**URBAN GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALIZATION**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the implications of democratic or political and administrative or fiscal decentralization in the downward accountability, participatory and deliberative democracy to shape the urban governance of natural resources, facilities, infrastructure, etc. The basic assumption of the decentralization effectiveness, political or administrative, is that local government, authorities and public decision makers are physically close to those citizens to whom are better able to respond to meet their local needs, to work on their behalf and to be accountable to all local population. The methodological and theoretical approach of the analysis is framed by the institutional theory, analyses the power relationships and interactions between national and local governments, authorities, agencies, politicians, and other actors within the urban democratic governance system, downward accountability, participative and deliberative democracy, etc. Democratic decentralization, either political or administrative, empowers local institutions, authors and actors with potentially institutional outcomes. Democratic decentralization empowers the local communities while administrative decentralization increases central state government monitoring authorities and governments at the local level. Finally, in the conclusion it is argued that some institutionalized democratic mechanisms and management practices can be implemented in the political or democratic and administrative or fiscal decentralization to improve democratic urban governance of natural resources, environmental and urban green areas.

**Keywords:** Administrative decentralization, democratic decentralization, downward accountability, natural resources, participatory and deliberative democracy, urban governance,

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1. **Introduction**

Democracy decentralization reforms in most of developing countries provide the framework for analyzing the development of democratic local authority and democratic local governance. Centralized states and systems have failed to provide basic services due to inefficient infrastructure, lack of transparency and accountability and high levels of corruption. The Latin America´s state formation was the result of a struggle between metropolitan, regional and local economic elites and oligarchies (Del Río, 2004; Faletti, 2004; Selee, 2004) until the period if 1980s and 1990s when appeared a strong process of democratic decentralization.

Since the mid-1980s, decentralization reforms and policies, democratic or political and administrative have been developed and legislated in most of the developing countries aimed to improve efficiency and equity (Crook and Manor, 1999; World Bank, 2000; Ndegwa, 2002; Mawhood, 1983; Crook and Manor, 1998). In the early and mid-1990s, democratic decentralized urban management practice incorporated some participative mechanisms to engage citizens in decision making and policy formulation. The 1990s witnessed a wave of liberal democratic decentralization process across the world. This process is associated with structural adjustment reforms and policies supported by a neoliberal expression of a modernization theory (Samoff, 1990). The Modernization theories are more concerned with socioeconomic prerequisites of local democracy.

Political reforms promoted democratic decentralization processes characterized by the transfer of power and resources to local governments and representative authorities, democratically elected and accountable to their constituents (Crook and Manor, 1998; Agrawal and Ribot, 1999). Democratic reforms of the State are motivated by the desire to foster democratic local institutions aimed to meet the needs of a diverse citizenry (Vedeld, 2003). Institutional economic and political reforms shape the democratic capabilities of the state and civil society.

Democratic decentralization reforms are implemented to promote the empowerment of local governments and authorities expecting to contribute to local democracy despite the difficulties to establish local democratic authorities (Ribot, Agrawal &Larson 2006; Agrawal &Ribot 1999; Grindle 2007). Democratic decentralization plays a crucial role in accompanying the democratic reforms (Manor, 1999). Under the framework of democratic reforms, the design and implementation of democratic decentralization have to take into account the powers and the means to transfer from central and national institutions of government to local government institutions. Reforms must establish the basic institutional arrangements of democratic decentralization, and paying attention to be fully implemented.

Democratic decentralization reforms, policies and projects transfer functions, powers and resources to elected local governments, authorities and agencies affecting democracy. Initiatives in policy instrument reforms aimed to develop and practice of principles and strategies of democratic decentralization create opportunities for more equitable distribution of benefits. Local urban economic, social, ecological and cultural dynamic must be taking into account when adjusting policy to the particularities of democratic decentralization of each local space.

The public justifications for choices of democratic decentralization processes and local government institutions may vary widely the design and implementation under the framework of democratic decentralization reforms and the outcomes could be not the expected but a weak functioning of powerless decentralized local institutions (Hara 2008). Implementation of democratic reforms have demonstrated that local authorities, governments and urban governance pose challenges for advancing policy equity and efficiency by increasing political representation of vulnerable individuals, groups, neighborhoods and local communities. Democratic decentralization reforms taking place may prove difficult to determine if they improve the conditions of equity, efficiency and alleviates poverty.

1. **Political or democratic decentralization**

Democratic decentralization offers a compelling argument about why local governments and politics matter in the creation and development of democratic and participatory urban governance institutions. Political or democratic decentralization refers to the transfer of powers and authority to representative and downwardly accountable elected local governments.

Decentralization refers to any act of national central government or agency formally transfers or cedes powers and resources to local institutions, agencies and actors at lower levels in a territorial and administrative, bureaucratic and political hierarchies. Democratic decentralization process transfers political power, functions and resources from central government to lower and local levels within the political-administrative hierarchy of the state (Mawhood 1983). Democratic decentralization processes transfer power to local institutions. Democratic decentralization must have specific objectives to achieve through rules to establish incentives for transferring appropriate powers to local accountable authorities (Agrawal & Ribot 1999; Kulipossa 2004; Larson 2003).

Ribot (2004) defines democratic decentralization as the transfer of powers from central governments to elected, representative and accountable local community governments in the name of local citizens. Democratic decentralization processes have reemerged to challenge local governments (van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal et al, 1999; Geschiere and Boone, 2003; Ntsebeza, 2002, 2005). Democratic decentralization involves transfers of powers to representative elected local community government under whose authority are the citizens’ who live in the jurisdiction. Democratic decentralization involves the transfer of powers from centralized authorities to democratically elected local governments.

Democratic decentralization and political decentralization transfer powers and resources to representative authorities accountable to local populations. Representative forms of local government are required for the democratic processes without marginalizing the vulnerable groups of population (Agrawal &Gupta 2005; Crook &Manor 1998; Crook &Sverrisson 2001). An engendered system of democratic decentralization in which vulnerable people and interests can be addressed to strengthen political and administrative participation in decision making processes al local level. Democratic decentralization entails the forging of strategic compromises that firmly secure the interests of the most disadvantaged groups with outcomes regularly reviewed (Mandondo and Mapedza 2003).

Democratic decentralization can serve the underprivileged and vulnerable groups to redress entrenched inequity focusing on biased hierarchy is a needed complement of local democracy in any local authority (Mansuri &Rao 2003:11-14; Heller et al. 2007:629; Crook &Sverrisson 2001). Decentralization is neither representation without powers nor powers without representation.

Democratic decentralization aims to increase public local participation in decision-making, supported by a strong downward accountability to local governments, agencies and constituencies. Decisions related to democratic decentralization must involve a political broad-based dialogue with a commitment to be efficient, effective and equity. Local government development is fostered by democratic decentralization, popular participation including vulnerable constituencies and constitutional commitment.

Democratic decentralization entails that central authorities entrust significant powers to representative local authorities, individual or collective bodies. All citizens give form to a community which is under the jurisdiction of local government. Local authorities to be representative requires powers to be democratic decentralized and to strengthen their local deconcentrated functions and not avoiding democratic institutions (Ribot & Oyono 2006; Ribot *et al.* 2008). Democratic decentralization of local governments facilitates the design and development of local institutions with capabilities of enhancing democratic deliberation.

Democratic decentralization is an institutionalized form of popular political participation. Democratization is linked on political participation in a democratic society and essential element in individual self-development. However, in some countries, political participation takes place at the central level while the local officials are the field operations functionaries of deconcentrated central monasteries and agencies.

**Fiscal or administrative decentralization**

Fiscal decentralization is a democratic and administrative decentralization which refers to the transfer of fiscal powers and resources for revenue generation Democratic decentralization is a means of national central governments and agencies to transfer fiscal and administrative burden to local governments, agencies and actors (Nsibambi, 1998).

Where democratic decentralization is being practiced, the relationship with administrative decentralization may not be hold true (Tacconi, 2007). There are several forms of decentralization, which can be administrative, deconcentration and democratic or political decentralization. Deconcentration is a weaker form of administrative decentralization with not well established downward accountability as it is in the democratic or political decentralization. Administrative decentralization is delegating authority and supervising administrative areas to local governments and agencies from national central governments requiring strong lines of accountability (Ribot, 2003; Ribot and Larson, 2005).

**Downward accountability**

Downward accountability is the essence of democratic institutions. Downward accountability of local governments and authorities require direct and democratically elected political representatives (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999; Crook & Manor, 1998). Democratic institutions must be representative and accountable to the people who may be empowered to respond. Local as well as central accountability benefit from democratic decentralized governments improving their functioning. Democratic decentralization aims to increase public local participation in decision-making, supported by a strong downward accountability to local governments, agencies and constituencies.

The development of the downward accountability is essential for the democratic processes taking into consideration that excessive oversight undermines local autonomy and democracy (Bigombe 2003). Downward accountability and grassroots democratic participation are essential mechanisms to strengthen democratic decentralization. Democratic electoral institutions and accountability mechanisms such as disciplinary action are needed (Kassibo 2003). Downward accountability is built into the functions of democratic decentralization processes of local governments and agencies with responsibility to national central government.

Weak state institutions can undermine the effectiveness of a democratic systems and accountability of local polities in regulatory authority, democratic planning, taxing or spending. Democratic national and local governments tend to have a positive interaction with political decentralization assuming that democratic elections improve the accountability of decentralized authorities (Mookherjee 2001). Legitimate democratic representation must be directed towards financial management institutions in order to guarantee the accountability of managers to state and local authorities and communities (Oyono and Efoua, 2006; Ribot, 2007).

Competitive local elections for local authorities encourage political parties and social movements to reach out to previously ignored and vulnerable groups (Cleary, 2004; Harriss et al., 2005; Hirschman, 1970). New social movements, and individuals use communication media to educate, organize and expand the action of democratic politics. Democratic government stimulates accountability overall, improving its performance. Democratic institutions are representative and accountable to the people empowered to respond. Democratic decentralization must recognize, operate and strengthen democratic institutions as well as distributional and procedural equity which can be obtained through public participation and downward transparency and accountability.

Local authorities holding democratic representation are responsive to the needs expectations and aspirations of their local population and citizens. Democratic representation of local authorities is driven by accountability and responsiveness to the concerned population of the communities being governed.

Democratic decentralization is not always implemented correctly in terms such as representation and accountability of authorities, management of resources and decision making power. Public sphere has been questioned as a form of deliberative democracy through internet practice for failing support the status quo of social and political systems and accountability of power.

**Participatory and deliberative democracy**

Democratic theory has developed the notions of citizen participation or participatory democracy under the assumption that democracy is government by, of, and for the people The participatory democracy of the Greeks is contrasted by Habermas (1996) with the radical democratic movements, the representative, parliamentary bourgeois democracy and the attempts at reducing citizen participation in the welfare state. The participatory democracy requires that citizens must be politically informed, active, organized, participative, debate, discuss, argue and deliberate to become a political force within the lifeworld and civil society to transform the public sphere of polity. Participatory democracy legitimizes governments’ policies and allows followers engagements in decision making processes.

Strategic formulation and implementation of participatory democratic institutions affect government and citizen’s behaviors as in line with democratic outcomes. Participatory democratic institutions contribute to the deepening of democracy when the interests and activities of local government and civil society organizations complement to favor the new political and social rights for citizens. An elected democrat local government and civil society share interests to work together in a legitimate decision-making process to elaborate and develop participatory budgeting programs by fostering the growth of social capital within the “participatory publics”. Participatory budgeting helps local governments to identify themselves as democratic and participatory with strong ties to the participatory public civil society organizations.

Participants in participatory budgeting have the opportunity to make decisions in local government spending, taxing, and other state investments, raising the profile of government and civil society leaders in neighborhoods and local communities. Successful participatory democratic programs can have positive effects on democracy deepening and improving the quality of local democratic processes participatory budgeting outcomes has contributed to advancing participatory democratic experience by fostering the growth of social capital through local democratic processes.

Local participatory democracy is a learning arena for democracy (Grindle 2007:7-13a) and skills of deliberation. Local government leaders can be linked to participatory public civil society organizations and have strong ties to support deliberative and democratic processes.

The theoretical analysis and studies on local participatory democracy is growing exponentially based on normative democratic theory (Habermas 1996; Cohen and Arato 1992; Sen 1999; Evans 2002) and recognizing the deficits of representative democracy.

Local participatory democracy is also an effective school for democracy teaching people the rules structuring conflict resolution and to be more effective at rewarding and punishing the political behavior of local officials. Local government officials more likely to delegate authority can be linked to democratic and participatory public civil society organizations. Schooling and media play a critical role in forming citizens to make them capable of participating in democracy (Kellner 1990 and 1998). The media assuming democratic functions must be vigilant in checking excessive and corrupt powers and informing adequately the citizenry.

Democratic decentralization is an institutional participatory processes used to increase public participation in local decision-making from which can be derived great benefits. Local authorities create and develop significant discretion to deliver benefits. Local authorities may have a narrow institutional space of discretion that they do not represent the local population and have a little effect on participatory local management arrangements. In a country with a strong central control, the imperative of participatory planning must be legally inscribed in laws of local development.

All citizens and citizen groups involved in participatory parity, regardless of identity, must have equal and the same opportunities to participate in democratic institutions (Fraser 2000:115). Transfers of powers through democratic decentralization is occurring under different processes of privatization, civil society and NGOs, empowerment and participatory approaches, community-driven development, social funds, and other organizational, institutional and authority forms which have different distributional and democratic outcomes (Pritchett and Woolcock, 2004; Ribot, 2004).

Urban democracy literature is more concerned with the “right to the city” than a participatory or deliberative democracy approaches from the perspective of neo-liberalization, which also is problematic (Dryzek, 1996, p. 6). Deliberative democracy (Habermas 1995), is based on principles of social inclusion, argumentation and deliberation processes in the formation of democratic decisions. Privatization schemes do not follow the logic of democratic decentralization because they are taking public resources away from democratic local institutions and transferring them to private owners who are self-regulating, self-serving and often non-sanctionable. Participatory approaches and transfers to customary and private bodies rarely constitute democratic decentralization processes.

The participatory democratic theory assumes that local space is more democratic than other space scales. The associative democrats support the argument that devolution of power to localities invigorates democracy (Cohen and Rogers,1995; Matthews, 1989 and Cunningham, 2001, p. 136). Diverse democratic forms of decentralization are being analyzed and practiced around the world including the participatory approaches consisting of consultation, mobilization and involvement of people. These forms can be a democratic decentralization with power transfers and the contractual participation such as co-management.

Participatory democratic practices are necessary for the implementation of routinizing democratic decentralization through widening political local spaces for citizenship participation to legitimate a democratic local government in such a way that the expectations of citizens from local authorities sustain the democratic practices. Strengthen decentralized democratic processes and practices assumes granting local authorities, agencies and political actors, greater decision-making power, democratic representation and making them accountable local entities To remedy the so called democratic deficit central governments of nation states grant new powers to local governments making them more accountable to citizens and communities by designing structures, mechanisms and procedures for direct involvement in decision making, planning and budgeting. Besides of devolving resources to local governments, it is promoted the participatory democracy.

Citizens and citizen group through a process of participatory parity must have equal opportunity to participate in decision making. Movements such as #Occupy, egalitarian, radical democratic grassroots that has contributed to the development of an alternative democratic self-organization model through open and participatory assemblies shifting public discourse, influencing political discussions, corporate financial interests and shaping policy debates on economic stagnation and growing inequality.

Media technologies are serving the basis for a participatory democratic communication politics. Communication media and technology can be democratized to give support to democratic media politics and thus to democratic transformation. Public interest communication multiplies information and discussion for a more informed citizenry geared toward democratic participation for the common good. Habermas's analysis makes rigid and imperative the distinction between lifeworld and system understood as economy – state, removing this one from democratic transformation. Also, the analysis limits participatory democracy to the lifeworld undergoing new threats from the system such as the colonization by technologies of information and communication.

Democratically local governments can be captured by economic and political elites whose involvements in the political arena distort priorities limiting the participatory democratic processes. Power relations surrounding and filling new spaces for democratic decentralization engagements are critical for an analysis and assessment of the participatory democratic development and their transformative potential. The long-term democratic effects of tutelage should allow access to the local authorities giving voice to civil society and citizens without producing clientelism.

Local governments unwillingto delegate authority to citizens cannot have full participatory programs with democratic content. Research is required to measure the impact that democratic and participatory programs have on citizens, urban local communities and civil society organizations Local government willing to delegate authority and practice participatory democracy as a strategy to reach out to interested constituents and develop deep links to participatory public civil society organizations.

**Urban governance**

The macro-level institutional context is having an interactive effect with local political democracy and government shaping the urban democratic governance. The creation and development of an urban green areas network under the framework of democratic decentralization is a possibility of entering to the field of local urban governance and contributing to expanding their scale and scope with some democratic content. This innovation is being labeled in different forms: participatory urban governance, deliberative democracy, empowered deliberative democracy (Fung and Wright 2001:7).

Participatory urban governance institutions as a democratic innovation, are attracting citizens associated with radical political parties broadly concerned with the political commitment of radical democracy and achievement of social good.

Political theories of democratic urban governance have developed a whole range of assumptions supported by the actualization of the reality of modern citizenship in plural expressions of democratic forms. There are no *a priori* reasons that local forms of governance are more democratic and decentralized authority, which in fact, in some contexts may be quite pernicious. Democracy as a form of urban governance is shifting from transition to deepening the democratic rule (Linz & Stepan, 1996), the democratic quality of institutions and urban governance with more political direct participation than only electoral participation, and by promoting and improving the overall capabilities of citizens in new forms of engagement with public decision making (Dre`ze & Sen, 1995). Therefore, democracy is strengthening and countering the influence of powerful hegemonic interests (Avritzer, 2002).

Local government and politicians in times of electoral competition are more likely to promote participatory urban governance institutions in order to appeal ignored and vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making and policy formulation processes. Vulnerable people and groups are inhibited from participation on democratic consolidation processes with technocratic structures and procedures that engender governance. The dynamics of participatory democratic urban governance in countries where it is used, is subject to all sorts of imperfections, abuses and manipulations. Privileged urban enclaves are created and developed against the concept of democratic urban spaces with economic, social and cultural divisions, which in some cases are the result of bad governance, insecurity and unsafety.

New democratic experiments transform direct forms of citizen engagement with more participative urban governance of people in political decentralized spaces through the strength of liberal democratic institutions. Democratic local urban governance points to accountability, participation and empowerment.

Empowered participatory urban governance (Fung and Wright 2003) in political democratic practice is grounded on the dynamics of culture, power and politics which are critical elements of deliberative democratic spaces. The ideological preference for participatory urban governance lends legitimacy to a radical political culture that breaks with authoritarian past of governments. The elements of the new political culture in participatory urban governance institutions favors normative and democratic practices in which everyone has a right to express his opinion and arguments, join in the debates, object and negotiate any terms that is considered to be democratic, right and fair.

Democratic urban governance is the result of the civil rights in a congruent relation with political entitlements, legitimacy and accountability as a dimension of collective responsibility. These processes are taking place instead of participatory democracy involving participation related to rights of citizenship and to democratic urban governance, deepening democratic forms of responsive government expressions, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, democratic state intervention, etc.

Local democratic urban governance may use other mechanisms like co-management, CBNRM and other participatory approaches sometimes difficult to distinguish from democratic decentralization (Tacconi et al 2006, p15, Nemarundwe, 2004, p285). Democratic ecological, environmental and urban sustainable development governance has as fundaments the political and managerial representation and discretion of local public authorities and governments.

Representative democratic politics and participatory urban governance have similar styles of political behavior matched by networks, ideological commitments and political projects spanning these spaces (Fox 1996).

Citizens engagement in democratic and participative forms of urban governance face serious limitations in societies where the inequalities are deeply rooted. The failure of the reforms for democratic urban governance have critical consequences for local sustainable development.

**Theoretical and methodological approach**

Democratic decentralization as a theoretical approach framed by the institutional theory, analyses the power relationships and interactions between national and local governments, authorities, agencies, politicians, and other actors within the urban democratic governance system, downward accountability, participative and deliberative democracy, etc. The contribution of local actors and agents in the making, granting and taking of the institutional space in local urban governance challenge democratic deliberation processes beyond the social movements and the electoral politics. Consolidation of democratic institutions that forge a nation and consolidation of the political power and territorial integrity are the foundations of the democratic governance and rule.

Institutional theory framework of democratic decentralization provides the basis of political democratic rationality to enhance resource sustainable development to build political spaces for citizens instead of the market rationality in competitive spaces of consumers. Democratic decentralization theory sustains that its spirit is the empowerment of local institutions. The institutional analysis approach is more context specificity oriented and more theoretically compatible with the study of democratic decentralization.

A comprehensive review of the political economy approach of democratic decentralization is provided by Manor (1999). The logic of democratic and administrative decentralization process is inclusive and public and because the proximity to the benefited population, it reduces transaction costs and internalize costs of externalities, provides better accountability of local government, authorities and decision makers integrating them across the local needs and aspirations of population and matching with resources (Agrawal and Ribot 1999).

Local governments receiving authority over resource management need downward accountability to have effective democratic decentralization.

Studies of democratic decentralization have focused on service delivery efficiency and equity at local government level (Crook &Manor 1998; Bardhan & Mookerhee 2006; Tulchin & Selee 2004; Oxhorn, Tulchin &Selee 2004; Ribot & Larson 2004). However, recent analysis on democratic decentralization are focusing more on democracy outcomes and the effects on local democracy (Ribot 1999; 2003; 2004; Grindle 2007; Ribot, Chhatre &Lankina 2008; Harriss, Stokke &Törnquist, 2004).

Local democracy is contingent on democratic local government and institutions have to offer to local citizens. Each region and town requires different alternatives and approaches to build more effective democratic decentralization institutions which can work close to the people. Harriss, Stokke &Törnquist (2004:6) argue that “…the test for democracy is not about the existence of formal democratic rights and institutions, but whether they have real meaning for people.” Local government should recognize and respect the fundamental democratic rights of citizens and civil social organizations (CSOs). However, CSOs should have enough capacity to engage the local government on their own terms.

**Democratic decentralization and urban governance**

Devolution to urban and rural municipalities in the aftermath of the democratic decision-making transitions of the1990s standing as governance generated significant benefits for the communities. Democratic decentralization can support the practice and experience of local governance based on the benefits to the community. Democratic decentralization of power and resources through external interventions in the form of capital converted into authority, reshaped through institutions and practice of norms, has effects on national and local democracy and democratic urban governance. However, democratic local urban governance is not necessarily a consequence of decentralization policies.

This democratic decentralization process takes different forms in different public spaces depending of the urban governance design of states.

The neo-liberal democratic decentralization policy called right to the city and urban citizenship, moves urban community governance away from participatory and deliberative democratic decision-making. Democratic and accountable local urban governance is able to implement devolved responsibilities from central government. However, at the local and regional levels, policy and urban governance interventions do not necessarily are decentralized and democratic.

Between the assumptions about participation, accountability and democratic decentralization embedded in participatory urban governance and deliberative democracy, there is a tension that needs to be more explored for the understandings and practice of the new actors in these new democratic spaces (Cornwall 2004). Increasingly democratic decentralization practices are more sustainable for long and bring more democratic participation of citizens on decision making over natural resources and urban green areas governance to local governments.

The urban space-taking by citizens and communities stressing their role of moving democratic subjects may be supported by the institutions of local governance. Still today, a civil society approach to local institutional democratic decentralization and governance may result to benefit the economic and political elites but excluding the marginal and poor populations from democratic decision making and ignoring their demands.

The principles of democratic decentralization and subsidiarity apply to the governance of urban green ecosystem services. Deliberative democratic decision-making can transform the mechanisms of state power as a form of authoritarian urban governance into permanently more mobilized deliberative democratic grassroots forms.

Decentralization processes in environmental and natural resources sectors has not well developed and much have to occur on actors receiving limited transfer of powers due to divergence of local state institutions and governance. Democratic reforms on decentralization of resources to local authorities have some limitations regarding the prospects for sustainable management, local environmental governance, and benefits redistribution. Most of the times, influential local elites are reinforced. Ribot assumes that democratic environmental decentralization may be feasible with accountable urban local communities.

**Democratic decentralization in natural resources**

The concept of democratic decentralization in the area of natural resources is being questioned by some conservation advocates who propose the notion of democratic conservation. There is a marked trend towards greater community engagement in urban green areas management. Community conservation of environmental and green areas initiatives are growing in large number in urban settlements taking place, most of the times, outside the formal confines of democratic decentralization projects. Urban green innovation planning authority needs to develop democratic participative decision-making processes on issues of environmental and sustainable development.

Local people’s entitlements and rights to make democratic decisions about their environmental and natural green resources are not always recognized, prompting displacements from protected green areas in the name of conservation principles for surviving and striving democratic decentralization and conservation of environmental and green urban areas may create and develop conditions for innovation of power democratic exercise to benefit the citizenship, urban communities and neighborhood. Urban communities must explore more equitable forms of space allocations to ensure public access, use and enjoyment of urban public spaces and streets.

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is related to democratic decentralization which is considered as an institutionalized and scaled-up for. Democratic decentralization of natural resource management (NRM) is distinct to CBNRM in the inclusion of all citizens in decision making processes based on representative authorities of local governments while CBNRM represent specific sectors of population (Alden Wily, undated; Ribot, 2002).

Institutionalized representation of local government and authorities in the form of democratic decentralization hold political and management responsibilities over local natural resources as an institutionalized form of CBNRM. Representative authorities of local governments and agencies through democratic decentralization processes in the form of CBNRM receive transfers of powers and resources in the name of citizens. A decentralized small community at local level in the context of a city tends to be weaker in power and in democratic decision making, thus local action entails a fragmented vision and loss of coherence.

Several analyses do not question the core assumptions of democratic decentralization considered as an institutionalized form of Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) with engagement of people on conservation of benefits (Tacconi *et al.*, 2006 and Hailey 1938). Democratic decentralization and community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) are different (Ribot 2004).

The participatory ideology considers than communities can legitimate manage natural resources over democratically elected local governments and authorities involved in related issues. In this case, democratic decentralization cannot deliver the promised benefits to the community. Several analyses do not question the core assumptions of democratic decentralization considered as an institutionalized form of Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) with engagement of people on conservation of benefits (Tacconi *et al.*, 2006 and Hailey 1938). Strong elected local authorities can have some options to choose to work through participatory democracy, community-driven development (CDD), stakeholder or Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) approaches.

Democratic decentralization is a mechanism of reintegrating and placing priorities in terms of needs and aspirations de the community. This allows local representative governments and authorities to place natural resource management (NRM) and urban green areas innovation and NRM among other basic needs of their communities. Some contextual factors of urban green areas innovation are more supportive of local democratic decentralized authorities without developing negative trade-offs on the political and ecological fronts between local elites. These contextual factors that shape the outcomes of democratic decentralization, are according to (Olivier de Sardan 2004, p3) the socio-political aspects including the role of local aristocracies.

Supporting democratic urban green areas innovation, development, conservation and management initiatives require allocating meaningful resources for community, local government, citizens and other stakeholder’s capacity-building to encourage open and participative deliberation over environmental and natural resource management and fostering a shift from regulation to support functions. Local democratic government institutions can transfer meaningful discretionary powers to communities and neighborhoods over the management of natural resources in urban green areas.

Devolution to local communities in the form of democratic decentralization as Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) brings some benefits, sometimes as utilitarian incentives (Tacconi, 2007). Lummis (1997, p. 18) contends that democracy depends on the local spaces where the people live. However, some analysts argue that local-scale institutional arrangements do not always result in more participatory democratic decision making outcomes. The capacity of subordinate groups in a consolidated formal democracy has an effective role in shaping public policy. Factors such as the macro-economic policy articulated with issues of accessibility and affordability to natural resources engenders democratic decentralization, mainly affecting to vulnerable groups of population.

Local government is inherently based on political interests, power relations, hierarchies and authority achieved by political competition and rivalry and solved by electoral votes rather than by democratic representation on detrimental of environmental, ecological and natural resources. The proliferation of user committees in political decentralization of natural resources, criticized by Manor (2005) as having shortcomings, it is questionable that facilitates democratic transformations of the local government institutions and electoral democracy they lack representative and democratic credentials and are vulnerable to elite manipulation.

An institutionalized representation of authorities in democratic decentralization in the form of Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) has managerial responsibilities over natural resources. Democratic decentralization can establish as recipients of decentralized powers and natural resources management to the elected local authorities and governments (Ribot, 2008; Alden Wily, undated). However, democratic participation and deliberation as a way of life in urban settlements has been very limited not allowing naturally the gathering together all people. Local actors can be chosen by agents willing to intervene and accomplish democratic decentralization and de-concentration initiatives and processes to transfer powers and resources to local governments such as Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM).

Democratic decentralization of natural resource management either transfer too little power or transfer this power to non-representative local authorities (Ribot, 2004; Larson and Ribot, 2007). Democratic decentralization may not contribute for the good of local livelihoods (Blaikie, 2006; Tacconi et al, 2006). The democratizing discourse is associated with natural resource decentralizations and transferring significant powers to democratic local bodies (Ribot,2004; Ribot and Larson,2005). Democratic decentralization processes of natural resources have failed to empower democratic local governments. Assuming that locally entrenched economic, political, social and cultural factors, democratic decentralization to local government does not always result in fair representation of citizens and direct access to environmental and natural resources.

**Discussion**

Different patterns of associational democracy can improve the quality of democratic urban governance. Institutionalized democratic mechanisms and management practices can be implemented for democratic urban governance of environmental and urban green areas. The efforts of the state should aim to design and build local democratic institutions to foster democratic decentralization of resources and more participatory democratic governance. National central authorities play a relevant role in democratic-political and administrative decentralization to ensure that local governments and democratic institutions address the expectation, needs and aspirations of local people. Opportunities for legislation, formulation and implementation of democratic decentralization processes have to be created and developed aimed to promote local democratic environmental governance.

The basic assumption of the decentralization effectiveness, political or administrative, is that local government, authorities and public decision makers are physically close to those citizens to whom are better able to respond to meet their local needs, to work on their behalf and to be accountable to all local population. Democratic decentralization, either political or administrative, empowers local institutions, authors and actors with potentially institutional outcomes. Democratic decentralization empowers the local communities while administrative decentralization increases central state government monitoring authorities and governments at the local level.

Increased democratic participation may bring a broader cross-section of the population into political and administrative decision making issues, participatory processes are not often necessarily neither representative nor binding (Mosse 2001).

Interventions of democratic and administrative decentralization can develop and work together with other local developments outside the official authorities but recognizing, strengthening and legitimating them. Some capabilities required to support the implementation of democratic and administrative decentralization are administrative and financial management, problem solving, decision making, capacity for democratic leadership and other technical skills.

Local actors in natural resource sector decentralizations must hold powers in democratic form and be accountable to their population. Holding non-democratic power are contingent to powers without accountability or accountability without powers (Ribot 2004). Local actors may be more active as democratic subjects in different actions of local agency leading to qualify as more efficient than democratic and administrative decentralization processes.

Political and administrative decentralization in Mexico was opposed by strong traditional bureaucratic actors, the tendency towards more centralized oriented planning and intersectoral coordination. All these factors lead to falling short of devolution purposes and with serious consequence for the equity and efficiency of services becoming more a measure to increase central control than a democratic principle or a response to political pressure from below (Gonzalez-Block and others1989).

Olowu et al (2001, p1) sustains that decentralization copes *“…with two major political problems. The first stems from* *the fact that the political and administrative leaders are not ready to share the* *monopoly of power they inherited from the colonial period… The second political* *dilemma is the confiscation of power by local elites. In many cases, the local elite,* *rather than the most vulnerable groups, capture decentralized powers… In the absence* *of more ambitious institutional, political and economic reforms, democratic* *decentralization will be a contradiction because improvements in financial allocation* *can only take place if the local government is accountable to its citizens and has the* *capacity to carry out its functions.*

Civil society democratic participation alongside considerable increases in representation of vulnerable groups can make important contributions to political and administrative decentralization development of local communities.

More complex concepts of environmental and urban green areas governance, decentralized democracy and conservation are required to build participatory governance and promote democratic and accountable vertical links at differing levels of governance and across actors are the challenges, from local to global reform and vice versa (Mohan and Stokke 263 Democratic and administrative decentralization of urban environmental and sustainable development programs must be supported by policies and practices.

Democratic decentralization to be fed by technical dimensions to have an impact on sustainable local green development requires responsive government authorities and strong commitment from organized civil society to vulnerable groups involvement. Decentralization process increases the capacity of citizens to elect responsive authorities and select public officials holding both of them accountable for their political and administrative performance.

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