a total of 90 sites designated by urban planning instruments. Primarily, it is the removal of shanty settlements and prefabricated homes within the urban framework, as well as the injection of rural housing programs in sparse areas. To secure the implementation of this complex program, a number of actors had to intervene including the civil society via organizations and district committees, which played a significant and even exemplary role. The uniqueness of this aspect in the present work rests in the fact that a neighborhood committee was able to play a pivotal role in a very intricate process. By serving as a liaison and mediator between the administration, local elected officials, and residents, this committee has facilitated the establishment of a previously unknown role for civil society. It has accomplished the impossible by mastering formal/informal tactics, insisting on intensive proximity work, and gaining the trust of all parties. This is the committee for the "Djaafarou" neighbourhood in the Ibn Badis municipality of the Constantinople wilaya. Considered to be a "pilot" project for the eradication of substandard housing, the aforementioned initiative is viewed as a potential solution to the problem.

Nonetheless, this operation was unable to circumvent a number of challenges and obstacles associated with the methods of land acquisition as well as the tools of control and coordination required between services and actors, in this case the establishment of regulatory and organizational provisions. In essence, these limitations exceed the responsibilities and capabilities of a small group. Representatives of the associational movement deem the outcome of the operation to be rather satisfying, taking into account political will, enduring socioeconomic reality, and the necessities of good governance. The goal of our research is to develop a model of citizen engagement that is both effective and sustainable, so that the citizen is actually an "actor" in the urban act. To this end, and through research based on local investigation and exhaustive fieldwork with the various actors, we have attempted to highlight both the positive and negative aspects in order to develop recommendations that could serve as the foundation for a new policy to promote good governance through planned and effective citizen participation.

**Key words:** Citizen participation, civil society, participatory democracy, good governance, Actors

## INTRODUCTION

Governance refers, by definition, to a collection of decision-making processes and practices, notably for matters of common concern. It is also defined as the manner in which national economic and social resources are managed for development (IFAD, 1999). In addition, good governance, which refers not only to "good government" but also to the concept of "excellent management of public affairs" (Zadi, 2013), entails a dimension relating to evaluation and control standards and techniques. Consequently, its primary interest rests in its relationship to human rights, especially civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights guaranteed by so-called governance institutions. The human rights principles constitute a set of values intended to guide the actions of governments and other political and social actors. They also give a set of accountability norms against which these actors can be challenged (UN, 2007). The right to appropriate housing is among its primary goals. In this setting, housing is of crucial importance and risks impeding socioeconomic development if not handled by an effective and targeted strategy.

In Algeria, the production of housing has been largely determined by the housing crisis (Largat, Farid and Chettah, 2022). Frequently, it is admitted that the quantitative aspect has dominated at the expense of quality. The phenomena of the expansion of precarious housing in all its forms, coupled with a governmental commitment to provide access to good housing for all Algerian families, has had a significant impact on the size of the housing stock, especially over the past two decades. The struggle against the establishment of insecure housing has taken several forms in urban and rural locations. Therefore, in order to control this strategy, it was crucial, if not essential, for the State to utilize the available urban planning tools, especially the development and urban planning tools. Although they are extensively questioned and considerably less appreciated by most actors due to their rigidity and non-conformity to ground realities (Kadri, 2000), these instruments constitute tools for good governance, notably in terms of forecasting, programming, and prospecting.

In an effort to tackle all forms of insecure housing, the wilaya of Constantine has witnessed the development of the national housing support program "FONAL" over the previous ten years. This effort has covered the whole territory of the wilaya via 90 sites encompassing a combined area of nearly 700 acres (DUAC, 2012). Across the six dairas and twelve communes of the wilaya of Constantine, fragile housing sites affected by the FONAL program have been identified and clearly characterized in accordance with the decision of local authorities, particularly those of the wilaya. Consequently, the topic of precarious housing has been elaborated upon by urban planning studies (PDAU groupement de Constantine, 2018). Thus, it was seen that a territorial and local strategy was implemented to address the built environment, both in urban agglomerations and in dispersed areas, in terms of diagnosing the situation, anticipating the future needs of the population, and situating the various programs.

The master plan of development and urban planning of the municipality of Ibn Badis (daira of Ain Abid) identifies six areas of insecure housing in the capital city, including the "Djaafarou" neighborhood (PDAU of Ibn Badis, 2018). This neighborhood, which was once a shantytown, is now an incomplete housing estate that benefited from the "FONAL" program in 2011. Despite sharing the common goal of completing this project, the Wilaya, the daira, the Popular Communal Assembly (APC), the Direction of Urbanism and Construction (DUC), the engineering offices, the civil society, the National Housing Fund (CNL), the Direction of Domains and Land Registry... Each actor had to be involved according to its responsibilities and area of expertise. Regardless of the large number of actors, there were significant management, coordination, and cooperation issues. It was primarily an issue of administration. Even though that the project is currently 90% complete, the residents are dissatisfied with their living conditions due to the severity of the remaining issues. However, the Djaafaou neighborhood group insists on the neighborhood's significant progress. This project is frequently regarded as a "pilot" for the battle against precarious habitat in Constantine. It has become such due to the committee's efficiency, rigor, and dedication, as well as the engagement of residents, who have contributed positively to the success of the FONAL program, a clear reference to a relative "governance. Nonetheless, it is crucial to ask the following: Why is the redevelopment of the Djaafarou neighbourhood called a pilot project? Was citizen engagement truly effective? Using this initiative, can we evaluate the "citizen involvement" metric in Algeria?

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

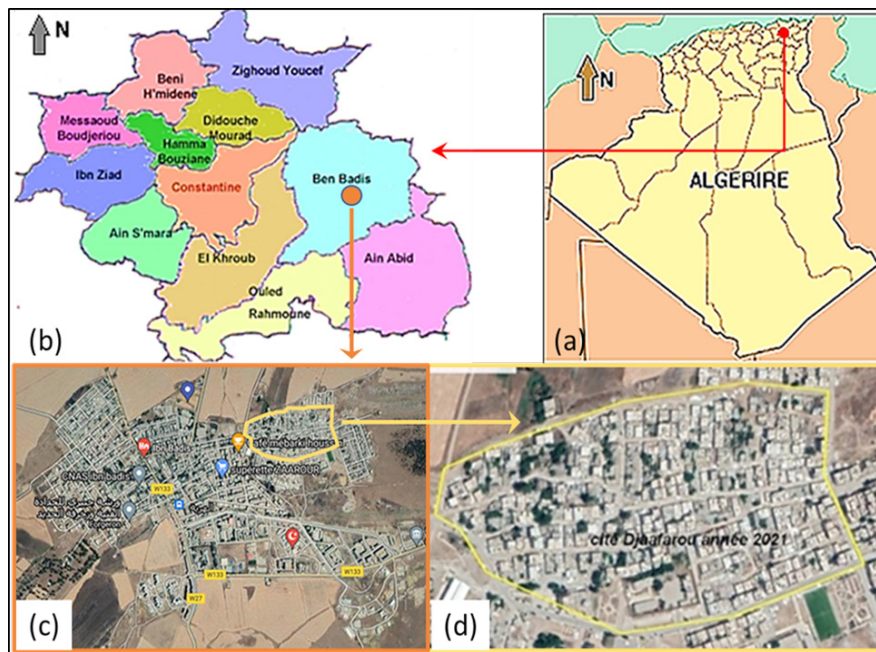
Given that our main objective is to evaluate the outcome of the governance process of this project, particularly with regard to the stake of actors and the role of the citizen in particular, the present work is based first and foremost on an analytical approach that consists in exhaustively diagnosing the entire technical, administrative and social process that marked the development of the FONAL project in the Djaafarou district. It was necessary to know all the actors involved in this operation in addition to the collection, understanding and control of all the documentation used, including the regulatory texts and the related specifications. Thus, and according to the objectives previously set up, our methodological party is carried out according to the following stages of investigation and research:

- Collection of information and documents: PDAU, POS, regulatory texts, specifications charges, press articles, meeting minutes, etc.
- Visits to the municipality and the site in question while carrying out an urban analysis of the current state of the "Djaafarou" district, taking photos ...
- Diachronic reading and analysis of the genesis of the site with the help of the different plans of recollement imposed by the reserves of the different organizations.

- Multiple interviews and consultations via working sessions with representatives of the Djaafarou neighbourhood committee, interviews with local elected officials of the APC of Ibn Badis, interviews with former executives of the society of architecture and urbanism(SAU), consultation with the administrations concerned (Directorate of Urban Planning, Architecture and Construction, Directorate of Housing and Public Equipment), exhaustive questionnaire with the association in question.

## STUDY AREA

The project in question is in the wilaya of Constantine, which is in Algeria's north-east (figure 1.a). It has a land area of 2197 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1,189,127 people. It is bounded to the north by Skikdawilaya, to the east by Guelmawilaya, to the south by Oum El Bouaghiwilaya, and to the west by Mila wilaya. The project in question is located in the commune of Ibn Badis, which is geographically located in the extreme eastern part of the wilaya of Constantine (Figure 1.b), and it covers an area of 31,520 Ha (URBACO, 2015). This commune is bounded to the southeast by Ain Abid commune, to the southwest by Ouled Rahmoune commune, to the west by Constantine and El Khroub commune, and to the northwest by ZighoudYoucef commune. It consists of three secondary settlements (Beni Yagoub, El Hambli, and Zaroura) in addition to the chief town (ACL), as well as some mechtas and rural groupings (PDAU of Ibn Badis, 2018). At the urban scale, the Djaafarou housing estate is an urban entity located northeast of Ibn Badis LCA (Figure 1.c). It currently consists of an unfinished individual housing estate (Figure 1.d), which was originally a slum with a surface area of 10.74 ha and a population of 2021 people in 2011. (SAU, 2011).



**Figure 1.** (a) Situation of Constantine in relation to Algeria; (b) Situation of the municipality of Ibn Badis in relation to the wilaya of Constantine; (c) Chief town of Ibn Badis; (d) Djaafarou neighbourhood in 2021 (Source: figures a, c & d authors' processing based on Google Earth; figure b downloaded from [https://www.cci-rhumel.dz/?page\\_id=863](https://www.cci-rhumel.dz/?page_id=863))

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DJAAFAROU DISTRICT RESTRUCTURING PROJECT

### Different Phases of the Project

According to the Society of Architecture and Urbanism (SAU) and the APC of Ibn Badis the restructuring operation of the Djaafarou site was divided into four phases (SAU, 2011; APC Ibn Badis 2021).

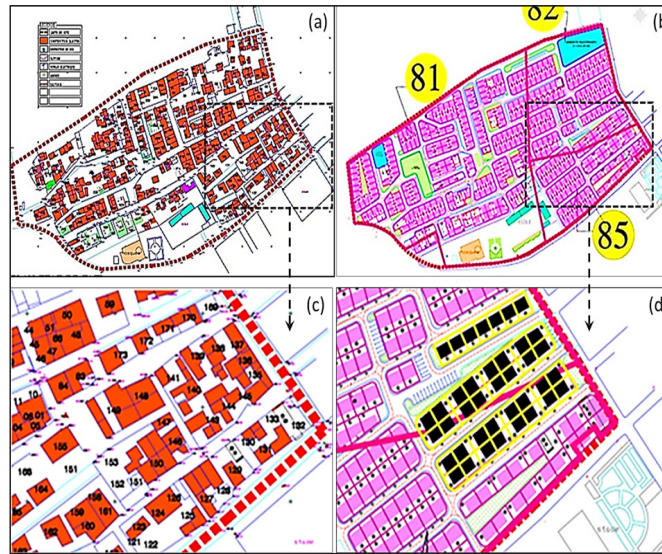
**Phase 1:** consisted of a general census of families, households and buildings (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Number of buildings, families and habitats in the Djaafarou settlement

Site	Number of constructions	Number of families	Number of inhabitants
Djaafarou	310	675	2021

(Source: SAU, 2011)

**Phase 2:** was devoted to updating the fixture inventory (figure 2.a): analysis of the built environment, external spaces, planimetric and altimetric survey, topographic survey of the equipment, description of the existing in the form of a summary diagnosis with the presentation of a development proposal (figure 2.b).



**Figure 2.** (a) The Djaafarou housing estate's initial state of affairs; (b) The housing estate's overall development plan; (c) A block of the housing estate before restructuring; and (d) After restructuring (Source: SAU, 2011)

**Phase 3:** consisted of creating an execution file for the following lots: roads, drinking water supply (AEP), waste water drainage, and external lighting. A plot plan and a regulatory plan indicating the building rights were also included in the file. The SAU rearranged the blocks, preserving only the layout of the various existing networks (water, gas, and electricity), but rarely the site's condition (Figure 2 c & d). It should be noted that, according to the Neighbourhood Committee's statements, the current state of the latter was carried out in a way that did not comply with any technical standard. As a result, a new plot of land was created while the existing hard-standing buildings, which numbered 24 according to the office's census, were preserved.

**Phase 4:** Persisted in on-the-ground intervention. It entailed demolishing the houses and precarious fences (figure 4), allowing the new networks to pass through, rebuilding certain houses (figure 5), transferring certain residents to social rental housing of their choice, and maintaining the houses that were already in bad shape.



**Figure 4.** Demolition operation (Source: Enasr Journal, 2014)



**Figure 5.** Reconstruction operation (Source: authors, 2020)

## **Citizen Participation Through a Neighborhood Committee**

The residents of the “Djaafarou” district have banded together to form an association to protect their interests. According to the revelations of the Committee of the Neighborhood, whose executive board includes 11 people, a general assembly was held in record time and members were elected in 2011.

### **Areas of the Association’s Involvement in the Project**

- Public awareness campaign,
- Census operation of inhabitants and constructions,
- Consultation meetings,
- Coordination between the different actors,
- Conflict management,
- Supervision of the demolition operation of precarious dwellings,
- Discussion of development plans.

## **PROJECT PROGRESS, OBSTACLES EXPERIENCED, AND THE ROLE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD COMMITTEE**

### **The Emergency as an Alibi for Actor Selection**

Following the decision, the DUAC, which had been designated as the project manager in charge of the restructuring study, resorted to the mutual agreement procedure, a contractual form synonymous with urgency that can be used without a formal call for competition (Executive Decree 10-236, 2010). The centralized authorities approved the use of this form of designation, and the alibi was urgency. As a result, the SAU was designated as the project manager for the wilaya’s southern communes, including Ibn Badis. Since the beginning of the project, the concept of social urgency appears to have been the rudder of the entire process. However, it is well established that any social emergency device must be considered within a multiform network of actors in order to identify various implications (Wagener, 2012). The residents of the Djaafarou district were in the process of organizing themselves at the time.

### **Taking into Account the Cultural Characteristics of the Rural Population**

One legitimate question remains: How did we transition from the vision of total eradication of precarious housing sites to the maintenance of the population through various housing-related aids? The district committee has indeed imposed its strategy, because the reality of the field, in its words, imposed this form of maintenance given that the population on site lived in perfect symbiosis with the context of their localities, a network of social and family links between inhabitants, a particular way of life at the border between urban and rural lifestyle. There are some buildings next to each other that use the method of raising a few domestic animals, as well as small vegetable gardens that decorate the outside spaces. In a nutshell, this type of habitat was defined by a way of life. Should a “uprooting” logic be imposed, or should the population be kept in place through the strategy of the so-called “drawer” operation for this type of housing, following the example of other similar operations such as Draibina in the commune of Ain Abid, which was overseen by the World Bank in 1997 and was subsequently very successful? (DUAC, 2000). The final intervention type chosen was to keep the population on the site while carrying out a rather complex operation of restructuring, development of new lots, transfer and displacement of lots to other locations on the same site, demolition and reconstruction of certain existing lots, and maintenance of existing buildings in poor condition. On the ground, this equation proves to be extremely constrained. Finally, even if we admit that this was the most prudent decision, there was no indication that this strategy was based on a retrospective or planned reading. The intention of the neighbourhood committee was guided by a single goal: to transform state institutions into facilitators of citizen participation, which was a key phenomenon of the 1990s in a process of political and social democratization of local communities (Simard, 2008).

### **Total Absence of A Socio-Economic Study of the Population**

Without the presence of the inhabitants or their representatives, all meetings were held in conclave at the wilaya headquarters under the chairmanship of the wali and in the presence of the executive directors, heads of Daïra, and presidents of the popular assemblies of the communes concerned. The debates at the wilaya level during the project manager’s presentations of the sites centered on the status of the studies and the finalization of the development plans.

The emphasis was on the purely technical aspect of the project, with no regard for the socioeconomic dimension of the population (size and income of households, unemployment rate, percentage of the population of working age, local skills in craft activities and especially the eligibility of households to take care of themselves). As a result, the concept of social entrepreneurship, which consists of a specific form of citizen participation based on the action of local human resources, was completely absent. It allows citizens to act directly and effectively (Brouard et al, 2010). This anomaly is primarily due to the fact that the neighborhood committee had not yet been formed at the time. Although basic and geographically limited, the status of "neighborhood committee" faces significant challenges. Among them, combating the marginalization of a deprived and devalued social class remained a goal to be attained. In general, it is these poor and vulnerable social groups that are the least integrated (both economically and intellectually) (Blondiaux, 2001). This goal, however, has been met since the establishment of the "Djaafarou" neighbourhood committee, which, despite its dedication and rigor, lacked the supervision and training required to promote the concept of social entrepreneurship.

### **Power Monopolization at the Expense of Good Governance**

The development of citizen participation was not at the forefront of the authorities' thinking at the start of the project process. The state institutions were not democratic among themselves, and the DUAC (the project owner) monopolized all the powers to be the developer, landowner, and interlocutor with the inhabitants all at the same time. Only after the project's launch did the residents organize themselves into an associative movement by forming a neighborhood committee. Citizen participation benefits democracy in a variety of ways, including increased knowledge of issues, improved skills, and contribution to decision-making (Ank, 2011). As a result of its expertise in the field, the Djaafarou neighbourhood committee's participation in this project facilitated the creation and rapid commissioning of an exhaustive and real database. Furthermore, the other state structures (housing directorate, national housing fund, water resources directorate, land registry service, SEACO, Sonelgaz, Algeria Telecom) were not directly involved in this project from the start, as if it were the project owner's sole operation. With the exception of the technical services of the municipality of Ibn Badis, which had to validate the list of those eligible for state aid from the start of the operation, no horizontal coordination was on the agenda from the start.

### **Total Absence of A Legal and Regulatory Framework**

A significant legal gap was identified in relation to the project's progress and completion conditions. The issue of the legal regulatory framework for this type of operation was raised in relation to the current laws and decrees. The issue was the delivery of various authorizations: development works, certificate of viability, delivery of title deeds, subdivision or building permit authorization, and release of state aid. This entire chain of events was not legally clear. The neighborhood committee, which was required to participate in a regulatory and legal associative movement, encountered an often informal and ambiguous process. We emphasize that this state of affairs confirmed an often-overlooked reality: informal governance can be beneficial and even necessary at times (Geoffroy and Koeberle, 2021). Olivier Gilbert, for his part, sees informality as a way to compensate for shortcomings in public services, among other things (Gilbert, 2016). According to Abderrahmane Mebtoul, an international expert in strategic management, it would be interesting to examine the trends and mechanisms of structuring and restructuring of society, particularly in urban, suburban, and rural areas, in light of the economic and social reality of informal initiatives that emerge, impelling a form of social regulation (Mebtoul, 2013). In terms of governance-related legal texts, it should be noted that some have addressed the subject without providing sufficient details on the modalities of application, such as Law 06-06 of 20 February 2006 on city orientation. This vision deserves special consideration, especially in light of legal gaps that could lead to cost overruns.

### **The Neighborhood Committee Emphasized the Defeat of a Useless And Heavy Bureaucracy**

If the "Daïra" represents the administrative level located between the commune and the wilaya with a purely administrative control role, it still has a role to play in the project under the authority of the chief of Daïra. It is the Daïra of Ain Abid in our case, which includes the communes of Ain Abid and Ibn Badis. It is a management mechanism similar to the wilaya, but with more limited prerogatives: to ensure the application of tutelage orientations, to advance project work, to report on measures taken, to associate the various state administrations at the Daïra level, and to connect the various public operators. We observe that the introduction of the " Daïra " as a control institution is merely an archaic and ineffective form of bureaucracy that will result in an even more cumbersome administrative process and inevitable slowness. If administration is required for the functioning of any society, being at the service of citizens and the economy, it must not establish itself as an autonomous bureaucratic power in any way. Otherwise, the bureaucracy's power will result in the

ineffectiveness of institutions and the various laws enacted (Mehtoul, 2013). In this sense, Jean-Pierre Olivier stated that modern bureaucracy is created everywhere in opposition to previous modes of administration, and this was especially true in Africa than in Europe (Gilbert, 2016). However, the Daïra has existed since the 1960s, when it was known as an arrondissement (Raham, 2003), and its incorporation into the project process does not follow any strategy or well-thought-out plan.

### **Lack of Coordination between Actors**

The territory is frequently regarded as an emanation of public or private actors, whose coordination actions cannot be reduced to public policy in the traditional sense, but rather to public action (Leloup et al, 2005). This foundational principle of good governance was practically absent at the start of the project, and in a sectoral vision, each actor was only concerned with the mission entrusted to him or her, with no regard for coordination with other actors. The Djaafarou district committee then found itself in need of answers to questions posed by the administration, as well as solutions to obstacles impeding the process. From marathon trips between agencies to the exchange of official correspondence between institutions. The committee members' sole goal was to manage the situation and complete the project at any cost.

### **PROJECT FINAL OUTCOME: SUCCESSES AND FAILURES**

Each time the associative movement attempted to strengthen its role as an interlocutor and intermediary between beneficiaries and administrative authorities, its representatives became acutely aware of the project's complexity, particularly after the start of the implementation and demarcation operation. All of the questions posed during the official meetings with the various actors were projected in front of the residents' eyes, and the anomalies and inconsistencies in the development plan gradually became apparent. Several lots, for example, were established on sewerage or gas lines, while others were under medium voltage power lines. Unfortunately, these inconsistencies continue to exist today (figure 6).

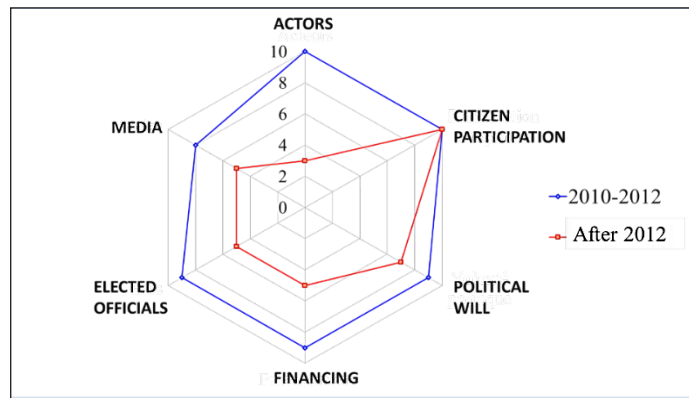


**Figure 6.** Medium voltage power lines encroach on roadways and densely populated areas (Source: Authors, 2022)

On the ground, new conflicts have emerged, and the neighbourhood committee has been the most positive influence in preventing the authorities from escalating to a dangerous level. Indeed, some of the beneficiaries complained about the lack of equity in the new plot sizes. Families with multiple households, on the other hand, were assigned a single plot of land. The most serious conflict situation, however, that jeopardized the entire operation was the incompatibility between the number of plots identified in the development plan and the number of families registered. This was exacerbated by the discovery of new families on the premises who were not on the previous list. As a result, the district committee faced a major challenge, and it was only through the personal relationships of its members, as well as the trust generated between the association and the residents, that these conflicts were intelligently managed and the project was able to break the deadlock and see the light of day.

### **LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Through the example of the “Djaafarou” neighborhood restructuring project, a promising perspective on the role that civil society can truly play with the administration's committed and positive involvement is emerging. The neighborhood committee has demonstrated a previously unseen awareness of volunteerism. It was also confronted with the need to find solutions to problems that frequently exceeded its moral and regulatory capabilities. Despite the fact that the project still has some flaws and failures, the president of the committee and the APC's local elected officials confirm the overall success of the operation. According to the evaluation indicators of good governance, citizen participation comes in first place, surpassing all other actors (figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Assessment of good governance indicators for the Djaafarou district restructuring project (Source:Authors)

Finally, based on the unique experience of the Djaafarou neighborhood and in consultation with neighborhood committee representatives, we were able to develop the following recommendations.

- It is absolutely necessary to conduct an in-depth examination of the socioeconomic context by involving the residents from the start of each project.
- To shed light on the cultural aspects and way of life of the inhabitants, as well as the social links that connect them, including forms of sociability within the neighborhood, social relations, and their relationships with local elected representatives.
- When beginning urban studies, include sociologists, urban planners, and demographers.
- To deepen the socioeconomic studies until they reach the details of the employment situation of the district's inhabitants, to count the types of activities of the inhabitants, to rigorously estimate the rates of unemployment, the rates of occupancy by housing, the rates of occupancy by room, the financial resources available to the inhabitants, the rates of schooling of the children, the needs of the various age categories according to the sex.
- Inform and train all actors, particularly decision-makers, on the concept of "good governance," its principles and objectives, and how to successfully carry out such a project.
- Establish the concept of the urban project, beginning with the establishment of the operation, and promote public/public and public/private partnerships.
- Highlight the district's human resources and evaluate the potential for qualified labor that it may have; rather than ignoring it, it is more prudent to establish a construction site or school for learning construction techniques at a lower cost.
- Implement stringent and coercive measures to curb the phenomenon of proliferation following the demolition of precarious housing, while also developing a strategy for reclaiming the recovered land.
- Strengthen the role of urban planning instruments as tools for good governance by making it mandatory for them to be respected, particularly by political authorities.

## CONCLUSION

Although not explicitly addressed in Algerian legislation, governance is heavily implied in several texts. The concept of actors, i.e. increasing citizen participation and promoting the role of civil society in any development process, has enriched several laws and decrees. Nonetheless, the modes of application and implementation are anarchic, ambiguous, or even non-existent. Participatory democracy has not progressed beyond slogans and theories because citizens are always present without being truly involved, and associations are active without being effective or involved in development. In turn, political will is expected to set up, supervise, and guide the entire governance process through tools for control, evaluation, and, most importantly, coordination among the various actors. However, it has been noted that all of the policies designed and strategies proposed continue to face challenges in this interactive relationship between actors. In this context, the FONAL program was a real test that allowed the identification of certain flaws and shortcomings that caused the mediocrity of the result, and despite the significant financial commitment and the



rigorous political will (via the mobilization of institutions from all sectors), the project's outcome did not succeed in satisfying the social needs of a still-complaining population. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the development and urban planning instruments, in this case the master plans for development and urban planning, most of which have recently been revised, have greatly facilitated the process by making valuable documentary support, accompanied by an often-exhaustive morphological diagnosis, available to all actors, particularly the technicians. After ten years, the FONAL program in the Djaafarou housing estate has also produced mediocre results. Throughout the operation, various issues concerning land, roads and networks, land constructability, and other social concerns (standard of living) have resurfaced. The outcome of this project was essentially the dissatisfaction of the residents of the Djaafarou district as a result of certain details related to conflicts between the actors. Each of the parties has completed his or her mission, with the exception of the process being marred by poor coordination with the other parties involved. It should be noted, however, that civil society, as represented by a neighborhood committee, has always been present. Its role as a liaison between citizens and various institutions was outstanding. Finally, we can say that two flaws mar the governance process in Algeria: (i) the lack of vertical coordination among actors, and (ii) the lack of regulatory tools for evaluation and control downstream, despite their effectiveness upstream.

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