

## Social participation and empowerment in vulnerable communities: scoping review

*Participação social e empoderamento em comunidades vulneráveis:  
revisão de escopo*

*Participación social y empoderamiento enp comunidades vulnerables:  
revisión de alcance*

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### Abstract

*This research aimed to investigate the state of knowledge about social participation and empowerment in vulnerable social contexts. Method: scoping review according to Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). Guiding question: Can participatory processes contribute to the empowerment and promotion of citizenship in vulnerable communities? The thirteen articles analyzed are national and international, published from 2001 to 2019. The results present the main characteristics of these studies. The discussion points out the complexity of the articulation between participation and empowerment, indicating its potential when considering the different historical and social contexts and the bonds between subjects and the community. Having as its horizon the strengthening of rights and citizenship, it reveals the difficulties faced by the participatory movements, the absence of mechanisms for exercising the condition of citizens and the consequences of the selectivity of the State for the urban peripheries.*

**Keywords:** Social Participation; Empowerment; Social vulnerability; Social inequality; Citizenship.

### Resumo

*O objetivo desta pesquisa foi investigar o estado do conhecimento sobre a participação social e o empoderamento em contextos sociais vulneráveis. Método: revisão de escopo conforme Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). Questão norteadora: Os processos participativos podem contribuir para o empoderamento e a promoção de cidadania nas comunidades vulneráveis? Os treze artigos analisados são de âmbito nacional e internacional, publicados entre 2001 e 2019. Os resultados apresentam as principais características desses estudos. A discussão aponta a complexidade da articulação entre*

*participação e empoderamento, indicando seu potencial ao considerar os diferentes contextos históricos e sociais e os vínculos entre os sujeitos e a comunidade. Tendo como horizonte o fortalecimento de direitos e da cidadania, revela as dificuldades enfrentadas pelos movimentos participativos, a ausência de mecanismos para o exercício da condição de cidadão e as consequências da seletividade do Estado para as periferias urbanas.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Participação Social; Empoderamento; Vulnerabilidade social; Desigualdade social; Cidadania.*

## **Resumen**

*El objetivo de esta investigación fue investigar el estado del conocimiento sobre participación social y empoderamiento en contextos sociales vulnerables. Método: scoping review según el Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI). Pregunta guía: ¿Pueden los procesos participativos contribuir al empoderamiento y promoción de la ciudadanía en comunidades vulnerables? Los trece artículos analizados son nacionales e internacionales, publicados entre 2001 y 2019. Los resultados presentan las principales características de estos estudios. La discusión apunta la complejidad de la articulación entre participación y empoderamiento, indicando su potencialidad al considerar los diferentes contextos históricos y sociales y los vínculos entre los sujetos y la comunidad. Teniendo como horizonte el fortalecimiento de los derechos y la ciudadanía, revela las dificultades que enfrentan los movimientos participativos, la ausencia de mecanismos para ejercer la condición de ciudadano y las consecuencias de la selectividad del Estado para las periferias urbanas.*

**Palabras clave:** *Participación social; Empoderamiento; Vulnerabilidad social; Desigualdad Social; Ciudadanía.*

## INTRODUCTION

We are currently live-in cities whose territorialization, metropolization and use of natural resources are determined by economic policies governed by a mercantilist and excluding logic that affects a large part of the population, especially those who are most vulnerable, depriving them of their basic rights (Santos, 1997).

Social inequality represents a constant threat to a dignified existence in different dimensions. The subjective dimension expresses the concrete experience of this condition of sub-citizenship (Souza, 2012). With the restriction of experience, mobility, and will, sad emotions like impotence and humiliation are triggered (Sawaia, 2011). This scenario reveals the production of suffering that is passed down through generations, mainly in countries with a long history of slavery and capitalist exploitation, such as Latin America, and countries in the African continent (Dussel, 2005; Mbembe, 2014; Sawaia, 2002).

Specifically in Brazil, the issue of social inequalities is linked to almost four centuries of exploitation of slaves as a labour force in different areas of the economy (Moura, 2019). And even after the abolition of slavery, this population was exposed to unemployment and marginality since the State has not created policies for their inclusion as citizens.

The promotion of public policies by the State to confront and overcome different aspects of social inequality constitutes processes of paramount importance in guaranteeing human rights and citizenship. However, when they are unable to overcome the effects of the violation of rights, then it is necessary to give more importance to strengthening social participation. This is understood as a collective force that “that grows in power, the more it shapes itself to the different reliefs and contours, valuing the modes and moments of the communities in which it is produced.” (Costa & Castro-Silva, 2015).

This collective and democratic power, in which individuals and communities work actively in the search for a fairer society, must be seen as a movement that implies different levels of individual and community strengthening. However, the expression of these levels manifests according to different contexts and singularities, which in turn are guided by different strategies and expectations (Castro-Silva, 2009; Montero, 2006).

For Romano and Antunes (2002), expanding the capabilities of the poor and socially excluded people, so that they can get rid of the main causes of their freedom deprivation and vulnerability, results in their empowerment. Among the forms of empowerment, the authors mentioned active participation in decision-making spaces, awareness, and the struggle for social rights. For the authors, poverty would be a state of disempowerment, as it is caused and maintained by power relations within the neoliberal project.

In a literature review on vulnerability, Carmo and Guizardi (2013) stated that, in the assistance field, this concept starts to encompass the social sphere, in terms of understanding the consequences caused by poverty. According to the authors, the vulnerable state is associated with an individual or collective context, and the vulnerable human being is the most susceptible to suffering damage because of disadvantages concerning social mobility, which prevents him from reaching better levels of quality of life, as a result of a weakened citizenship. However, they pointed out that these human beings can create the necessary capacities to make a change in their condition.

When analyzing socioeconomic and civil vulnerabilities, Kowarick (2003) found that there are reflections that highlight the development of various socioeconomic and civil vulnerability processes in society, which lead to what he called “the process of decitizenization”. For Kowarick (2009), socioeconomic vulnerability is characterized by the unprotected condition in which a large section of the population finds itself concerning basic citizenship rights, such as the guarantee of work, housing, transport, education, health, and sanitation.

In this context, social participation acquires meaning as a collective and democratic force, a product of the gathering of subjects and communities actively working to build a more just society, in the case of movements that involve different levels of individual and community empowerment.

In a literature review on social and political participation in Brazil, Delenogare and Araújo (2018) verified that most of the studies found sought to understand movements based on historical, cultural, and political influences; in its various forms; of spaces and participants; and the effects they produce. Pointing

out as limits the lack of place in governmental agendas; the limitation of institutional actions; lack of public engagement. And as needs, the expansion of the relationship between society and the leaders; and the promotion of new forms of participation so that the population can take ownership of them.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to investigate, through a scoping review, the processes of social participation and empowerment in contexts of vulnerability, since they involve the role of subjects and communities in facing social inequalities and in the defense of their rights. We opted for the scoping review, as it allows us to gather research with different designs and methodologies, explore the main categories of the topic in question, verify the dimension, scope, and nature of the study, summarise, publish, and point out gaps in existing research.

## METHOD

The bibliographic search was guided by the Population, Concept and Context (PCC) strategy, which makes it possible to accurately locate reliable scientific information, helping the research guidance. The following elements were adopted for the strategy: “P” – communities; “C” – social participation and empowerment; “C” – vulnerable place, bringing forth the following guiding question: “Can participatory processes contribute to the empowerment and promotion of citizenship in vulnerable communities?”. The objective was to explore national and international literature related to social participation and empowerment in highly vulnerable communities.

To identify the existence of protocols and/or review articles on the research question, in September 2019, through the descriptors “social participation” AND “personal autonomy,” a search was performed on the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) and The Cochrane Library databases, and no studies in progress were found.

Based on this, data collection began in September 2019 on the following bases: Web of Science, Scielo, Scopus, Sociological Abstracts and Lilacs (Table 1). The following descriptors and combinations were used: “social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”.

Table 1 - Search results

Database	Search strategy	Date	Found	Selected
Sociological Abstracts	“social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”	9/2/2019	206	5
Web of Science	“social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”	9/2/2019	269	12
Lilacs	“social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”	9/2/2019	37	1
Scielo	“social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”	9/2/2019	794	27
Scopus	“social participation” AND “personal autonomy” OR “social vulnerability” OR “community participation” OR “social planning” OR “promotion of citizenship”	9/2/2019	19	3

It was decided not to limit the search period, and regarding the articles found, there was the inclusion of free articles available entirely online in a peer-reviewed publication; published in Portuguese, English or Spanish languages; with a quantitative, qualitative or quanti-qualitative approach, and available until september 2019. The following were excluded: books, guidelines, experience reports, interviews, theses, dissertations, monographs, abstracts, and documents.

This study is part of the Integrated Project: “Social inequality and subjectivity: life trajectories and struggles for better living and health conditions in the vulnerable territory in the Baixada Santista” financed by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), which encouraged the elaboration of the Master’s project “Social participation of leaders and the search for improvements in living conditions: the territory as a space for promoting citizenship” in the Graduate Program Interdisciplinary in Health Sciences at the Federal University of São Paulo – Baixada Santista.

## RESULTS

The study search and selection process in this review is shown in Figure 1, according to the JBI recommendations and a checklist adapted from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA).

The search strategies retrieved 1,325 titles, after using filters for refinement and approximation to relevant themes, 48 remained. Then, after reading the titles and abstracts by considering the guiding question, 14 articles were selected that met the inclusion criteria, among which one was excluded because it was duplicated (Figure 1).

The studies included in this review were published and/or made available from November 2001 to June 2019, with the majority in the period from 2014 to 2018. Among them, seven were published in the Portuguese language, five in Spanish language and one in the English language, with two literature reviews, one doctoral research and six pieces of research (Table 2).

Figure 1 – Article selection process

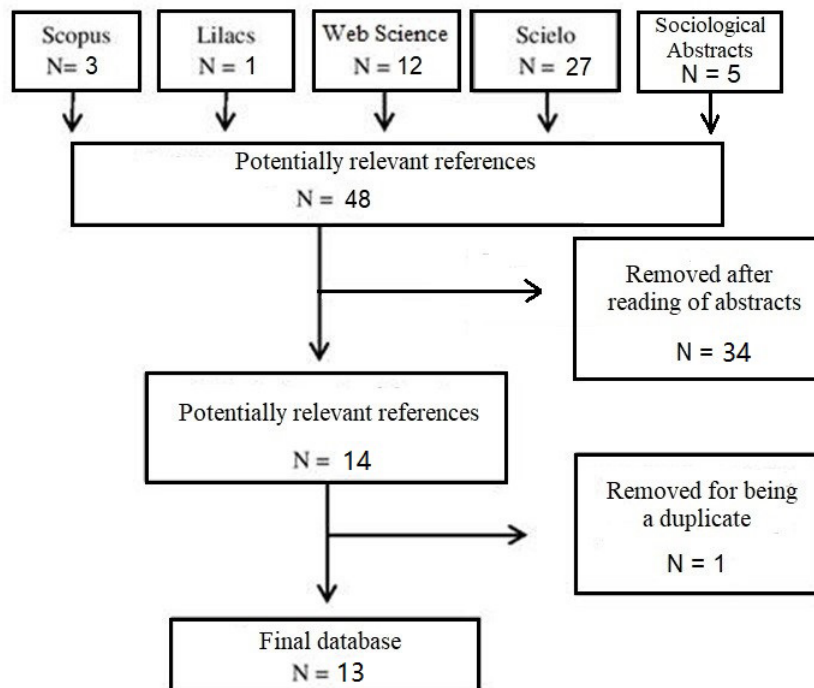


Table 2 – Author, year and country; Objectives; Description and method and Results.

1. Author/year and country	2. Objectives	3. Description and method	4. Results
1- Anhas and Castro-Silva (2018) Brazil.	To understand and give visibility to ways of social participation of young people living in a peripheral community on the coast of São Paulo; to reflect on health production; to reveal how young people face the context of inequality in which they live.	Doctoral research based on recorded observations, field diaries and semi-structured interviews, was analyzed using the Depth Hermeneutics method.	The construction of community bonds expresses the participation of young people and contributes to fighting against inequalities and exclusion. Participation in groups is shown to be powerful and capable of configuring processes of autonomy, care of oneself and the other.
2- Blanco, Fleury and Subirats (2012) Mexico.	To analyze and evaluate the nature and scope of community participation in their different expressions, in the context of urban peripheries in Spain and Mexico.	It identifies and justifies the theoretical and empirical relevance of three main themes: urban peripheries, community participation, and new institutionalality.	It highlights the great heterogeneity of the peripheries, contextualizes the importance of participation in deepening relations between society and the State, underlines the ideological and political diversity of participation and proves the practical difficulties of consolidating a new institutionalality.
3- Banda Castro and Morales Zamorano (2015) Peru.	To identify two components of the theory of empowerment and specify the predominant influence between them.	Qualitative empirical study through interviews that proposes the systemic interaction of intrapersonal and behavioural components of empowerment.	It measures and identifies an intrapersonal component and an empowerment behaviour component, showing how the first is affected by the latter.
4- Escorel and Arouca (2016) Brazil.	To focus on current ways of participation and changes in the relationship between citizens and politics, observing their potential and weaknesses.	It presents some elements of analysis to think of democracy and participation beyond the traditional dichotomies and the health field.	For the participation of the population to advance, the institutional channels must be complementary to other ways of citizen participation in public affairs.
5- Gohn (2019) Brazil.	To focus on the theme of social and political participation, theorized in academia and present in the Brazilian reality both in civil society and in the State.	Theoretical work that rescues the concept and the main theoretical approaches on participation. Ten approaches are identified, focusing on how they have been applied in the analysis of different ways of socio-political and cultural participation.	It is noted that the theme of participation has been important in explaining processes to fight against injustices, for the recognition of rights, and in explaining the processes of social inclusion.
6- Kauchajke (2008) Brazil.	To discuss social movements as a matrix that contributes to improving the civic quality of other ways of social participation.	Participant observation that presents part of the research on social movements in Brazil, debates its centrality, conceptual aspects, historicity and the relationship with social participation.	It understands the meaning of social movements for the constitution of society, considering the consolidation of political solidarity and the constitution of social subjects.

(Table continues in the next page)

1. Author/year and country	2. Objectives	3. Description and method	4. Results
7- Kleba and Wendausen (2009) Brazil.	To approach the process of empowerment, taking it as a relevant element for understanding the possibilities and limits in promoting social and political participation.	It presents the process of empowerment based on dimensions of social life on three levels: psychological or individual; group or organizational, and structural or political.	It allowed for a closer approximation to the theme of social participation, one of the aspects in the search for democracy, and empowerment is a fundamental element in this process.
8- Mergen, Zanetti and Reschilian (2018) Brazil.	To reflect on the development of popular participation in debates around the city, guaranteed by the statute, and identify the possible spaces and mechanisms for the exercise of citizenship.	Exploratory and qualitative research through participant observation, related to the themes of citizenship, heritage, popular participation, urban planning and management.	It was found that there is little participation of the population in city decisions, and the public sphere may not create adequate mechanisms and instruments for popular participation, a strategy that opens space to legitimize the interests of capital.
9- Milani (2007) Brazil.	To check to what extent participation represents innovation in the ways of formulating, implementing and monitoring local public policies.	Analysis of research carried out on ten participation experiences in Latin America and Europe.	The government and society have a strategic role in renewing the process of formulating local public policies; local governments start to ensure the articulation of collective actions in which governmental and non-governmental agents take part in the political process on a matter of a public nature.
10- Ramos-Vidal and Maya-Jariego (2014) Spain.	To assess the sense of community, psychological empowerment and community participation in performing arts workers in the region of Andalusia - Spain.	Using three quantitative models, it verifies the relationship between the sense of community, psychological empowerment, and citizen participation.	The ability of cultural organizations to influence the community's environment has been proven, and the modulating role of organizational dynamics in the processes of identification, empowerment and, mainly, community participation has been described.
11- Restrepo (2001) Colombia.	To analyze from the Colombian reality the relations between social participation, the State and civil society.	It makes a history of participation, lists its objectives, makes an operative evaluation, and considers the relationships between the State and society.	It proposes several principles to achieve efficient social participation and help the democratization process.
12- Vasilieva, Danilova, Poltavskaya and Strizoe (2018) Germany.	To obtain knowledge of ways of social activity in the Russian Federation, using the example of the Volgograd region.	An empirical study that develops tools to assess the population's awareness of the types of social participation and the readiness of the agents for charity and volunteering.	The problem areas are identified, development technologies are structured, and it concludes that the objective conditions do not make it possible to increase the efficiency of non-profit social organizations.
13- Banda-Castro, Varela e Morales Zamorano (2016) Colômbia.	To identify the links between social capital and social participation, values and empowerment.	Review several databases using the deductive interpretive method.	The links identified between social capital, values, empowerment and social participation are shown to be enhancing resources for human development.

## DISCUSSION

The history of participation has been associated with the search for better living conditions for people, groups and communities. Citing historical data, Gohn (2019) reminded that modes of social organization were used by the incipient bourgeoisie since the 13th century to defend their fundamental rights and by the popular strata who also had to fight for the same rights. Only in the 19th century, the rights would be incorporated by some countries' Constitutions.

From the perspective of support for basic rights, Gohn (2019) showed that, in the 1980s, the theme of participation acquired meaning when it was associated with overcoming social exclusion, meaning that being excluded is synonymous, at first, of no participation. The author said that, with the contribution of other researchers, this discussion became more complex, by including the arguments that participation would be related to the valorization of the person by society, because one needs to feel important and useful, for that there must be a consistent environment from the relationships and social ties point of view.

Within the different conceptions of the Human and Social Sciences, there are those that value organizations as articulators of participation, highlighting social movements; those associated with the management of public power, through approaches that value identity aspects in the articulation of interests of gender, race/ethnicity and those that value subjectivity/affection as a catalyst for engagement in collective struggles (Gohn, 2019).

From this contextualization, we will identify the main theoretical-conceptual and strategic contributions that express participatory process practices guided by different approaches. Along these lines, the interface with the notion of empowerment proves to be an important benchmark; in this way, we will analyze some articles that cover its different aspects, pointing out the viability and increase of social participation.

In their study, Banda-Castro and Morales Zamorano (2015) revealed that the behavioural components of empowerment, such as community actions and decision-making, affect the interpersonal components, such as self-esteem, self-concept and self-determination; external components, such as communities and institutions, are capable of promoting empowerment; this increases satisfaction, trust, creativity and social participation, which, in turn, is influenced by wage income; resilience processes increase and consolidate empowerment. This study considers participation as one of the components of empowerment. The work of Kleba and Wendausen (2009) pointed out that personal empowerment enables the emancipation of individuals, increasing their autonomy and freedom.

The relationship between the processes of empowerment, participation and sense of community was explored by empirical research with workers from cultural organizations carried out by Ramos-Vidal and Maya-Jariego (2014), showing that there is a significant relationship between empowerment and a sense of community and that both play an important role in the relationship between individuals and organizations. According to that research, the highest rates of empowerment, sense of community and participation were observed in organizations with better internal dynamics, while organizations with less than ten members showed the ease of involvement with the community environment.

The previous research also revealed that the processes of empowerment, sense of community and participation do not make up a triad of mutual empowerment in workers in cultural organizations. Furthermore, that participation does not affect, nor is it affected by empowerment and the sense of community, a fact that contradicts some studies (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) cited by Ramos-Vidal and Maya-Jariego (2014) and which point out that the meaning of community precedes social participation.

According to other authors (Edelstein & Wandersman, 1987; Ramos-Vidal & Maya-Jariego, 2014), effective experiences of participation allow the acquisition of some skills that will have a positive impact on the processes of empowerment and sense of community, while frustrating experiences of participation can have a disempowering effect.



In the perspective of deepening between the notions of empowerment and participation, some authors resort to the notion of social capital, a concept whose first systematic analysis was carried out in 1980 by Pierre Bourdieu, when he postulated that “[...] to understand the mechanisms of union between societies and to build bonds between their members” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 67). According to Bourdieu, social capital, together with economic, symbolic, historical and cultural capital, forms the set of resources that individuals and groups must maintain or ensure their power in society (Milani, 2004).

In their review study, Banda-Castro et al. (2016) stated that, by definition, social capital encompasses three elements: social networks, norms of reciprocity and trust, and the last two are values that govern social relationships. The authors also pointed out that social capital generates cooperation and civility as a result, facilitating life in common, increasing productivity, strengthening group identity, generating solidarity and creating links with people or groups outside our social circle. In the same sense, the results obtained by Banda-Castro and Morales Zamorano (2015) allow us to affirm that empowerment increases satisfaction, trust, creativity, and social participation.

The relationships between social capital, empowerment and participation show, according to Banda-Castro et al. (2016), resources that enhance human development by including affective, emotional, ethical, family and community development, not limited to aspects of economic and labour productivity. The authors pointed out that, according to some scholars (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004), social capital is associated with a reduction in crime rates, an improvement in child well-being and public health.

In the words of Gohn (2004), the territory is the place where true social capital arises, generating “social cohesion, emancipatory forces, sources for change and social transformation” (Gohn, 2004, p. 24), and experiences of solidarity occur, and the social forces and energy of the community are located.

Regarding the term participation, some authors (Blanco et al., 2012) have highlighted its polyphonic or multidimensional/polysemic character, as called by Lavalle (2011), cited by Gohn (2019). Researchers such as Vasilieva et al. (2018), indicated that social activity is a multidimensional phenomenon, and can present itself as social participation, community participation and civic engagement.

According to Milani (2008), social participation is part of a reality in which social relations are not yet crystallized, being the construction in and of the social transformations, with its evolution conditioned to geo-socio-historical contexts. For Blanco et al. (2012), participatory processes must consider the specifics of the context in which they take place; in this sense, for Milani (2008) and Blanco et al. (2012), there is no single model or standard for participation.

As reported by Mergen et al. (2018), political participation is associated with ways of exercising citizenship, appropriation and development of public space. The experience of establishing the Master Plan for the City of São José dos Campos, in São Paulo, raises questions about the process of organizing this type of action, which has in the State an important agency of mediation of interests, highlighting the balancing of the interests of businessmen and from other less favoured/popular social classes. According to the authors, civil society should always be involved in all aspects of decisions that involve the city, seeking effective participation, as this is the only way to guarantee citizenship, stating that political participation is associated with forms of exercising citizenship, appropriation and development of public space.

As stated by Milani (2008), after a period of expansion in the 1990s, participation processes encountered delicate problems both in Europe and Latin America, as participation was encouraged, but not always lived in an egalitarian way or with guarantees of legitimacy regarding collective interests.

Regarding the weakening of participatory movements (Gohn, 2005, 2006), Mergen et al. (2018) raised the hypothesis that it may be related to the absence of resolute public policies that, by reiterating the interests of capital, do not favour the promotion of citizenship, nor the awareness of people for the importance of participation, stating that, in democratic management, popular participation and the exercise of citizenship were not effective and little progress was made when civil society managed to organize itself.

For other authors, the legacy left by the colonization of Portugal and the enslavement of African peoples (Gohn, 2019), patriarchy and patrimonialism (Mergen et al., 2018) also contribute to weakening the participation of civil society, since they manage to privilege their interests, circumventing the dis-

inction between public and private (Aguiar, 2000), keeping alive the logic of exclusion that, historically, leads to vertical structures of power in the country.

In line with Lavallo, Houtzager and Castello (2006), Latin America's democracy and public administration have always had European and North American institutional processes as a reference, but in the case of social participation, Gohn (2015) pointed out that, probably for the first time in history, the Northern Hemisphere started to think based on the innovative experiences that emerged in the Southern Hemisphere.

For Blanco et al. (2012), there was a modernization process in Latin America without the transformation of oligarchic and excluding power relations. The authors pointed out that, according to Fleury (1994), modernization generated industrialization processes that the citizenship guarantee systems did not follow, giving rise to the so-called "States without citizens", which had as consequences the private appropriation of public resources and the maintenance of old forms of patronage. Whose effects were the presence of territories and populations characterized by the absence of the State, with tragic effects in the urban peripheries, reinforcing the idea of maintaining a State only for the included citizens.

Reflecting on the forms of democratic construction in Colombia, Restrepo (2001) recalled that, from 1958 onwards, the Community Action Boards had the function of organizing the demands of the neighborhoods and, at the same time, guaranteeing a loyal electorate. From 1986, there was a reconfiguration of social participation, not being restricted solely to utilitarian claims, politicizing the involvement of social organizations in public management, indicating a new phase of social movements. However, about participatory democracy, the author pointed out that the actions of political parties *vis-à-vis* the State, to represent civil society, have not responded to the expectations set. Restrepo (2001) also pointed out that there were many setbacks and difficulties arising from a patrimonial and patriarchal tradition, making it difficult to expand deliberative forums.

For Escorel and Arouca (2016), there is, in Brazil, since the 1988 Constitution, a struggle for the realization of basic rights, however, it is observed that the exercise of citizenship takes place unequally in society. While the more affluent classes access rights as consumers, the less favoured ones make a great effort to access the same rights, which are seen as favors.

The work of Escorel and Arouca (2016) revealed new forms of popular expression in different countries, including from the point of view of criticism of more institutionalized forms. Demonstrations that do not have a party and/or union affiliation; for example, in Brazil, the 2013 demonstration "for the free pass" expresses a form of engagement based on individual motivations and the insertion of the internet and social networks. Individual motivations mean valuing individuals seeking to be heard in society, in a culture of valuing selfies and individual rights.

When referring to the issue of gender, Banda-Castro and Morales Zamorano (2015) stated that some authors (Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2013) pointed out the existence of differences in the patterns of participation according to gender. Men who score high on a scale to measure personal agency and empowerment tend to participate in roles where they are representative of others, while women with the same score tend to participate in organizations and are more likely to engage with others in decision-making processes.

Regarding the difficulties encountered by representatives or popular leaders, Mergen et al. (2018) revealed that one of the main ones is mobilizing people around them, a fact that undermines the construction of stronger networks for clashes in hearings. Other times, the representative assumes a messianic character, weakening the politicization and engagement of other/new leaders. Another aspect pointed out is the privilege of certain social classes that have more experience in negotiations with the public power, disfavoring those popular representations with fewer skills and incipient insertion in these spaces of dispute.

Participatory processes have been thematized mostly under the aspect of public policies (Escorel & Arouca, 2016; Gohn, 2019; Mergen et al., 2018; Milani, 2008; Restrepo, 2001), from which the authors emphasized the need to the opening spaces by the State for the participation of the community.

Concerning management, Vasilieva et al. (2018) points out that administrators should create spaces where community inhabitants, authorities and experts can discuss urgent problems and implement solu-

tions. Emphasizing that the meaning of these referrals is given from “bottom-up”, making the inhabitants become their partners. In addition, support for information policies is necessary, as it allows people to be attracted to the processes of change in communities (Vasilieva et al., 2018). The same study indicates that, according to some authors (Belokurova & Vorob’ev, 2011), in Russia, there are no effective mechanisms for the participation of the population in the formulation of public policy and that the rights and interests of certain social groups are violated by the decisions taken by local regimes.

In empirical research that points to the challenge of promoting public policies that involve young people, Anhas and Castro-Silva (2018) reflected on a successful example of the participation of young people in highly vulnerable situations in the periphery located in Baixada Santista, in São Paulo. Paul. Considering the adversities arising from structural inequality, young people faced difficulties in their community through participation in NGOs and hip-hop groups, promoting processes of autonomy, self-care and care for others.

In this context, when reflecting on urban peripheries, Blanco et al. (2012) highlight that the greatest obstacles to participation are found in the peripheries, such as economic precariousness, low levels of education, the fragility of social networks, the constant threat of violence and the need to spend time with long journeys to the working local. According to the study, despite the fragile presence of political and economic institutions, in the peripheries, there is greater potential for innovative and creative participatory processes to emerge, through local movements organized in favors of social inclusion.

According to Blanco et al. (2012), Cano Garcia (2012) point out that one of the paradoxes is that precisely where collective action is most needed, there are the worst conditions for it to be produced. Unfortunately, the absence of the State and citizenship rights has meant that these spaces are occupied by drug trafficking groups and organizations.

The articles analyzed below bring reflections to contribute to the strengthening of society, participation and democracy.

The study by Restrepo (2001) highlighted the need to strengthen social interlocutors and combat social fragmentation, weak citizen culture and social rights that are associated with a unionist and mendicant mentality about the State and public affairs. The author emphasized the need to build socio-community networks that encourage meetings between administrative structures and the community. This is to systematize the experiences so that the proposals of society, the instances involved, and the mechanisms of participation can be qualified. In this sense, Blanco et al. (2012) highlighted that both in Europe and in Latin America, the idea of networking has been consolidated as a predominant approach in dealing with the problems of degraded urban peripheries.

The work of Kauchakje (2008) showed that participation in councils, forums and NGOs improves with the contribution of social movements, and their non-legitimization can lead to low quality of participation. Milani (2008) pointed out the need for a space for dialogue between the practices that try to make effective the experiences of participation aiming at the renewal of local democracy, stating that the current challenge for managers is to be able to produce exchanges and agreements between actors from different countries. spaces, creating institutional rules and adequate instruments to promote citizenship. Escorel and Arouca (2016) proposed the observation of the complexity of the social changes that are taking place, verifying the weaknesses and potentialities and the need for dialogue with the different forms of political participation.

About democratization, Kauchakje (2008) indicated that, at present, social movements constitute one of their matrices by contributing to the process of “participation in decision-making and public policy implementation spaces” (Kauchakje, 2008, p. 687). For Milani (2008), social participation has become, since the 1990s, one of the organizational principles for formulating public policies and democratic deliberation. However, the author warned that participatory instruments must be questioned: “who participates and what inequalities remain in participation?” “How does the process of building collective interest take place within the scope of participation devices?” (Milani, 2008, p. 560).

About the discrimination of different forms of participation, Blanco et al. (2012) emphasize that the fundamental parameter is its ability to transform the power relations reproduced by excluding societies. In this sense, they claim that participation is not always beneficial or positive, as participatory processes can carry incompatibilities in terms of their interests.

In this context, we consider that social participation acquires strength and meaning when different knowledge is guided by ethical and political proposals guided by democracy, citizenship and human and social rights (Santos, 2013).

In this review, we found that the issue of citizenship appears linked to participation in four articles (Gohn, 2019; Kauchakje, 2008; Mergen et al., 2018; Milani, 2008). For Gohn (2019), since the late 1980s, participation has acquired the status of a measure of citizenship, being associated with the category of social exclusion. According to Milani (2008), citizenship defines those who belong (included) or who do not (excluded) in each society; for this author, “social participation derives from a conception of active citizenship” (Milani, 2018, p. 560), as it supposes complex networks of interaction between people, groups and institutions with the State.

The concept of citizenship encompasses a set of social, political and civil duties and rights, and exercising them implies using them as principles for the actions and relationships that take place in the space where one is inserted. However, the State maintains a centralized policy that offers its citizens instruments of social participation without the mechanisms for their full exercise, thus denying the exercise of citizenship, which has not been effective (Mergen et al., 2010).

In terms of recommendations on strengthening citizenship rights, the work of Kauchakje (2008) proposed articulations between social movements and forums, public hearings, policy councils and NGOs and between them, because this would increase interest and political participation. In addition, according to the author, it is also important that academic research can make the potential of these relationships visible.

To close this set of propositions with different approaches on participatory processes and empowerment, we turn to Kauchakje (2008), who highlighted an important aspect about social movements, pointing out that they have a specific rooting in the social fabric and their articulations with the institutional circles, which guide the potential of building democracy.

Based on what has already been discussed up to this point, we can infer those participatory processes make it possible to acquire certain skills that contribute to the shaping of empowerment and the sense of community, giving rise to citizenship actions, such as solidarity, cooperation, and civics, being, as a collective and democratic force, a powerful way to face the inequalities that mainly afflict vulnerable communities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This review found that participatory processes, especially in Brazil, are currently marked by a contradiction, because, on the one hand, with the opening for the flourishing of numerous politically organized social movements, there was the possibility of strengthening democracy, with the 1988 Constitution, on the other hand, there is still a great challenge regarding the delegitimization of these movements through the traditional hegemonic sectors of society.

It was observed that the legacy of Portuguese colonization contributed to this, which, by adopting patriarchy and patrimonialism in their administrative practices, governed the State by privileging their interests, thereby weakening the participation of civil society, and cooperating to maintain the logic of exclusion that historically leads to vertical structures of power in the country.

It was found that, when the experiences of participation are effective, there is the acquisition of skills that reverberate positively in the issue of empowerment, which, in turn, increases participation. When considering the affective, ethical, and family aspects in social relationships, social capital contributes to the understanding of the bonds between individuals and the community, as well as the processes of empowerment and participation.

It was detected that, only when society was organized did the few advances about the exercise of citizenship and participation take place and that, in Latin America, the industrialization processes provoked by modernization were not accompanied by social rights. The selective presence of the State resulted in the private appropriation of public resources and clientelism, bringing tragic consequences for the inhabitants of the urban periphery.

It was verified that there is no model or standard for participation, that networking has become an important approach to confronting inequalities and that managers must create spaces where there can be greater integration with the demands of communities, thus creating mechanisms for citizenship promotion.

Because it has been limited to the study of recognized literature in the scientific field, that is peer-reviewed articles, this review suffers from the gap concerning the consult of theses, dissertations, books and reports, which make up the so-called “grey literature”. Studies on social participation that consider the literature remain objects of desirable future investigation.

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