

Citizen Participation in the Consultative Councils for Sustainable Development (CCDS) in Southeast Mexico: An Academic Perspective

La participación ciudadana en los Consejos Consultivos para el Desarrollo Sustentable (CCDS) en Sureste mexicano: Una visión académica

GÓMEZ-RIVERA, Petrona*†

ID 1st Author: *Petrona, Gómez-Rivera*

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Abstract

In Mexico, since 1995 a Citizens Advisory Council involved in the analysis of environmental policies and offer recommendations to the Federal Government was formed. The academic sector is part of these Councils, and the following research questions were raised: councils are performing the functions set out in the Regulations? Which of these functions is the incident?. With this, the objective was to measure the level of participation of these citizens advice in a state of the Mexican Southeast. The methodology consisted of applying a questionnaire to identify the areas of greatest impact and citizen participation, responses were evaluated based on a scale (Likert), the instrument was applied to 90% of participantes of CCDS, it was validated with Cronbach's alpha, obtaining acceptable reliability of 0.70. As a result of data analysis, it was found that the highest incidence of involvement of the Council, is in the role of recommendations with 44.4%, determining a moderate level Likert scale. From the academic perspective, this paper contributes a qualitative measurement instrument participation of the Council, but at the same time, will encourage others and more robust instruments and strategies for improvement in the Councils.

Civil participation, Civil advices, Environmental policy

Resumen

En México, desde 1995 se conformó un grupo de Consejeros Ciudadanos que participan en el análisis de las políticas ambientales y ofrecen recomendaciones al Gobierno Federal. El sector académico forma parte de dichos Consejos, y se plantearon las siguientes preguntas de investigación: ¿los Consejos están realizando las funciones establecidas en su Reglamento? ¿cuál de estas funciones es la más incidente?. Con lo anterior, el objetivo fue medir el nivel de participación de estos Consejos Ciudadanos en un estado del Sureste mexicano. La metodología consistió en la aplicación de un cuestionario para identificar las áreas de mayor incidencia o participación ciudadana, las respuestas se valoraron con base en una escala (Likert), el instrumento se aplicó al 90% de participantes del CCDS, mismo que fue validado con el alfa de Cronbach, obteniendo una confiabilidad aceptable del 0.70. Como resultado del análisis de los datos, se observó que la mayor incidencia de participación del Consejo, se encuentra en la función de recomendaciones, con el 44.4%, determinando un nivel moderado en la escala de Likert. Desde la perspectiva académica, el presente trabajo contribuye con un instrumento cualitativo de medición de la participación del Consejo, pero a la vez, propiciará otros y más robustos instrumentos, así como, las estrategias de mejora en los Consejos.

Participación ciudadana, Consejos Ciudadanos, Política ambiental.

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* Correspondence to Author (email: pgomez.tc@uttab.edu.mx)

† Researcher contributing as first author.

Introduction

In Inclusive Mexico, social policies that promote citizen participation, transparency and accountability are elements that foster development with statistical evidence to evaluate and feed back into social programmes (PND 2013-2018).

On the issue of environmental governance, the Consultative Council for Sustainable Development (CCDS) has had an important trajectory since 1995, in which it exercises the functions of advising, recommending, analysing and evaluating public environmental policies (LGEEPA, 2008).

Throughout its 20-year history, the CCDS has had the participation of around two thousand advisors from various sectors: academia, business, youth, indigenous peoples, social organisations, gender and women, who together have analysed specific environmental situations and have made recommendations to SEMARNAT and the corresponding bodies such as CONAGUA, CONAFOR, PROFEPA, among others (<http://www.semarnat.gob.mx>).

During 3-year cycles, each generation of Councillors issues a historical document called White Papers, in which the experiences and achievements obtained, the recommendations made, the attendance to meetings, as well as the participation in other consultative bodies, are reflected in the form of reports. In spite of having these documents and information concentrated over 20 years, it can be seen that there are a significant number of recommendations, but the significance of these works in Mexican environmental policy is unknown.

Therefore, and from an academic perspective, the trajectory of the CCDS deserves to be evaluated with instruments that make it possible to measure the level of citizen participation and its impact or incidence on environmental policies that have promoted sustainable development in our country. This work offers a semi-quantitative measurement instrument, based on the following basic research questions: Are the Councils carrying out the functions established in their Regulations? Which of these functions is the most important?

Objective

The objective of the study was to determine the level of impact or incidence of the functions exercised by a CCDS in Southeast Mexico during the period 2008-2011. This will contribute to having information to improve the management of the CCDS at the governmental level and to accurately assess the results.

Method

An instrument (questionnaire) was designed, based on the four functions of the CCDS (advising, recommending, analysing and evaluating public environmental policies), with nine items, whose response options were assessed on a Likert scale.

The dependent variable was the impact of the CCDS, and the independent variable was the applicability of the work generated by the CCDS. The target population for the application of the instrument was all CCDS councillors in southeastern Mexico.

To determine the reliability (precision or accuracy) of the measurement instrument, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (1) was applied, with which the variances of the items and the variance of the total score were obtained, establishing a minimum required value of 0.7.

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left[1 - \frac{\sum S_i^2}{S_T^2} \right] \quad (1)$$

Donde :

K = número de ítems

$\sum S_i^2$ = varianza del total de filas

S_T^2 = varianza de las sumas de los ítems

In order to determine the impact of the Advisory Council, descriptive statistics and Likert scale response frequencies were used for the data on the functions of the Councillors and the impact or incidence of the work carried out by the Council under study.

Results

Application of the instrument

With the support of the President of the selected Council, and as a general subject of an ordinary meeting held in April 2015, the Councillors and authorities of SEMARNAT of the State Delegation were informed of the objective of the research project and were invited to actively participate in the process of applying the questionnaire, which was sent to them electronically, through the official mail of the technical secretary of the Council.

During the months of April to June 2015, the applied instruments were received.

The expected goal was the participation of all councillors, resulting in 90% of participating councillors.

Validation of the instrument

The results obtained were processed in an Excel 2013 spreadsheet, descriptive statistics were applied, and the frequencies of responses were calculated on a Likert scale.

Subsequently, the Cronbach's alpha formula was developed, obtaining a 0.70 level of reliability of the instrument, which is considered an acceptable correlation between the items of the instrument applied (Cortina 1993, Streiner 2003 in Oviedo 2005).

Participation of Board Members with respect to the functions performed

With regard to the indicators of the functions and impact of the work carried out by the Board members, the percentage of responses on the Likert scale (0=nil, 1=low, 2=moderate, 3=high) was analysed, and it was found that 55.6% consider the function of issuing recommendations to be moderate, the functions of evaluating specific issues to be low with 66.7% and the function of advising to be nil, with 66.7% (Table 1).

Estimating the impact of the work carried out by the Council

In reference to the impact of the Council's work, Table 2 shows that 44.4% of the Councillors are of the opinion that the applicability of the work issued is moderate; on the other hand, the administrative response time for the work issued by the Council has a low scale value, with 77.7% of the responses; and 44.4% express no participation in advisory work on specific projects (Table 2).

The results obtained do not have a reference point with which to argue, but the methodology used must be reinforced with a conceptual and analytical framework that allows for the integration of information from other primary sources in order to design robust indicators and evaluation instruments.

Item	Porcentaje de frecuencias	Escala de Likert que presento la mayor frecuencia
Asistencia a reuniones del Consejo	55.6	1= bajo
Participación en la función de asesoría	66.7	0=nulo
Participación en las función de emitir recomendaciones	55.6	2= moderado
Participación en la función de evaluar asuntos específicos	44.4	1= bajo
Participación en la función de evaluar resultados de los programas, políticas y acciones	66.7	1= bajo

Table 1 Results of Councillors' participation in specific functions

Source: Gómez R.P.2015

Item	Porcentaje de frecuencias	Escala de Likert que presento la mayor frecuencia
El esfuerzo de trabajo realizado es	44.4	1= bajo
Tiempo de respuestas administrativas para los trabajos que emitieron, es:	77.7	1= bajo
Interés administrativo hacia los trabajos que emitieron, es:	55.5	2= moderado
La operatividad de los procesos administrativos e internos del Consejo es:	55.6	1= bajo
La aplicabilidad de los trabajos que emitieron, es:	44.4	2= moderado
El número de asesorías realizadas a la fecha, es:	55.5	0=nulo
El número de recomendaciones realizadas a la fecha, es:	55.5	1= bajo
El número de evaluaciones específicas:	55.5	1= bajo
El número de evaluaciones de resultados de programas, políticas y acciones, realizadas a la fecha, es:	44.4	0=nulo

Table 2 Outcome of the impact of the work carried out by the Council

Source: Gómez R.P.2015

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Conclusion

It is considered that the impact or incidence of a CCDS in Southeast Mexico on environmental policy is moderate, that of the four main functions of the Council, that of issuing recommendations is the most recurrent, and the opposite is the case of the advisory function, which is considered to be null.

On the other hand, the moderate level of enforceability of the work issued by the Council may be due to the low response of the administrative time to be expected to be enforceable.

The results provide qualitative information, which should be reinforced with other methodological and statistical instruments to strengthen the results and serve as a basis for decision-making for the improvement of the Advisory Councils for Sustainable Development.

The study is useful, considering the lack of studies that evaluate the impact of the Advisory Councils at the national level. With these data, an academic perspective is provided to measure the citizen effort added to the responsibility of environmental policies, for environmental governance.

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