



La participación popular como base del proyecto democrático de la Revolución Cubana

Participation as the basis of the democratic project of the Cuban Revolution

Eblis Velázquez-de los Reyes; Pedro Antonio Sánchez-Matos

Escuela Provincial del Partido “Israel reyes Zayas, Guantánamo, Cuba

Centro Universitario Municipal Yateras, Universidad de Guantánamo, Cuba

Correo(s) electrónico(s)

eblisv@gmail.com

pedroantonio@cug.co.cu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3050-1194>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0035-6042>

Recibido: 18 de mayo de 2021

Aceptado: 3 de diciembre de 2021

Resumen

En el artículo se aborda el problema de la participación popular en Cuba, con el objetivo de estudiar abordajes, analizar el fenómeno en su devenir. Se emplearon métodos como: análisis-síntesis, inducción-deducción, hermenéutico, histórico-lógico y análisis documental, los que permitieron constatar la evolución histórica del tema. Como resultado, se presenta cada etapa de la Revolución cubana con sus características específicas para lograr dicha participación. También, se aprecia el desarrollo alcanzado en cada momento y una concepción más integral en la práctica de dirección colectiva.

Palabras clave: Participación ciudadana; Dirección colectiva; Desarrollo social; Comunidad; Intervención social

Abstract

The article addresses the problem of popular participation in Cuba. Consequently, they set as objectives, first, to study approaches around the referred matter; second, to analyse said phenomenon in its future. Then, analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, hermeneutical, historical-logical and documentary analysis methods were used. These allowed to verify the course of the historical evolution of this topic. As a result, each stage of the Cuban Revolution is presented with its specific characteristics to achieve such participation. Also, the development that she has achieved at all times is appreciated. In addition, a more comprehensive conception is shown in the practice of collective management.

Keywords: Civic Participation; Collective Management; Social Develop; Community; Social Intervention

Introduction

The issue of collective leadership is basic to socialism, seen from a Martí, Marxist-Leninist, Guevara and Fidelity perspective. This association of advanced ideas builds a conception of social leadership totally different from those that in other places have been developed or are being developed. Nevertheless, having taken the positive aspects of other experiences, their errors have been analyzed in order to apply ideas from those foreign proposals. But, essentially, Cuban society, its leadership, the principles that sustain it have an autonomous character. They have been born from the Cuban content: its needs and aspirations, its culture, its history, its heroes and the dream of the future, with the optimism of the great masters of the subject.

In correspondence to the above, there are several international experts and institutions. Among them, we can point out Engels (n.d.), UN (1972), Kontantinov (1984), Kaplún (1985), Freire (1993, 2000) and at the national level, Communist Party of Cuba (1978, 2017), Castro (1987, 2000), Linares (1995), Commission of Local Bodies of the National Assembly of Popular Power (1997), Dávalos (1998), Davila (2005), Rubio (2006), who have referred to the subject described. Some, from general perspectives seen or not in their context, others with a more specific character, related to Cuba. Nevertheless, this issue is still a pending task in important aspects of Cuban social development.

Consequently, the authors approach the problem of popular participation in Cuba with a historical-concrete perspective from a dialectical vision. In this sense, the objectives are to study some referents around the preferred issue, to analyze this phenomenon in its evolution up to the present time.

Development

Participation in Cuba, a matter of systematic attention.

Incidentally, participation in Cuba, as a principle, has been an aspect of constant treatment in theory and practice by Castro (1987, 2000), Communist Party of Cuba (1978, 2017), Linares (1995), Commission of Local Bodies of the National Assembly of People's Power (1997), Dávalos (1998), Davila (2005), Rubio (2006). However, the country has gone through difficult conditions since the triumph of January 1, 1959. Therefore, it has had to develop under the need to assume challenges to guarantee the maintenance of socialism with a projection of prosperity and sustainability. One of these challenges has been to achieve an ever-increasing sum of wills for the integral defense of the project.

In this regard, from the very beginning of the socialist construction in Cuba, the recognition by the people of their participation in the transformation actions has been sought. In this sense, it has been demonstrated

that it constitutes a right. In this regard, it has also been insisted on the responsibility of those who lead to promote it.

However, mass participation in Cuba, since the triumph of January 1, 1959, has become a consubstantial element of the revolutionary process. Consequently, the great voluntary mobilizations of the population make it become the central axis of the political consensus that unites, strengthens and ensures power.

Since the 1960s, participation has been admitted and defined in Cuba as a resource for development, with emphasis on its active character. Basically, this refers to the intervention of the members of society in the decision-making process.

There are many examples that demonstrate the preceding thesis, in this sense, we remember the literacy and vaccination campaigns, the construction of houses, the harvesting of the people, the political and historical commemorations, as well as the massive support to important decisions of the revolutionary government, such as the socialist character of the Revolution, the creation of the Revolutionary Militias, thus the operation of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the Cuban's Women Federation.

However, an unavoidable issue is the fact that the new Cuban society in formation had to compete very hard with the discriminatory aftermath of the past. In this sense, one of the aspects that are still a challenge to be changed is the way democracy is exercised. This is necessary because every Cuban citizen has to defend what has been achieved, through an active and conscious participation in all actions that ensure this purpose.

The experience of socialism in Cuba during the first years of the Revolution was deeply analyzed in the First Congress of the PCC in 1975. In it, the need to dialectically combine the economic and moral springs was raised. The conclave discussed the increasingly important role that the latter should play, and the correlation between material and moral stimuli.

At this event, the importance of stimulating people's socially active behaviors was considered. In this last matter, it was necessary to educate the masses politically and ideologically to guarantee their participation in the analyses and evaluations that concern them. In this regard Castro (1987, p. 170), pointed out, "We must not think for a minute that we are going to solve with money the problems that only conscience can solve; we must use material stimuli intelligently and combine them with moral ones".

Morality plays a primordial role in the struggle to create the new society, the socialist consciousness and the ideological education of the people. To this end, it is necessary to promote

successful revolutionary political work with the masses. In this, the activist teachers of the Municipal Party School play a transcendental role.

It is necessary to point out that, with the establishment of socialist and definitive democracy in the country, and as a sovereign act of the people, with the constitution of the National Assembly of Popular Government in 1976, the period of provisionally of the revolutionary government comes to an end. In this sense, the Socialist State adopts definitive constitutional forms, which denote the popular character and the rooting of the process in the masses.

For fifteen years the power of the people was exercised centrally, as the only option to guarantee the survival of the Revolution in the face of the plans and aggressions of the enemy of the North. In this regard, the people exercised the government by filling the public squares, together with their leaders, decided democratically and adopted the required measures, which demonstrated their right to decide their destiny. Thus, the main educational, health and economic development actions were undertaken in acts of full participation, in which the Party played an important role in linking with the masses, informing and educating them.

In addition, with the process of institutionalization in 1976, the Cuban Political System was endowed with new procedures of participation and legitimization. Among its actions was the opening of new spaces for direct and representative participation in the State through electoral processes, achieved with the creation of the Organs of Popular Government.

The idea of creating a participatory process, which included and at the same time exceeded citizen involvement in the selection of leadership, guided the actions of the Popular Power.

This was a period in which we worked to direct and channel the popular incidence in local decision making and in the permanent control of the leaders. This implied the incorporation of all the organizational baggage and community experiences accumulated during the preceding years. This was a very useful element in the mobilization of resources for socio-economic development and political support for the socialist project. Legal norms and political actions were established to support a more intense, fluid and better-informed participation.

The achievements and shortcomings of that design were not unrelated to a systemic environment that combined a great social sensitivity and a high mobilizing capacity, a vertical, centralizing political style, combined with a paternalistic pattern of participation, predominated. This was possible within the framework of an extensive economic model supported by a favorable international economic insertion.

Consequently, as any human work, the Revolution was not exempt from errors, nor has there been no lack of criticism of them. Errors and negative tendencies accumulated due to technocratic concepts, deficiencies in the Economic Management System and its application. Hence,

deformations were enthroned that compromised the strategic objectives of the socialist revolution. Aspects also manifested in relation to his preparation for participation in these economic issues so closely linked to the spiritual life.

In those circumstances, Fidel was the first to warn about the serious deficiencies. He took up again the warnings made at the First and Second Congresses of the Communist Party of Cuba held in 1975 and 1980 respectively, about not abandoning the work with man, nor resting blindly on the mechanisms of the system that was being implemented, thus not forgetting the political-ideological work and listening to the masses.

In this sense, related to the importance of attending to the subjective factor for its linkage with the development of the productive forces in the communist construction Guevara (1970), expressed: We do not conceive communism as the mechanical sum of consumer goods in a given society, but as the result of a conscious act; hence the importance of education and work with the consciousness of individuals in the framework of a society in full material development. (p. 299).

In this regard, in 1986 the Process of Rectification of Errors and Negative Tendencies was developed, which reached all the structures of the country. The study it implied led to the change of management and control methods. The rectification, which had begun with the economy, covered all areas of politics and ideology.

In this sense, the necessary improvement of the Party, with the policy of rectification of errors, made the Higher School of the Party "Nico López", introduce modifications in its curricula, began to work with the dialectical methodological conception of Popular Education, preparing the future leadership cadres of the Party at all levels to develop their work with the popular masses, so that in their actions they would project the participatory leadership, which allowed preparing the ground for the transformations that arose later.

The preparation cannot be restricted only to guarantee a general culture, this can be one of its most stimulating results, it requires responding to the needs of the Cuban nation in the context of a revolution of the masses. For this purpose, Cuba has sufficient human resources throughout the national territory from the early years. In this sense, the activist teachers of the Municipal School of the Party are significant. This is also an example of participation of the people, since this is a Cuban variant of popular education. In it, those who carry it out do it voluntarily, without any remuneration, and assume in the educational process a good part of the masses in each municipality. At the same time, the students (trainees) are people who participate democratically in the meetings that are held.

On the other hand, it is important to understand how the foundations of Popular Education, based on the theory of knowledge for the participation of the masses, were embraced by the revolutionary social system. This is reflected in the transformations in education, research, arts., politics, among others.

On the other hand, in the rectification process in 1989, changes in mentality were already noticeable; of measuring the economy not only in financial values; investment discipline was recovered, the social policy in construction; the movement of micro brigades for housing and social works was enhanced, and the multi trade; volunteer work and the concept of attention to man were recovered. These are brigades created from the beginning of the Cuban Revolution with the purpose of assuming the necessary construction of housing, in which the brigades themselves also built their own houses. All this led to a constant process of popular participation, without which this work would have been impossible to carry out.

Consequently, the paternalistic labor legislation was criticized and modified, the profit motive was struck, formalism in political work was criticized, recovering it to put man at the center of his attention and the Party at the center of the problems. The popular participation became evident in

this process by the emission of criteria, proposals and pointing out of problems in the social and productive environment.

On the other hand, the rectification process created new forms of organization and participation in social production, such as the construction contingents; then those of agriculture and industry; the experimental enterprises and the methods of continuous planning with the participation of the different staff.

These socio-economic transformations, at the gates of the IV Party Congress, imposed that the rectification should embrace the whole society, a task that could only be done with the masses. In this sense, the exceptional conditions existing before the Special Period allowed for a very harmonious framework of distribution and consumption relations. This explains the high degree of consensus found. This also had an impact on the difficulties encountered in the achievement of qualitatively superior participation practices, in the expression of demands and in the implementation of decisions.

In March 1990, the Central Committee of the Party issued the call for the IV Congress, and in April summoned all the people to discuss it. This debate had a broad popular participation, which constituted the essential starting point for the drafting of the theses of the Congress, by its organizing commission.

However, due to the conjuncture of the Special Period, with the consequences of the crisis already felt, and taking into account the enormous and complex challenge it posed to the nation, the IV Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba adopted the decision not to propose a program or programmatic guidelines that would establish a long-range strategy. These were considered impossible to carry out under those conditions.

In such circumstances, democratic centralism was expressed in the will of the Party and of all the people to support that decision. This gave greater powers to the Central Committee and the leadership of the Revolution. This made it possible to take quick decisions that could not be elaborated and conceived through normal channels.

In this regard, it is known that the Special Period in peacetime, in the 1990s, produced a change in the favorable conditions in which the country had developed its social project. These were manifested in: economic crisis, material limitations, emergence of new social groups in the national context, certain social inequalities, intensification of the U.S. blockade against Cuba, among others.

In the face of the abrupt economic turn the country was facing, the State leadership perceived the need for decentralization and recognition of the community. This made it possible to understand the role it should really play in the social structure.

In the middle of that decade, a government commission was created to make community work viable at the grassroots level. This helped to raise awareness of the need to avoid top-down methods and to make community self-management decisions increasingly decentralized. These issues were in line with contemporary conceptions of development. This stimulated new proposals and projects that demonstrate popular participation. Therefore, at the grassroots level, they analyze, from their own practice, what can be done to solve problems.

Another aspect of development was the creation of the popular councils in 1986, by virtue of Law no. 56 and its subsequent generalization as of 1991. This meant a courageous and necessary experience in the development of the Revolution and the improvement of community participation. In this sense, the IV

Party Congress, in October of that same year, proposed to the Cuban society relevant measures related to democratization, a resolution dedicated to the improvement of the People's Power.

At the same time, the final declaration of the National Assembly of People's Power of that year, pronounced the search for alternatives to improve the Political System. This included the electoral mechanism, further deepening a greater and better popular participation, and promoting the permanent democratization of Cuban society.

On the other hand, in the sessions of July and October 1992, the Parliament approved two laws related to this matter: The Constitutional Reform Law and the Electoral Law. Accordingly, the Popular Council enters as an institution aimed at promoting development, resource mobilization and popular participation in areas under its jurisdiction. This governmental structure, being closer to the common citizen, gives the possibility to participate directly in the Revolution, not only with its presence, but also through the expression of ideas. But it also includes decision making at that level, with the actions of the delegate and his electors, which allows the projection of multiple actions.

In addition, the economic limitations imposed a work more directed to the attention of the subjective aspects, due to the significance they have. The work in the community will be effective if certain spiritual needs of its inhabitants are also met, among which are: information, communication, affection, identity and participation.

From that point on, participation in Cuban society has been defined with increasingly evident actions. This has been an expression of a process of progressive and integral involvement of its members, in the changes that they themselves propose, from the needs and resources that identify them. This is key to their materialization and the achievement of better results.

In these times, the improvement of the real participation of the masses in each of the scenarios is projected, because as a social process, it has to be measurable. Cuban authors have adapted, from foreign authors, proposals of indicators of the participation process. This is the case of Dávalos (1998, p.78-79), who proposes:

- Needs assessment: a factor that allows measuring how the problems that the community considered primary and the definition of their possible solutions were jointly established.
- Leadership: to what extent formal or non-formal leaders make the transformation program their own.
- Community organization: measures the degree of collaboration, cooperation and participation of neighborhood organizations and institutions and the possible creation of organizations required by the program, so that all sectors of the community are represented.

- Mobilization of resources: identification of the human, financial and material resources necessary for the initiation and development of the programs, to reduce subordination or dependence and promote self-management.
- Management of work programs: resulting in the degree of participation, implementation and evaluation of work programs. These indicators describe work logic to be developed from participation and its results, the integrality imposed by the preparation of social actors, and their performance in the process of determining and solving problems, as a culminating point.

Other manifestations of the process are expressed in this stage of the Special Period, since the Workers' Parliaments were held. These allowed more than three million citizens to participate directly in the analysis and proposal of measures. These defined the internal and external economic policy changes that the country needed.

Likewise, an unprecedented sample of participation was in 2002, with eight million one hundred ninety-eight thousand two hundred thirty-seven voters. This process was carried out to ratify the socialist content of the Constitution and to interest the National Assembly of People's Power to reform this law. To the extent that this would allow the irrevocable character of socialism and the Cuban political system to be established. This display of committed participation was a reflection of the strengthening of the democratic system, which would not have been possible without a broad, conscious and active attachment to the Revolution and its leaders.

In this regard, the experiences of participatory processes in Cuba focus on the achievement of collective objectives. In this sense, their own potentialities have been manifested. On the other hand, obstacles (objective and subjective) have been recognized, which may arise in their development, with participatory techniques and links with leadership.

In addition, the participation of individual and collective subjects in the decision of their purposes, has as a fundamental principle the respect for autonomy and community decision making. Therefore, it requires stimulating, facilitating and increasing the power of the people and their organizations. Likewise, working with the masses constitutes a basic element to guarantee their behavior in the development of any process.

Consequently, it is necessary to protect a history of struggle based on the participation and integration of the people, whose antecedent is October 10, 1868. This date has a glorious significance as a crucible of participation of Cubans to achieve the noble ideals of justice, humanism, libertarian determination, willingness to fight and heroism of this people.

Another element is expressed in the democratic and participatory nature of the Process of updating the Cuban Socialist and Economic Model. This imposes not to ignore the great moments of popular participation in which the Cuban people have been immersed. Likewise, to project the recognition of theoretical-methodological foundations those allow its improvement, so that participation becomes more and more conscious in the determination of policies and their implementation. Since it constitutes a combat weapon for the defense of the prosperous and sustainable Socialism to which the majority of Cubans aspire.

Consequently, Communist Party of Cuba (2017) reiterates that in these times the people have to be the author and actor of the changes, proper to the Updating Process of the Cuban Economic and Social Model of Socialist Development. To this end, popular participation is valuable, necessary and indispensable. It is a factor for the determination and implementation of the approved policies. Likewise, the participatory and democratic nature of this process gives an important meaning to the contribution of the masses. Their active and conscious collaboration will make possible the achievement of the objective transformations that must be accomplished.

The protagonist of the social actors in the decision-making process for the solution of problems constitutes the cornerstone of the development of the Cuban democratic system, since the individual and collective commitment guarantees the materialization of such purposes.

For these reasons, the achievement of an increasingly conscious participation of the masses constitutes another challenge, since it is a banner of combat for the entire Cuban political system in each of its scenarios. The leaders of the different organizations must have a clear projection in their preparation. This is essential for the achievement of a performance that allows them to exert influence. This should facilitate the awareness of its members on the value of recognizing, assuming and occupying with full conviction the role that corresponds to them.

In this regard, the mastery of the assumptions that ensure the effectiveness of such participation guarantees the adequate analysis of behaviors. This will be one of the essential factors that will allow, after the deepening of the theoretical and methodological postulates, to make proposals that will help to improve practices. This is possible through the conscious assimilation shown in the attitude of actors and managers of community work.

On the other hand, popular participation, defined beyond the classical conceptions that reduce it to electoral notions, has been an implicit and explicit goal in the democratic-participatory project of the Cuban Revolution. This construction process, which involves not only normative and procedural issues, also refers

to the political culture. In this society, this constitutes the basis for all actions that have to do with the life of its human groups.

The processes developed by the Seventh and Eighth Congresses of the Communist Party of Cuba in 2016 and 2021, respectively, are added to the above. Likewise, the one carried out for the constitutional reform of 2018 and 2019. This resulted in a new Constitution, evaluated by experts as one of the most advanced of all times. And more currently the consultations that are being carried out with the Draft Code of Cuban families.

In summary, participation as a popular principle of leadership has acquired a different nuance in each historical moment of the Cuban Revolution. It has marched in accordance with the changes necessary for the improvement of society and its leaders. Today it constitutes a guarantee of the new changes and what is to come. However, it is still necessary to continue educating the people and their leaders for the deep understanding of this concept and its consistent application by both.

Conclusions

The Cuban revolutionary process has been unifying from the very moment of its conception by the generation that thought about it in each historical epoch. The last emancipating stage initiated with the centenary generation led by Fidel Castro, constituted the crucible of that unitary thought, and the triumph of the people on January 1, 1959, constituted the historical moment to strengthen that feeling and turn it into an unavoidable reality. There have been, systematically, until today, spaces and opportunities taken advantage of in such a high purpose. The achievements attained by the country must be defended and strengthened in pursuit of the construction of the prosperous and sustainable socialism that the majority of Cubans have set for themselves. Therefore, collective, conscious, timely and consistent participation is undoubtedly one of the tasks that implies guaranteeing a society that is, as Martí (2001, p. 243, 269) points out, "with all and for the good of all".

Bibliographic references

Castro, F. (1987). *Ideología, conciencia y trabajo político. 1959-1986*. La Habana: Política.

Castro, F. (2000, 11 de abril). Discurso inaugural Cumbre Sur-Sur. *Juventud Rebelde*.

Comisión de Órganos Locales de la Asamblea Nacional de Poder Popular (1997). *La rendición de cuentas del delegado a sus electores. Apuntes para el perfeccionamiento de su desarrollo*. La Habana: Editora Política.

Partido Comunista de Cuba (1978). *Documento. Tesis y resoluciones del Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba*. La Habana: Ciencias Sociales.

_____. (2017). *Documentos del 7mo. Congreso del Partido aprobados por el II pleno del Comité Central del PCC el 18 de mayo de 2017 y respaldados por la Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular el 1 de junio de 2017*. Compendio. La Habana: Editora Política.

Dávalos, R. (1998). *Desarrollo urbano: Proyectos y experiencias de trabajo*. La Habana: Universitaria.

_____. (2005). *El Partido, alma de la Revolución*. La Habana: Páginas.

Engels, F. (s.f). *Anti-Duhring [edición digital]*. Chile: Fondo documental EHK.

Freire, P. (2000). *Constructor de sueños*. (Vídeo). México: Producción IMDEC.

Freire, P. (1993). *Extensión o comunicación. La conciencia en el medio rural*. México: Siglo XXI.

Guevara, E. (1970). *Escritos y discursos*. La Habana: Ciencias sociales.

Kaplún, M. (1985). *El comunicador popular*. Ediciones CESPAL.

Kontantinov, F., (1984). *Fundamentos de la Filosofía Marxista Leninista*. La Habana: Pueblo y Educación.

Linares, C. (1995). *La participación ¿Solución o problema?* La Habana: José Martí.

Martí, J. (2001). *Obras Completas. Tomo 4 [edición digital]*. La Habana: Centro de Estudios Martianos.

ONU. (1972). *Participación popular en el desarrollo de la comunidad*. Departamento Asuntos Económicos y Sociales. New York.

Rubio, D. (2006). *La participación comunitaria*. (Tesis de maestría). Universidad de Oriente. Santiago de Cuba.