The NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Winter 2021/2022

10.2478/nispa-2021-0016

Study on Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Vietnam

Nguyen Trong Binh[1], Nguyen Quang Giai[2]

Abstract

Reform to establish a democratic, citizen-centered government is an important orientation in the world and in Vietnam today. For Vietnam, how to promote and strengthen democratic governance must be one of the most crucial issues in order to achieve sustainable development goals. Based on the theoretical framework and survey results, this study evaluates citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam on seven main dimensions, including: (i) Transparency aims to ensure citizens' right to know; (ii) Participation in elections; (iii) Outlining of policy initiatives; (iv) Policy discussion, social criticism and referendums; (v) Voluntary contributions and cooperation with the government in public-service delivery; (vi) Social self-governance; (vii) Supervision of the social realm. Research shows that the dominance of local government is very evident in the process of citizen participation. The policy implications for countries in transition like Vietnam are that, in order to increase citizen participation in local governance, the openness of local government should be enhanced. Of course, doing this well needs a certain social basis.

Keywords:
citizen-centered government, democracy, citizen participation, local governance, local government, Vietnam

1. Introduction

From a theoretical perspective, in view of the limitations and inadequacies of traditional public-administration theory, which has been concerned with "administration", but not with the "public" aspect, from the 1960s up to now, many theories on public administration, such as social construction theory, new public service the-

1 Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, Academy of Politics Region IV, Can Tho City, Vietnam.

2 Thu Dau Mot University, Thu Dau Mot City, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam.

Open Access. © 2021 Nguyen Trong Binh, Nguyen Quang Giai, published by Sciendo.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License.

ory, public value management theory, and new public administration theory were born. These theories all have in common (1) their direct criticism of the traditional public-administration model, which considers the government as the sole subject in social management; (2) on the basis of affirming the "public nature" of public administration to emphasize the creation of an open government governance model, as well as emphasizing the participation of citizens in the process of public policy as well as in government governance (Binh 2018). From a practical perspective, under the influence of many factors, especially the change of the governance environment and the low efficiency in government governance, in recent decades, the process of model-transformation governance of government in the world is focused on one core point, that is, moving from the traditional model of government management with its characteristics emphasizing the unique role of government in social management to a new model of government management, i.e. the modern government governance model with the core characteristic of emphasizing democracy in the government's social management (Binh 2021). In this process, expanding citizen participation as well as strengthening cooperation between the government and society are highly valued by many countries (Binh 2016).

In this context, citizen participation in government governance as well as in local governance has become one of the topics of interest to theoretical researchers and practitioners around the world. International organizations and many researchers agree that the effectiveness of citizen participation is considered one of the criteria of good governance, which is also an indispensable mechanism of current government governance. The implementation of the Doi Moi policy since 1986 in Vietnam has set an objective requirement for increasing citizen participation in local governance because increasing the participation of citizens in local governance contributes to ensuring the implementation of the principle of "people's sovereignty". Moreover, socio-economic changes and information technology have also contributed to creating the necessary conditions to promote citizen participation in local governance. In addition, the government reform policy towards building an open government, harmoniously resolving the relationship between the government and society is also an important factor promoting the participation of citizens in local governance in Vietnam. The purpose of this study is to build a theoretical framework on citizen participation in local governance and from primary and secondary data sources to assess the status of citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam, thereby providing some policy implications regarding citizen participation in local governance for policy makers in Vietnam. The questions here are: (1) How effective is citizen participation (width and depth) in local governance in Vietnam? (2) If citizen participation in local governance has not met the expected goals and requirements, what is the cause of it? (3) In order to increase citizen participation in local governance, what key issues should policymakers focus on?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Definition of citizen participation in local governance

In terms of content, local governance differs from the traditional management method of local government when it emphasizes the government's unique role in providing public services, as well as in solving social problems. The core content of local governance is to emphasize the promotion and integration of the strengths of many actors, mainly the government, businesses and society (social organizations and people) in the solution, solving social problems as well as ones in public-service delivery. Regarding its actors, local governance is composed of the following main actors: (i) the local government system, represented by public managers and local government agencies as the basis; (ii) the market system (enterprise) with the business team as its representative and the corporate organization as the basis; (iii) a social system that takes citizens as its representatives and takes social organizations as the basis (Ping 2014). The purpose of forming such a multi-center governance structure is to contribute to limiting the "failure of the government", the "failure of the market", as well as the "failure of society"; at the same time, it is beneficial to promote the strength of the whole society in local governance. Thus, citizen participation (or social participation) is one of the indispensable mechanisms of modern local governance, as well as one of the important criteria of good governance.

Citizen participation in local governance is composed of all acts and activities of citizens (including individual citizens and social organizations as representative organizations of citizens) through certain institutions and mechanisms to influence or decide on the public policy process as well as the process of solving public problems of the local government. From this definition, it can be seen that: (i) the subjects participating in the local governance process are individual citizens and representative organizations of citizens (the core are social organizations). In other words, individual citizens and social organizations are entities outside of local government agencies; (ii) initiating citizen participation in local governance is both rooted in the willingness of citizens to participate and includes the encouragement of local government agencies; (iii) the form of citizen participation in local governance is mainly determined by the relevant legal institution; (iv) citizen participation in local governance is to participate in all steps and stages of the public policy process as well as in the process of solving public problems of the local government; (v) citizen participation in local governance occurs for the purpose of maintaining and promoting the public interest, and contributing to improving the effectiveness of local government governance; at the same time it contributes to maintaining and promoting the realization of the interests of citizens; (vi) citizen participation in local governance is both a political right of citizens and a basis for ensuring and promoting the exercise of other rights of citizens (Binh and Anh 2019).

2.2 Forms of citizen participation in local governance

Citizen participation in local governance is the specific way or means through which citizens can influence or decide on the public policy process of local government. It is expressed through the institutional participation strategies and methods applied in the process of interaction between the government and citizens (Binh 2016). To date, from different perspectives, researchers have pointed out different forms of citizen participation in local governance; some case studies that can be mentioned in this context include the following: The World Bank believes that citizen participation in local governance can include forms and levels, such as: (1) Information sharing; (2) Consultation; (3) Collaboration and (4) Empowerment (World Bank 2002). In the best case, participation means a process in which the participants can control the decision-making and resources. Kweit and Kweit (1981) argue that there are four forms of citizen participation in local governance, which are: (1) participation in elections and appeals; (2) participation through unions; (3) citizens and local government coming into contact with each other, i.e. the government seeks receive the opinions of the peopleby means of a referendum, a conference while also establishing a mechanism for citizens to monitor the activities of the government; (4) citizens' actual participation in the implementation of public policy, i.e. the government promotes citizen participation in policy implementation through delegation or contracting. According to Pluto (2007), citizen participation in local governance is a process that includes: (1) Sharing together; (2) Following the thoughts; (3) Joining the conversation; (4) Planning together; (5) Deciding together; (6) Arranging together.

Based on the three stages from low to high citizen participation, Arnstein (1969) suggests that there are eight forms of citizen participation from low to high, including:

(i) Government-controlled form of participation. This means that in local governance, where some form of participation already exists, the government has also established some mechanism for interacting with citizens. However, in the participation process, the government uses a number of methods to control citizen participation, such as limiting the scope and extent of information.

(ii) A form of participation that is educational in nature. That is, citizens do not have a substantive understanding of the policy issue, so education is a necessary option to initiate participation. On the other hand, educational propaganda is also a way to limit citizens' opposition to some policies that the government does not want to have a different opinion on.

(iii) Forms of participation through ensuring the citizens' right to know. That is, through the disclosure of information, the government makes citizens aware of a number of issues related to local governance, know the work of the government as well as orient the perception for citizens.

(iv) Forms of participation through government consultations with citizens. That is, the government consults widely with citizens when making a certain policy.

(v) Participation through government dialogue with citizens. That is, for a certain public issue, the government and the citizen (or the citizen's representative) can dialogue directly with each other.

(vi) Participation through cooperation between government and citizens. This is a form of participation that is intrinsically significant to the policy process. Because, on the one hand, the government's perception of citizen participation has radically changed; on the other hand, through the government and citizens jointly managing some common affairs in the community and local governance, the people received substantive authorization from the government.

(vii) Participation through government empowerment of citizens. This is a high-level form of citizen participation.

(viii) A form of participation that demonstrates the complete autonomy of citizens. This is an ideal state and form of citizen participation, demonstrating the autonomy of citizens in managing and deciding important local affairs.

Thomas (1995) said that, for different purposes, it is possible to divide the forms of citizen participation in local governance as follows: (1) The policy is issued by the local government autonomously, with no participation of the people or a low level of citizen participation. (2) The form of participation takes an equal dialogue between the local government and citizens as the goal. (3) The form of participation receives information for the policy process as the goal, including specific forms of local government polling citizens through different channels; local government is in contact with representatives of the people; citizens actively interact with local government; small group opinion polls; participation via the internet and e-government; disclosure of local government information. (4) The forms of participation are aimed at increasing citizens' acceptance of local-government policies including: citizen conferences; the government consulting and listening to citizens; citizen advisory committee. (5) The forms of participation are aimed at developing and enhancing the self-governance and self-governance capacity of citizens, including: supervision of organizations established by citizens; stating the initiative and appeal; Citizen Forum; cooperation between local governments and citizens in public-service delivery; voluntary and self-governing activities of citizens.

Although Thomas's research has highlighted many forms of citizen participation in local governance, at the same time, it can be applied to the practice of participation in different countries. However, there are some forms of participation whose effectiveness in practice difficult to assess. Therefore, in this study, we only limit the survey and assessment of citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam to seven main forms, including: (1) Transparency aims to ensure citizens'

right to know; (2) Participation in elections; (3) Outlining policy initiatives; (4) Policy discussion, social criticism and referendums; (5) Voluntary contributions and cooperation with the government in public-service delivery; (6) Social self-governance; (7) Supervision of the social realm.

These seven forms of participation not only fully reflect the level of citizen participation in the local governance of a country, but also facilitate the manipulation of the concept to conduct surveys and measure the actual participation in a country or a region.

2.3 The main factors affecting the level of citizen participation

Research by Almond (1987) has shown the influence of citizens' educational level and political culture on citizen participation. Research by Huntington and Nelson (1989) has shown the influence of income, economic conditions, education level, occupation and collective consciousness on citizen participation. In fact, the level and effectiveness of citizens' participation in local governance is influenced and governed by many different factors, mainly:

The development of social organization (or "third sector", NGOs, ax-free sector) is the basis for increasing citizen participation in local governance. Many researchers, such as Burnell and Calvert (2004), Howell and Pearce (2001), Florini (2000), Cohen and Aroto(1992), Kumar (1993) etc., all believe that only the mature development of civil-society organizations can foster and promote citizen participation in local governance. In turn, citizen participation in local governance promotes the development of civil-society organizations as well as enhancing the self-governance capacity of society. Functionally, a civil-society organization is an institutional entity with the power of the government that integrates and expresses the interests of citizens. Through social organizations, the voice of the citizens is more easily respected by the government. On the other hand, the development of social organization is also the basis for expanding the autonomy of society. In particular, social organizations are also "schools" that foster citizens' capacity and participation skills (Denhardt and Denhardt 2001). This means that civil-society organizations themselves are the best way for citizens to participate in local governance.

Citizenship is a particularly important factor affecting the effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance. Many studies, such as Marshall (1994), Tilly (1996), Turner (1994) etc., all argue that citizenship is important factors affecting citizen participation on the governance local. Accordingly, the development of social organizations as well as the level of citizen participation requires the conditions of citizenship. Citizenship is not only the legal recognition of citizenship rights, but also includes citizens' sense of rights and obligations and citizens' capacity to practice democracy. However, researchers all agree that it is not only when the status and morale of citizenship are guaranteed that it is necessary to expand citizen participation. On the contrary, they believe that citizen participation is also a process of

fostering and developing citizenship and spirit. Specifically, researchers believe that: (1) Citizens' participation can only be realized on the basis that the constitution and laws recognize and guarantee the rights of citizens. (2) The rights that citizens have are not unconditional, besides enjoying the rights, citizens also have to assume the corresponding public responsibilities. (3) The law that recognizes and regulates the rights and obligations of citizens is only a necessary and sufficient condition for the spirit of citizenship, the core of which is citizens knowing their rights and obligations as prescribed by the law; citizens actively exercising and putting their rights into practice; citizens having an interest and active participation in public affairs, citizens have active citizenship, they are not only taxpayers and consumers of public services, but are also directly involved in local governance (Box 1998); citizens have a certain capacity to judge and evaluate whether a certain government policy is appropriate and consistent with the law and the public interest; citizens respect and protect the public interest as well as the interests of the community; citizens have a spirit of courage in fighting acts that infringe upon the legitimate interests of others, not in accordance with the legal order; citizens respect opinions and lifestyles, are objective and rational in evaluating things and phenomena; citizens know how to use peaceful, not violent, methods to resolve conflicts and differences.

Social capital, trust and cooperation are also factors affecting the level and effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance. Many researchers, such as Putnam (1993), Fukuyama (1996), Warren (1999), Stoker (2004) etc., all believe that social capital is a decisive factor in forming cooperation, citizen interaction and interaction in the community. The form of social capital has a very clear influence on people's participation. Putnam (1993) said that, on the one hand, the network of citizens' participation is increasingly developed and concentrated, most citizens are able to express their thoughts, aspirations, opinions and ideas, participation efforts; engaging in political activities related to their close interests will promote civic participation; on the other hand, citizen participation contributes to raising their sense of participation, fostering civic spirit, enhancing mutual trust and cooperation among citizens. All these in turn increase the accumulation of social capital, promoting the development of social organizations.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the development of digital government, the openness of local government as well as the implementation of public responsibilities by public managers are also factors affecting the effectiveness of citizens' public participation in local governance (Anh and Binh 2020). True to the point of view of Box (1998) on how to choose a local-governance model, the most important point is that local governments as well as public managers prefer to choose local-governance models based on factors such as: whether it is a closed, exclusionary governance system, or choose a governance system that welcomes the participation of citizens as well as making it easy for citizens to participate in the decision-making process. Accompanying this is the attitude and responsibility of public managers. Accordingly, in order to promote citizen participation in local

governance, public managers need to become citizens' advisors, not controllers, their functions need to be transformed into roles promoters, moderators, industry consultants and helpers for civic participation management.

3. Methods and Data

This study is based on primary data on citizen participation in local governance as mentioned in the Vietnam Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) by the Center for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES), the United Nations. The Development Program (UNDP) in Vietnam, the Center for Personnel Fostering and Scientific Research of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF-CRT) and the Real-time Analysis Company (RTA) have been implemented since 2011. PAPI is a governance quality assessment program of local government in Vietnam over the years. The purpose of PAPI is to improve the efficiency of the service provided by the local government in order to better meet the increasing demands of the public by: (i) creating opportunities for citizens to participate in the assessment efficiency of the government's activities, and mobilizing the government to the ways it serves the public; (ii) promoting self-assessment to renewal, creating healthy competition practices and a culture of learning from local governments. The content of the program focuses on surveying and collecting data and opinions on the following content: (1) Participation at Local Levels; (2) Transparency; (3) Vertical Accountability; (4) Control of Corruption; (5) Public Administrative Procedures; (6) Public Service Delivery; (7) Environmental Governance; (8) E-Governance. By the end of 2019, PAPI had collected and reflected the experiences of 131,501 people. In 2019, PAPI directly interviewed 14,138 people in all 63 provinces (CECODES et al. 2020). In terms of citizen participation at the local level, PAPI examines and evaluates four aspects, including (i) Civic Knowledge (people's understanding of current books and leadership positions); (ii) Opportunities for Participation (level of participation in socio-political organizations, social organizations, people's clubs, and rate of participation in the last election); (iii) Quality of Elections (ensuring principles such as competition, autonomy, and transparency in the election); (iv) Contributions (the level of people's voluntary contributions to public work in a commune, residential area, etc.[3]

However, because the secondary data source from PAPI does not cover all seven forms of citizen participation in local governance, this study also uses a sociological survey to get more primary data on the participation of citizens in local governance in Vietnam. Specifically, this study designed a questionnaire to survey the breadth and depth of citizen participation in local governance in various aspects, such as policy initiatives; counter-argument and appeal; cooperation with the

3 For information related to PAPI, please visit the address: https://papi.org.vn/eng/. As for the PAPI report from 2011 to 2020, please visit the address: https://papi.org.vn/bao-cao/?lang=en

government in public-service provision, social self-governance and social supervision. Specifically for each aspect, such as social self-governance, etc., this study also designed questions to assess the scope of participation (expressed in percentage), as well as the depth of participation. In addition, on the basis of factors affecting the effectiveness of citizens' participation in local governance (in the theoretical framework), questions in the questionnaire to collect information for public affairs give an assessment of the level of active participation of citizens, attitudes and the performance of public managers' responsibilities towards citizen participation. This survey was conducted in 2019 with a large number of people – 5,000 respondents from two main subjects at the grassroots level, namely: (i) heads of social organizations (NGOs) and (ii) grassroots people in 13 provinces and cities of Vietnam.

4. Results and discussion

Transparency to ensure citizens' right to know

Transparency to ensure citizens' right to know has the following functions: (1) Ensuring the right to know as one of the basic rights of citizens. (2) Information disclosure is a condition and basis for enhancing and promoting citizen participation. (3) Disclosure is an important weapon to prevent unconstitutional behavior by government agencies as well as to prevent corruption and other ills; (4) Publicizing information in order to make society effectively use information from the public sector to serve its own life. PAPI reports for 2011, 2016 and 2021 show the level of transparency of local government, as is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Transparency aims to ensure citizens' right to know over the years

Content Index and Average Score	2011	2016	2020
Poverty List Published in Last 12 Months (%)	53.55%	53.63%	60.19%
Commune Budget is Made Available (%)	29.80%	32.17%	42.16%
Respondent Read Commune Budget (%)	37.38%	32.18%	28.78%
Believe in Accuracy of Budget (%)	69.66%	69.08%	81.70%
Aware of Local Land Plans (%)	19.99%	13.62%	16.32%

Source: CECODES et al. 2017, 2021).

This result shows that, for common information, such as the list of poor households and general information on policies, citizens' access to information is relatively good. Meanwhile, the rate of accessing information related to planning, land-use plan, budget revenue and expenditure of local government is still not high. Information transparency in some aspects has not yet met the requirements, possibly because some local governments and public managers have not performed well their respon-

sibilities to provide information to citizens, especially through appropriate forms for citizens to easily access and understand specialized information related to plans, land use planning, budget estimates. The PAPI report for 2021 shows that the percentage of people who think that a local government portal is easy to use for information retrieval is 25.56 % (CECODES et al. 2021). That shows that the local e-government has not played the necessary role in providing information to citizens.

Election of representatives in residential areas

The participation of citizens in the election of representatives in residential areas (village heads – rural areas, and heads of residential groups – urban areas) is an important method to ensure the democratic rights of citizens. Usually, the assessment of citizen participation in elections at the local level includes two basic aspects: participation opportunities and electoral quality (citizens' autonomy in choosing representatives, fairness, etc.), openness, transparency, competitiveness. The PAPI data showed the participation of citizens at the grassroots level, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Participation in grassroots representative election

Content Index (opportunity to participate and quality of elections)	2011	2016	2020
Village Head Elected (%)	83.38 %	77.87 %	83.60 %
Participated inVillage Head Election (%)	69.25 %	60.15 %	62.79 %
More than One Candidate (%)	51.50 %	42.21 %	49.00 %
Invited to Participate (%)	57.72 %	50.16 %	55.45 %
Paper Ballot was Used (%)	86.47 %	81.51 %	83.47 %
Votes Were Counted Publicly (%)	60.28 %	67.21 %	76.35 %
Candidate was not Suggested (%)	42.93 %	33.49 %	29.20 %
Voted for the Winner (%)	90.74 %	92.93 %	92.04 %

Source: CECODES et al. 2017, 2021)

The above results show that the opportunity to participate or the scale of participation in the election of representatives in the residential area is relatively good; voting quality is guaranteed on several fronts. However, there are several points regarding election quality, which are: (1) Ensuring the competitiveness in the election of representatives in the residential area should be given more importance. (2) It is necessary to ensure the autonomy of citizens in deciding who is their representative in the residential area. This is because there is a large percentage where the local government suggests voting for a particular candidate. In addition, citizens' sense of responsibility and self-discipline in participating in elections should be improved because there is a large percentage that participates in the election of representatives in residential areas when invited by the local government.

Policy initiatives

Policy initiatives are understood as citizens and their representative organizations (social organizations) actively raising their own initiatives to the government on the issuance of new or revised or adjusted policy (Binh and Anh 2019). If the initiative is properly valued, it will contribute to improving the response capacity of the local government, as well as contributing to the local government's policies to meet the needs and expectations of the people. This study examines policy initiatives of citizens and citizen representative organizations in new rural constructions in Vietnam to contribute to the assessment of this form of citizen participation in local governance, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Policy initiatives in building new countryside

Content Index	2019
Percentage of people who said that representative organizations of citizens (NGOs) have raised policy initiatives (%), in which:	36.00 %
• Initiative on new rural construction project (%)	67.00 %
• Initiative on priority order of new rural construction projects (%)	7.00 %
• Initiative on new rural construction project implementation method (%)	18.00 %
• Initiative on changing members of Steering Committee for new rural construction	8.00 %
Percentage of people who said that policy initiatives have been adopted by the local government (%)	85.00 %

Source: Author's survey results in 2019

This result shows that the effectiveness of policy initiatives (depth of participation) is relatively good because a large percentage of people believe that local governments value and accept policy initiatives proposed by NGOs. However, in terms of scope or scale of participation, the percentage of NGOs participating in such policy initiatives is still low, while policy initiatives are among the important functions of NGOs. This means that NGOs need to give more importance to policy initiatives as well as improve their autonomy in this activity. On the other hand, legal institutions need to have specific regulations on how NGOs and individual citizens can exercise their right to initiate policy. Local governments also need to encourage NGOs and citizens to take policy initiatives.

Policy discussion, social criticism and referendum

Policy discussion, social criticism and referendums are also forms of citizen participation in local governance. *Policy discussion* is understood as ensuring for citizens to discuss and comment on important draft policies of the local government, related to the interests and lives of many people. The Ordinance on the Implementation of

Democracy in Communes, Wards and Townships of Vietnam clearly stipulates the content and form of people discussing local government policies. *Policy criticism* here is social criticism, when based on theory, practice and the citizens' position, citizens and their representative organizations (social organizations) comment, evaluate and state their opinions, which leads to recommendations for drafting important local government policies. Referendum is the citizen-based instrument which makes the final decision or choice on one or more related issues in local governance. Regarding policy discussion, social criticism and referendum are shown in Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Table 4
Policy discussion of citizens according to PAPI data

Content Index	2011	2016	2020
Provided Input to Project Design (%)	21.91%	36.29%	36.56%
Comment on Local Land Plans (%)	6.19%	4.20%	4.49%
Land Plan Acknowledges Your Concerns (%)	81.12%	88.86%	89.39%

Source: CECODES et al. 2017, 2021).

Table 5
Policy discussion of citizens according to the author's survey results

Content Index	2019
Percentage of people who think that there are many opportunities to participate in the discussion of new rural construction plans and plans (%)	52.00%
Percentage of people who have the opportunity to discuss their contribution to new rural construction projects (%)	68.00%
Percentage of participants in discussions about new rural construction projects organized by the commune government (%)	59.00%
Percentage of participants discussing the level of contribution to implement new rural construction projects organized by the commune government (%)	59.00%
Little or no opportunity to discuss the new rural development plan of the commune government (%)	48.00%
Little or no opportunity to discuss and propose to the commune government on new rural construction projects (%)	44.00%
No opportunity to participate in discussions and discussions about the level of contribution to the implementation of new rural construction projects (%)	32.00%
Household representatives are not invited by the government to attend meetings to listen to the opinions of household representatives in new rural construction (%)	42.07%

Source: Author's survey results in 2019

Table 6
About the social criticism of social organizations

Content Index	2019
Social organizations at the grassroots have social criticism for the new rural construction policy (%), in which:	92.00 %
• Criticism of long-term and annual plans (%)	28.00 %
• Criticism of the draft master plan (%)	13.00 %
• Criticism of the new rural construction project (%)	5.00 %
• Budget estimates for new rural construction (%)	3.00 %
• Criticism of the draft report on the results of new rural construction (%)	51.00 %
• Individual citizens do not have the opportunity to criticize the project's prioritization	44.00 %

Source: Author's survey results in 2019

Table 7
About the referendum or decision of the citizen

Content Index	2019
Order of priority on new rural construction projects	
• Supposedly decided by the local government (%)	65.00 %
• Local government suggests, people discuss and decide (%)	23.30 %
• Decided by the people through the citizens' conference (%)	11.30 %
Regarding the implementation of new rural construction projects	
• Decided by the local government (%)	80.00 %
• Suggested by the local government, people discuss and decide (%)	14.30 %
• Decided by the people through a citizen conference (%)	5.30 %
Deciding the level of contribution for new rural construction projects	
• The local government decides the amount of contribution (%)	72.00 %
• Decided by the citizens	28.00 %

Source: Author's survey results in 2019

The above results show that, regarding policy discussion, although the local government attaches importance to and receives the suggestions of citizens, the opportunity for citizens to discuss and comment on some aspects reaches a relatively high rate. However, on a number of issues, it is necessary to expand opportunities for citizens to discuss and give opinions, especially citizens' discussion and opinions on projects and land use plans. Local governments need to perform their responsibilities well in expanding opportunities for discussion and giving citizens' opinions and looking for different ways for citizens to participate in discussions and give opinions on issues and important topics in local governance.

Regarding social criticism, social organizations or NGOs have attached great importance to performing the function of social criticism when most NGOs have done this activity. However, the opportunity for individual citizens to conduct social criticism needs to be valued and expanded further. The social criticism of NGOs should focus on important draft policies, especially important projects, master plans as well as budget estimates. The government creates better conditions for NGOs to critique important policies that relate directly and in many ways to citizens' rights and interests.

Regarding the referendum, the assurance of citizens' decision-making rights at the grassroots level should be improved. Therefore, the legal institution on citizens' appeal should continue to be perfected in the direction of clearly defining the scope of this right to be exercised. Local governments need to respect citizens' decision-making rights, as well as better ensuring citizens' autonomy in making their own decisions in accordance with the law.

Voluntary contributions and co-operative governance

The purpose of strengthening cooperation and partnerships between local governments, businesses and society is to maximize the mobilization and use of resources of the whole society, thereby ensuring the improvement of people's quality of life, enhancing public interests. Voluntary contributions of citizens as well as cooperation between citizens, representative organizations of citizens and local governments in public-service delivery are indispensable mechanisms of modern local governance. Voluntary contributions and cooperation with local governments in public service delivery are shown in Table 8.

Table 8
Voluntary contributions and cooperation in public-service delivery

Content Index	2019
Voluntary contributions	
Contribute resources to build new rural projects (%), in which:	49.30%
• Donate land (%)	23.30%
• Workday contribution (time) (%)	36.00%
• Contribution in kind (materials) (%)	20.00%
Assuming that the donation is voluntary (%)	86.70%
Recorded in the books of the commune government (%)	79.58%
Cooperation in public-service delivery	
NGOs are assigned a project by the local government and are provided with adequate funding (%)	53.00%
NGOs have been assigned a specific job by the local government and are adequately funded (%)	61.00%

Source: Author's survey results in 2019.

The above results show that the rate of citizens participating in voluntary contributions is still not high. This may be due to a number of reasons, such as: (1) citizens do not fully understand the meaning and importance of participating in contributing resources to contribute to solving some social problems in the locality; (2) A division of citizens has not yet promoted their sense of responsibility in local governance; (3) the local government has not well ensured the autonomy of citizens in contributing resources to projects or jobs and knowing how much to contribute. This means, in order to increase the rate of voluntary contributions of citizens, it is necessary to propagate making citizens understand the importance and meaning of their participation in contributing resources; citizens themselves need to see their responsibilities in local governance, and, in particular, local governments need to ensure the autonomy of citizens in deciding which resources to contribute to carry out work or projects, how much to contribute as well as to ensure publicity and transparency in the process of managing and using resources contributed by citizens. Cooperation between NGOs and the government in public-service delivery also has great potential. In order to promote the strength of NGOs in public-service delivery, local governments need to trust and cooperate with NGOs and at the same time transfer some services or jobs that local governments perform inefficiently for NGOs.

Social self-governance

The modern model of local governance holds that local governments need to know how to create the necessary conditions and opportunities for citizens to be able to solve some problems on their own. The fact that the government creates the necessary conditions for citizens to be able to solve some problems within their power is essentially social self-governance. This study examines social self-governance in two aspects: (i) self-governance in residential areas; (ii) self-governance of social organizations, the results are shown in Table 9.

Thus, the rate of citizen participation in self-governance in residential areas is quite good, but the room to improve this rate is still quite large, especially in self-governing activities of citizens through participation. Self-governance of NGOs through volunteering is very good. However, it should be noted how NGOs' volunteer activities can be practical and meet the necessary needs of the population that NGOs represent. On the other hand, besides volunteering activities, NGOs need to improve their autonomy in other activities, such as providing information to members and reflecting members' aspirations for local government.

Table 9
Social self-governance

Content Index	2019
Self-governance in residential areas	
Participate in project management after completion (%)	54.00 %
Participate in building conventions and conventions (%)	66.00 %
Members of certain squads, autonomous groups in a residential area (%), in which: • Member of team on security and order (%) • Member of team on environmental protection (%) • Member of team on grassroots mediation (%) • Member team on education (%) • Other self-managed team members (%)	54.00 % 38.00 % 11.30 % 18.00 % 12.70 % 20.00 %
Self-governance of NGOs	
Identify NGOs that perform well the propaganda function (%)	54.00 %
Access to information through NGOs (%)	3.30 %
NGOs have volunteering organizations (%)	100 %

Source: Author's survey results in 2019.

Supervision of the social realm

Social supervision is understood to occur when, on the basis of monitoring, detecting, reviewing and evaluating, citizens and representative organizations of citizens (social organizations) make recommendations and reflect on the local government on relevant issues in local governance. Social supervision plays an important role in ensuring the implementation of public responsibilities of the government (Binh 2014) and is also an important means of promoting government accountability. The results of the survey on social supervision are shown in Table 10.

The below results show that the level of response and satisfactory resolution of the local government to citizens' complaints, denunciations should be low. This means that local governments and public managers need to better perform their responsibilities towards citizens' complaints, denunciations. Supervision activities of institutions directly established by citizens, such as the Investment Supervision Board of the community and the People's Inspection Committee, need to be further improved, attaching importance to enhancing autonomy in supervision activities. Similarly, supervision by NGOs also needs more attention, especially the supervision of NGOs on the implementation of important policies by local governments.

Table 10
Social monitoring at the local level

Content Index	2019
Supervision of individual citizens:	
Percentage of respondents who reported that they had sent denunciations or complaints to local government (%)	22.40 %
Percentage of respondents saying that denunciations and complaints have been satisfactorily answered by the local government (%)	19.31 %
Supervision of institutions founded by citizens:	
Evaluate the performance of the People's Inspection Committee and the Investment Supervision Board of the community as effective (%)	58.00 %
The People's Inspection Committee and the Investment Supervision Board of the community supervise the construction and repair of works (%)	41.11 %
Supervision of NGOs:	
NGOs have overseen grassroots development projects (%)	30.00 %
NGOs monitor the behavior and employment of local governments (%)	31.00 %
NGOs monitor the implementation of legislation on grassroots democracy (%)	26.00 %

Source: Author's survey results in 2019.

Thus, in some respects, citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam has made great progress in terms of both breadth and depth of participation. Overall, however, the size or breadth of participation is only moderate. This conclusion can be drawn because the rate of citizens' access to information for budget estimates, master plans and plans on land use is still low. The rate of citizens' adoption of forms such as raising policy initiatives, discussions and criticisms to participate in the policy process is not high. The proportion of citizens participating in voluntary contribution of resources for the implementation of works and projects is not high. The participation of citizens in self-governing models and activities at the grassroots level is only moderate.

From the perspective of the depth of participation (autonomy and level of influence through participation in local governance), the effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance is also not high. This is reflected in the fact that the autonomy of citizens in electing representatives in residential areas is still not high when a significant percentage thinks that who to vote for is still subject to the government's suggestion. Ensuring that citizens make important decisions in local governance in accordance with the law needs to be improved. The effectiveness of citizen supervision is generally not high, and the response rate of the local government to citizens' petitions and reflections is still low. The level of cooperation between local governments and NGOs in public-service delivery is still not satisfactory. The quality and effectiveness of citizen self-governance at the grassroots level and the self-governance of NGOs in general are still not high.

Based on the levels of citizen participation mentioned by Arnstein (1969), citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam stops at level one (i.e. local government plays a leading role) or at the second level (citizens are participatory but people's influence on local governance through participation is not high), not at the highest level (citizen participation has a substantive influence on local governance processes and local governance outcomes). When assessing the effectiveness of citizen participation in depth according to the point of view of Pateman (1976), citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam is in the form of "participation is not substantial"[4] or "participating" type, but not yet "full participation". PAPI's report on citizen participation at the local level over the years also provides evidence to support this statement. Accordingly, the average scores of Participation at Local Levels in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 are respectively: 5.23; 5.16; 5.14; 4.91; 4.71; 5.15; 5.18; 5.19; 4.84 and 4.78 points on a scale of 1 to 10 (CECODES et al. 2017, 2021).

The level and effectiveness of citizens' participation in local governance in Vietnam has not met the target and requirements as expected due to many reasons, of which the most important reason are:

(1) There is not enough openness of government at the local level, and some public managers have not fulfilled their responsibilities well. According to Box (1998), one of the conditions for promoting citizen participation in local governance is the openness of local government as well as the implementation and promotion role of local government public justice for citizen participation. However, at present, the openness of local government has not been sufficiently guaranteed; some public managers are still biased towards control, thus not attaching importance to promoting citizen participation as well as creating conditions for citizen participation. Some public managers have not performed well the role of facilitator, moderator and consultant for citizen participation.

(2) Citizens have not yet acquired active citizenship. Citizens with active citizenship are one of the conditions for realizing their governance subjects and roles in local governance. However, the limitation in this respect is that a part of citizens has not yet actively participated in the work of the community. Research results show that 21.2 % of the respondents believe that local governance is the job of the government; 26 % of respondents admitted that they did not participate in meetings to discuss common work at the grassroots; 46 % of respondents said that they did not participate in the management of facilities at the grassroots level.

(3) The citizen participation network is not really developed; the autonomy of NGOs is not high. The citizen participation network, reflected in the develop-

4 "Participation is not substantial" means that public managers still allow citizens to participate in a certain way, but the goal is still to encourage citizens to accept policy options, not for citizens to propose policy options.

ment of NGOs, is one of the conditions for enhancing citizen participation in local governance. However, the PAPI report shows that Participation in Formal Associations in 2019 and 2020 amounted to 49.97 % and 44.70 % respectively, and Participation in Informal Associations in 2019 and 2020 amounted to 15.49 % and 13.87 % respectively (CECODES et al. 2021). In addition, the autonomy of existing NGOs is not high.

(4) E-government and digital government have not yet developed. E-government and digital government play an important role in promoting open government as well as enhancing citizen participation in local governance. Specifically, e-government and digital government are important factors for information disclosure and transparency as well as for the implementation of "e-democracy", "remote democracy" and "digital democracy". However, at present, the e-governance efficiency of the local government is still not high. E-government has not really become an important way to provide information as well as expand and enhance citizen participation. The PAPI report shows that the local government's e-governance efficiency scores in 2019 and 2020 were 3.42 points and 2.77 points, on a scale of 1 to 10 points (CECODES et al. 2021).

5. Conclusions

Reforming local government according to the theory of public governance and good governance has been the core content of local government reform in Vietnam in recent years. Research on citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam shows that the reform of local government towards building open government has achieved important results. This is reflected in the effectiveness of citizen participation in local governance, which has improved. However, there is still great room for improving citizen participation in local governance in Vietnam. Research results show that in order to increase citizen participation in local governance, a holistic approach is needed, as well as efforts from both the government and citizens.

This study takes Vietnam as the research context, which partly reflects the specificity and characteristics of Vietnam as a country in transition. Arguably, however, the challenges related to increasing citizen participation in local governance are not only challenges in Vietnam, but also ones that many other countries in the world, including those of Central and Eastern Europe, encounter today.

In particular, openness in government governance is one of the important features of modern government governance. However, because it is still influenced by the traditional public-administration model (which focuses on "administration" but lacks a focus on the "public", and its closeness is associated with this), in practice, the Government operations in countries around the world, including CEE countries – although the extent may be different –, still have the "government-centered" nuance as well as the self-contained nature. This itself has not been conducive to

increasing citizen participation in government governance as well as in local governance. Therefore, how to rebuild the public theory of public administration as well as through government reform to establish an "open" government remains one of the theoretical and practical issues of public administration in countries around the world in the twenty-first century.

Regarding theoretical research, rebuilding the public theory of public administration includes at least the main aspects, such as public administration with citizens; the spirit of citizens; public administration and public interests; public administration and public action; public administration and social design; public administration and public responsibility.

In practical terms, reforms to establish an open government model that favors citizen participation in government governance remain a strategic option for Vietnam and other countries, including countries in the current CEE region. Open government needs basic institutions, including (1) Transparency; (2) Policy advice; (3) Citizen participation; (4) Co-operative governance; (5) Social self-governance and social autonomy. Obviously, in order to do this, the construction of open government also needs certain social foundations, at least including: (i) fostering and developing citizenship and civic spirit; (ii) market economy and economic development; (iii) the legal order and the rule of law; (iv) digital transformation of government and digital government to increase government openness through digital platforms; (v) the development and autonomy of social organizations; and (vi) the responsibility of governments and public managers to create the conditions necessary to promote citizen participation, as well as having active cooperation with citizens in local governance because "government cannot invent society, but government can lay the groundwork for responsible and effective action by citizens" (Denhardt and Denhardt 2003). In addition, in order to meet increased citizen participation in government governance as well as in local governance, public managers also need to be fostered and strengthened with a number of new skills. Because in the environment of "governance" and not "management", leaders and managers in the public sector need to be a strategist, not a "technical staff", they not only need to "focus our attention on the apparatus", pay attention to the efficiency and priority in the work, but also have to "look outside", thus knowing how to connect, and in relation to that, spread widely and implement interaction and information exchange with citizens, citizens' organizations and taxpayers. In Smith's view, this requires leaders, public-sector managers to develop skills related to interactive activities, flexible exchange of relevant stakeholders, especially communication skills (Smith 2004).

References

Almond, G. A. 1987. *Comparative Politics Comparison: System, Process and Policy*. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House.

Anh, Nguyen Thi Ngoc and Nguyen Trong Binh. 2020. "Social Organisations in Public Governance: The Theoretical Basis and the Way." *Journal of Social Science Information* 12, 11–19.

Arnstein, S. R. 1969. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35(4), 217–244.

Binh, Nguyen Trong. 2014. "Social Supervision and Criticism of Social Organization with Ensuring Implementation Administrative Accountability." *Journal of State Organization* 3, 32–35.

Binh, Nguyen Trong. 2014. "Forms of Citizen Participation in the Public Policy Process from the Perspective of John Thomas." *Journal of State Organization* 7, 51–55.

Binh, Nguyen Trong. 2018. *Public Administration and Public Governance: Some Theoretical and Practical Issues*. Hanoi: National Political Press.

Binh, Nguyen Trong. 2021. "Features and Basic Institutions of Modern National Governance." *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 15 (7), 354–365.

Binh, Nguyen Trong and Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh. 2019. "People's Participation in Public Management." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 1(377), 11–22.

Box, R. C. 1998. *Citizen Governance: Leading American Communities into the 21st Century*. Washington DC: Sage Publications.

Burnell, P. J. and P. Calvert. 2004. *Civil Society in Democratization*. London: Frank Cass.

CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. 2017. *The 2016 Vietnam Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI): Measuring Citizens' Experiences*. Hanoi, Vietnam: CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. Available at http://papi.org.vn/bao-cao/?year-report=2016 (last accessed 31 May 2021).

CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. 2020. *The 2019 Vietnam Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI): Measuring Citizens' Experiences*. Hanoi, Vietnam: CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. Available at http://papi.org.vn/bao-cao/?year-report=2019 (last accessed 31 May 2021).

CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. 2021. *The 2020 Vietnam Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI): Measuring Citizens' Experiences*. Hanoi, Vietnam: CECODES, VFF-CRT, RTA and UNDP. Available at http://papi.org.vn/bao-cao/?year-report=2020 (last accessed 31 May 2021).

Cohen, J. L. and A. Aroto. 1992. *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Denhardt, J. V. and R. B. Denhardt. 2003. *The New Public Service: Serving, not Steering.* New York: MESharpe Press.

Denhardt, R. B. and J. Denhardt. 2001. "The New Public Service: Putting Democracy First." *National Civic Review* 90(4), 391–400.

Florini, A. M. 2000. *The Third Force: The Rise of Transnational Civil Society*. Washington, DC: Darnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Fukuyama, F. 1996. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: The Free Press.

Howell, J. and J. Pearce. 2001. *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*. London: Lynne Rienner Publisher.

Huntington, S. and J. Nelson. 1989. *It is Difficult to Choose: Political Participation in Developing Countries*. Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House.

Kumar, K. 1993. "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of an Historical Term." *British Journal of Sociology* 44 (3), 375–395.

Kweit, M. G. and R. W. Kweit. 1981. *Implementing Citizen Participation in a Bureaucratic Society: A Contingency Approach*. New York: Praeger.

Marshall, T. H. 1994."Citizenship and Social Class." In B. S. Turner and P. Hamilton (eds).*Citizenship: Critical Concepts*, Vol. II. London and New York: Routledge, 352.

Pateman, C. 1976. *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ping, Yu Ke. 2014. "The Essence of the National Governance System." *Journal of Theoretical Research* 5, 86–97.

Pluto, L. 2007. *Partizipation in den Hilfen zur Erziehung: Eine empirische Studie* (German Edition) Taschenbuch – 12. In Ley T. 2013. The added value of analyzing participation in a capability perspective. In: Society EU-CP, ed. Final Conceptual Report: "Inequality, Disadvantage, Social Innovation and Participation", 63–85.

Putnam, R. D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. New Jersey, United States: Princeton University Press.

Stoker, G. 2004. "New Localism, Progressive Politics and Democracy." *Political Quarterly* 75(s1), 117–129.

Smith, R. 2004. "Focusing on Public Value: Something New and Something Old." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 63(4), 68–79.

Thomas, J. C. 1995. *Public Participation in Public Decisions: New Skills and Strategies for Public Managers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tilly, C. 1996. *Citizenship, Identity and Social History*. Cambridge: The Press of the University of Cambridge.

Turner, B. S. 1994. "Outline of a Theory of Citizenship." In B. S. Turner and P. Hamilton (eds). Citizenship, Critical Concepts, Vol. II. London and New York: Routledge, 150.

Warren, M. E. 1999. *Democracy and Trust*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

World Bank. 2002. *A Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies*. Washington, D. C: The Office of the Publisher, World Bank.