

Rural “Participation” and its Framework in Tunisia

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Abstract. For two decades, Tunisia has been involved in reducing subsidies, promoting the liberalization of trade, and privatizing public enterprises. The rural sector is concerned notably with the establishment of Agricultural Development Groups (ADGs) in the field of natural resource management. Whereas ADGs activities are diversified and include international “technical” considerations (e.g. natural resource conservation and international cooperation) and development catchwords (local development, governance, participation), this paper reveals the continuity in Tunisian public action and shows the need to analyze participation and governance in relation to the state and its institutions. The paper argues that international and national stakes are interlinked, and that there is significant continuity in public action. Indeed, even if new actors (seem to) emerge and the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources has lost some competencies, ADGs remain a “rural framework technique” and instrumentation is still based on coercive instruments. ADGs represent the state’s redeployment on its territory, the roots of which can be found in the Protectorate.

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1. Introduction¹

Tunisia turned towards liberalization and privatization while adopting a structural adjustment policy in 1986. Today the country is reducing subsidies, promoting the liberalization of trade, and privatizing public enterprises. The rural sector is concerned with the strategy of restructuring

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rural institutions: the main goal is to “frame”² 50% of the farmer population and to engage rural institutions in activities such as marketing, agricultural goods transformation and natural resource management. In this field, the official discourse emphasizes the priority to make people participate in the decision-making process; to reach that goal, the previous natural resource management groups are replaced by *Groupements de Développement Agricole* (Agricultural Development Groups, ADGs). Compared to former natural resource management groups, the new legislation diversifies their activities: ADGs are in charge of both natural resource management *and* local development. The legislation also incorporates international considerations (e.g. natural resource conservation, international cooperation etc.) linked to development catchwords such as participation – farmers’ technical and financial involvement in infrastructure works and also in the decision-making process – and governance, settled as the normative definition (“good governance”) from international financial backers and referring back to a neoliberal conception of the state. Participation and governance are considered as leading to state withdrawal, as its competencies are transferred to the private sector and civil society. Participation and governance are also a means to leave politics aside, using technical and quantitative concepts instead.

This paper examines the meaning and the modalities of participation and governance in Tunisia considering these concepts as discourse and as stakes. They are analyzed in light of public action since public action implies different categories of actors’ involvement in public policy implementation. ADGs constitute the main case study in Tunisia that allows us to ask whether there are actors other than state agents involved in their implementation and to what extent new actors can appear. In the rural sector, participation evolves from a governed technical to a framed provoked one: the government administration does not decide what groups’ activities are but it is still strongly linked to, and even involved in the process, both upstream and downstream. Concerning the possible shift in the instrumentation of public action in Tunisia, while persuasive instruments appear to support participation, the coercive instrument, based on procedures and legal norms,

² The verb “to frame” as used here comes close to the meaning of “to organize”, but it also carries the connotation of territorial “*maillage*”, i.e. organizing a group or people within an administrative and political network. See section 3 for the definition of “rural framework technique”.

remains the main one.³ It shows the state’s continuity and even redeployment on its territory for population control. Also, the ADG case study points to the need to analyze participation and governance in relation to state institutions. This article thereby critiques the use of these concepts in their technical meanings that avoid issues of (local) politics.

To make this argument, this article compares discourses and practices regarding participation and governance and links them to juridical norms and policy implementation. According to Lascoumes (1990), juridical norms are “normative instruments used to frame and spread these policies”⁴; each policy change implicating juridical change in line with what the author has called “specific normative production”⁵ revealing the connection between state and society.⁶ Laws and decrees enable us to identify: actors involved in the process of implementation (i.e. the ministries in charge of implementation); ways to create ADGs; and the importance of the texts’ normative dimension. Law also has a discursive and displaying function that requires it to be compared with the reality of practice: the on-site observations enabled us to identify the space to maneuver of different actors and games at work in the implementation process. Consequently, this research first considered the corpus of legislation in the field of rural institutions before collecting observations on an international development project, the components of which were both technical (water and soil conservation) and social (rural participation). Interviews were also conducted with administration agents, representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and Local Development (MILD), the Ministry of Development and International Cooperation, and the majority with the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR). Several other interviews have been conducted with staff from international organizations, farmers elected to ADG board committees and consultants from the private sector.

The paper is structured as follows. First, it tackles the international and national interests and stakes in local development. Second, it deals with

³ According to Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007:13), instruments are “technical plans with a generic intent, symbolizing a concrete relationship between politics and society, and supported by an idea of regulation” (“*Dispositifs techniques à vocation générique porteurs d’une conception concrète du rapport politique/société et soutenus par une conception de la régulation*”)

⁴ “*Instruments juridiques normatifs utilisés pour cadrer et diffuser ces politiques*”

⁵ “*Production normative spécifique*”

⁶ Contrary to Anglo-Saxon countries, Tunisia is a written law country: law is legislated.

the state's withdrawal implied by participation, notably the transfer of competencies from public to private and the new instruments. Lastly, it shows the continuity in framing the rural sector and even the reinvolvement of administration.

2. The Local Level as an International and National Stake

Local development, governance and participation have been appearing on the international scene over the last two decades. The international discourse puts people at the core of the decision-making process and the Tunisian state promotes these concepts. However, official discourses hide other stakes, both international and national ones.

2.1. International Support to Local Development

The interest for local development (urban or rural), participation and decentralization amplified in the 1990s. In 1992, the concept of governance appeared in the World Bank report called *Governance and Development*. It is defined as: “*the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development*” that is to say the definition from the *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (Dorset & Baber) in 1979 (Hufty, 2007). The World Bank proposed a new conception of governance issues. Whereas early publications suggested governance meant public and private partnerships in public action and linked political process and scientific analysis, governance soon became a normative conception through the use of “problems of governance”. Governance went from a tool to a pattern through the “good governance” concept (transparency of public action, real accountability supported by technical and financial technical evaluation, management competences in development implementation, privatization of public services, public and private partnership, and profitability of actions).

The principle of efficiency hides its ideological nature. The dominant discourse justifies this growing interest for governance: financial state crisis, critiques towards the way traditional states handle collective problems, a new public management, social transformations and increasing complexity, and the acknowledgment of regional and local management and civil society (Pierre and Peters, 2000). The World Bank was a key vehicle in spreading the concept. In the mid 1980s, the institution went through an orientation crisis because of the failure of its projects (Gaudin, 2002). Civil society was acknowledged in opposition to central states that were accused

of embezzling money for goals other than development issues. This new orientation was linked to the World Bank's collaboration with the IMF that promotes neo-liberal concepts (less state, privatization, debt limitation, corporate management applied to public administration, that is to say New Public Management). Governance is now presented as a panacea, providing the possibility of collaboration with the local level (civil society, local political leaders), and as a way to introduce corporate management concepts at the core of national bureaucracies.

Acknowledging the local level is also justified by economic theories: redistribution would be more efficient when budgetary allocations are closer to the local citizens' demands and needs. Besides, the adequacy between supply of services and locally collected taxes would make users more inclined to pay them, especially if they were participating in the decision making process in the field of providing services. The World Bank's strategy document *Urban Policies and Economic Development: an Agenda for the 1990s* defined three main orientations: 1) increasing urban productivity, 2) urban poverty reduction, and 3) environmental protection. For fundraising organizations, "local development" became a preeminent theme that was significant in strategy documents (Venard, 1993), especially in institutional support, participation and decentralized cooperation dimensions. For FAO, programs and projects must enable people to play an important role within the new policies (state withdrawal, deregulation, privatization) or in the context of a lack of policies (state failures, institutional gaps) (FAO, 1997). Other policies include improving the transfer of competences or enabling agriculture service restructuring, improving their performances especially for the rural population. Here the issue is to involve the rural population in order to improve public institutions. When there are no territorial communities, definition and consideration of terroir⁷ will be at stake.

In brief, centralized states do not seem to have the monopoly on expertise anymore and international funds are conditioned by economic policies and public administration reforms. The intent is to decentralize their competences and to acknowledge local actors presented as the most direct representatives of the population. Nowadays, the question of governance is prominent in several fields such as law or natural resource management.

⁷ By terroir, we mean soil, defined as a space enhanced by a rural community. It is close to parish (e.g. agricultural area of a parish) which means delimited area appropriated and exploited by a rural community. See Levy, Lussault (2003)

2.2. The Autonomy of Local Institutions

Tunisia includes international institutions' themes in its policy discourse, either conceptual ones such as human rights, democracy, and decentralization, or technical ones, notably those in conjunction with the Conference of Rio (creation of the committee against desertification, for water and soil conservation). People's participation in development at the local level in particular, is emphasized in the discourse and through the creation of councils at different levels. Nonetheless, recognition of the local level is limited: decentralization is limited to deconcentration (ministries have representations at regional levels without financial and decision-making autonomy) and the rural sector does not yet have any elected representatives apart from the representatives of the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (Democratic Constitutional Rally, DCR) cells, that is to say political party representatives.⁸

2.2.1. The Rural Council, A Restrictive Council

The rural council (1989) is a consultative body in areas outside of municipalities. It is composed of designated members (designated by the *chef de secteur*⁹ – *omda* in Arabic) – from the area and nominated members¹¹ (nominated by the Ministry of the Interior and Local Development, MILD) and its opinion concerns economic, social, cultural and educational matters. It is considered a vehicle between population and administration, conveying people's preoccupations and needs, and proposing solutions. It is involved in cleanliness and hygiene programs implemented in the area.

2.2.2. The Local Development Council

The intermediate echelon between local and regional levels is the *delegation*. The *délégués* (delegates) are under the authority of the *gouverneur* (governor), which is the MILD representative at the regional level. He can delegate some of his prerogatives during a precise time and subject to the approval by the Ministry of the Interior.

⁸ The presidential party, and former single party. It is still the only party at local levels.

⁹ The *chef de secteur* is the Ministry of the Interior and Local Development's representative at the rural level. He is in charge of supporting administration services. He is also a judicial police officer and a registry civil officer. In practice, he represents both the administration and the notables (Hénia, 2006; Amri, 2008).

¹¹ 1 for 1000 inhabitants; minimum 5 members; maximum 10

The local development council (LDC) was created in 1994 at this level. As is the case with the rural council, the LDC is a consultative council related to local development programs and projects. It takes part in formulating the regional development plan, in the elaboration and execution of programs in the field of cleanliness and environmental protection programs, natural resources rationalization, preservation and conservation. It also organizes the local development days decided by the *gouverneur*. The LDC is composed of elected members (municipalities and arrondissement presidents) and designated ones (rural council presidents; *chefs de secteur*; administration regional services’ representatives).

Thus, these two councils officially represent a way to transmit information from the local to the central level without meeting the criteria of representation and participation in the sense of having a majority of elected members.

2.2.3. Decision-Making at the Regional Level

1989 was a turning point with regard to creating the rural representative council and replacing *conseils de gouvernorat* (governorate councils) by *conseils régionaux* (regional councils). At the regional level (governorate), as previously said, the MILD is represented by the *gouverneur*. He is the governorate’s general administrator and the state’s representative; his competencies are broad and he is under pressure to reach results. He is also the judicial policy officer. He applies national directives at the governorate level. The *gouverneur* is assisted by two delegates and a general secretary who has a political function. Governors have a political trajectory through the DCR.

The regional council is in charge of socio-economic programs and the scheduling and formulation of land settlement plans,¹³ and examines urbanism plans – oriented according to national policy. Concerning the state’s programs, the regional council’s opinion is consultative only. As with the previous councils (especially governorate councils), its urbanism competencies are broad. It coordinates national, regional and municipal programs as well.

This council is composed of designated members (governor, governorate general secretary, presidents of rural councils) and according to

¹³ Outside of municipalities’ areas.

electoral results, some elected ones (deputies, presidents of municipalities). The governor is the regional council's president; he votes when voices are equal. In the rural sector, he also has primacy over the local authority's president. He executes the council's deliberations and the budget and he elaborates the governorate projects which are submitted to the permanent sectoral commissions.

These permanent sectoral commissions are: Planning and Finances; Economic Affairs; Agriculture and Fishing; Equipment, Housing and Land Settlement¹⁴; Social Affairs, Health and Environment; Education, Culture and Youth; Cooperation and Exterior Relations (1992); Commission to Combat Desertification (2006).

Lastly, the regional council's Office (1992) is composed of the governor, the permanent sectoral commissions' president, and the general secretary, who is in charge of coordinating works, of examining reports and of submitting them to the regional council.

In terms of needs, most of the regional investments are used for ministries' deconcentrated services' expenditures and executions. Central ministries plan investments and transfer funds to governorates. Regional councils are in charge of implementation and follow up, but not of design and decision.

2.2.4. The Democratic Constitutional Rally Local Cell: Between Administration and Party

The electoral process at micro level and more broadly in rural areas is a stake as Tunisian rural areas have no real local elected representatives, except those of the former single party, the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*. The Tunisian territory has 7500 cells and 2200 professional cells, the members of which are elected. Cells appear to be closer to the administration than a political party: indeed, they are an intermediate level between centre and periphery, to take up concepts used by Grémion (1976) analyzing French decentralization. In a way they represent a parallel administration, the sites of which respond to the necessity of watching and of establishing power relationships; moreover, cells' and the administration's territories overlap. The DCR cells are used by elites as a place of "mediation

¹⁴ Since 1992, the settlement has no longer been solely urban.

between local interests and politico-administrative institutions of the state” (Hibou, 2006).¹⁵

Cells have different functions: from an individual point of view, interviews reveal that they make administration procedures easier and faster. Adhering to DCR and getting involved in cells or in “*political associations*”¹⁶ enable people to integrate into a network, and quickly and reliably to obtain a job. Cells are also involved in designating beneficiaries for microcredit. Thereby, benefits are more financial than ideological, for the young in particular, whereas elderly people associate DCR with the former parties, *Destour* and *Neo-Destour*, and thus with to the fight for independence. From a public policy analysis point of view, DCR representations identify priority areas called *zones d’ombre* (shadow areas) that will benefit from aid programs. DCR representatives are also involved in local and national professional consultations and in the follow up of committees such as those concerning the natural resource management groups.

The political cells function as structures for the transmission of information and control: they can either include or exclude – all the so in rural areas, where not being a member easily leads to exclusion – and they are involved in the implementation of “*orientations nationales*”.¹⁷ The cells can therefore be considered as one of the development institutions.

At the local and micro-local level, the DCR cells reflect local conflicts as well, as they integrate a combination of interests and conflicts. The DCR and its structures also enable the representation of local interests and their particularisms to the centre. Moreover, the central power can support or break up those tensions to improve the public policies or to impose measures decided at the central level. Yet, the expression of these interests can lead to the exclusion of notables when they are opposed to the centre’s interests.

In the rural area, the DCR cells are all the more important since there are no elected representative bodies: thus cells constitute places where (part

¹⁵ “*médiation entre les intérêts locaux et les institutions politico-administratives de l’Etat*”.

¹⁶ A way to call student associations for instance (interviews 2008).

¹⁷ The “*orientations nationales*” is the Tunisian term to express public policies. References to nation is constituent of political discourse used since Independence (1956).

of) the population can express wishes, and where tensions develop between families or interests over access to political, social and economic resources.

The creation of ADGs, new elected bodies in charge of local development, implemented through a participative approach, has to be considered in light of this particular context of rural institutions (see Figure 1 in the appendix mapping the rural institutions). The process of implementation reveals a transfer of some competencies and the appearance of new instruments and new actors supporting participation.

3. The Agricultural Sector and the Transfer of Competences to ADGs

The environment is also a field where local development and governance themes are applied and where participation is required. Since the 1990s, the approach is said to be bottom up, putting back into question the role of centralization and state interventionism which were accused of controlling local communities and leaving them outside the decision-making process (Froger, 2006). ADGs' legislation includes participative dimensions and their implementation leads to a reconfiguration of public action: firstly participation is supported by new instruments implemented by actors from international technical assistance (international organizations staff) or national (consultants from the private sector); secondly, and more broadly, agents from the Ministry of Agriculture lose competencies in favor of private consultants.

3.1. ADGs: A “Participative” Strategy

ADGs include participative issues. These groups are the first step in the strategy to restructure rural institutions, which includes rural institution studies (2000 and 2001), central cooperatives (first semester 2000), inter-professional groups and technical centers (first semester 2000), agricultural services and chambers of agriculture. New institutions are required to be involved in marketing, agricultural goods transformations and natural resource management. In these fields, the question concerns giving priority to regional institutions to manage and protect constructions belonging to the state like water systems. Regional services are in charge of high costs. On the local level, participation boils down to rural “responsibility”: on the one hand, farmers must pay for natural resources and equipment maintenance and, on the other hand, they take part in local area development through an electoral process: members elect the ADG board committee and have a say in its workings. Rural institutions are considered as the future link between

the local population and the Ministry of Agriculture's regional services. Consequently, since 1999, two new groups have been promoted: the *Sociétés Mutuelles de Services Agricoles* (Reciprocal Organizations for Agricultural Services) and the ADGs.

ADG policy is legitimated by a radical change of orientation, making a clean sweep of the past and implicating the population from now on. The theme of reform is highly evident in the interviews and refers to a discourse that has continued since Independence, in a way a constituent discourse of Tunisian liberation and nation: to develop, structures and mentalities should be reformed.¹⁸ Mentalities and structures also refer to theories of modernization from the seventies.

ADGs are also justified by the bottom up primacy in public action, and people's participation is broadly emphasized. ADGs are presented as a new kind of group, a connecting point in the triangle of administration/farmers/natural resources. They are integrated in civil society and acknowledged as associations: farmers are grouped together giving them the strength and capability to identify problems, propose solutions, and more, to be heard and independently manage their land. The interviews also reveal technical arguments related to efficient management, justifying this new status by the volition to limit groups and administration interlocutors, in other words to simplify the government administration's work.

ADGs have large competences: their activity fields concern the improvement of productivity, collection and sale of agricultural goods on national and international markets, as well as administrating subsidies. More precisely, ADGs are in charge of natural resource protection and rationalization; local infrastructure; participation in spreading techniques to improve productivity, rangelands and animal husbandry; and cooperation with national and international agricultural organizations. Farmers are required to be involved in local development. In this sense, ADG policy is directly linked to governance and participation.

The competences given to ADGs also seem to implicate a state withdrawal through a transfer of competences from the administration to the newly created groups, i.e. to the local population. Eventually these groups are supposed to allocate the grants that were formerly allocated by the administration. In addition to those grants, they are supposed to be in charge

¹⁸ Interviews with agents from government administration (2006, 2007 and 2008).

of irrigated perimeter maintenance and popularization of agricultural techniques. Two solutions are envisaged: either farmers pay for this service, or ADGs are in charge of it. The point is to privatize popularization. In other words, “participation” means “financial responsibility”.

3.2. New Instruments Supporting Participation...

Implementation of the participation strategy is supported by the introduction of new instruments, namely persuasive ones, diffused through international technical assistance. The persuasive instruments (Larrue, 2000) concern knowledge spreading among beneficiaries and the training and sensitization of executives. This part of implementation is a way for technical assistance, either national or international, to give technical support to farmers (direct persuasive instrument) and to train national administration agents about the participation process and implementation or about agricultural techniques (indirect persuasive instrument).¹⁹

Direct persuasive instruments relate to scientific knowledge and its spreading among farmers:²⁰ sensitization is one of the dimensions of ADG implementation. At micro local level, the agricultural popularization service is in charge of spreading these techniques. NGOs, technical centers and research centers are also concerned with direct persuasive instruments, due to their support in spreading knowledge among farmers. A manager training program has also been created with the Agency for Agricultural Popularization and Training and the World Bank. The technical assistance concerns training for ADG members and sharing of experiences through national or international travels. The legislation also includes making administrative agents available to support ADGs’ management, especially for budgetary issues.

Indirect persuasive instruments concern public actors involved in implementation. Thus, they relate to trainings, participative approach seminars and handbooks that are made available for the executive administration by foreign technical assistance.²¹ Thus, agents of the *Commissariat Régional au Développement Agricole* (CRDA, the regional

¹⁹ After the trainings, the idea is that administration agents will use the participatory approach or spread it.

²⁰ G. Moser distinguishes different techniques such as pedagogy and incentive or discouraging communication (quoted by Larrue, 2000:96).

²¹ They are also a way of spreading development catchwords.

departments [services] of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources) benefit from several trainings in participative methodologies, often through a foreign financing and external supports (development project, consulting agencies).

3.3. ... and the Appearance of New Actors? Implementing Participation and the Transfer of Mediation Competency

Implementing the participative approach in international development programs includes appealing to consulting firms. National consulting has a specific place in Tunisia and must be considered in parallel to the fact that the authoritarian state has marginalized research in the social sciences for decades. But in the 1990s, the state started to use consulting to make surveys and studies concerning collective issues.

Consultants become *médiateurs* defined as “agents who realize policy’s referential construction, that is to say the creation of cognitive images determining problem perception for existing groups and the definition of appropriate solutions” (Muller, 1990).²² Now consultants spread knowledge about local stakes, design projects, and outline the ways to handle social problems and social peace. Besides, these kinds of activities are interdisciplinary, contrary to academic research.

The new *médiateurs* transform actors’ cognitive fields durably and that is the reason why they meet opposition in partnership with administration, especially with the Ministry of Agriculture, and difficulties occur when collecting data. As a matter of fact, administrative elites also constitute *médiateurs*, but the traditional ones, belonging to the most important ministry in terms of human resources and means, and who in most of the country are considered state representatives at a micro level. The traditional *médiateurs* lose privileges and importance in favor of consultants.²³

Participative programs are qualified as “new” due to the reappraisal of the previous technicist approach in favor of one focusing on people and

²² “Agents qui réalisent la construction du référentiel d’une politique, c’est-à-dire la création des images cognitives déterminant la perception du problème par les groupes en présence et la définition des solutions appropriées”

²³ Most of the consultancy agencies are located around the Ministry of Agriculture in Tunis.

their wishes. This is due to the recruitment of sociologists: “*the participative approach is the sociological approach*”.²⁴ Nonetheless, it has to be noted that consultants’ profiles do not change: the former agricultural engineers in fact become sociologists by virtue of their recruitment and their terms of reference. Indeed, training for trainers in the participative approach or feasibility studies in the context of ADG implementation are led by “agricultural-engineer sociologists” who first belonged to the government administration and now promote international methodologies applying the Tunisian administration’s vision. A profile emerges: the “ADG specialist”,²⁵ is an agricultural engineer (or agro-economist) whose career path was first in administration before joining a consultancy agency or creating one. Only a few consultants recruited as sociologists are trained sociologists²⁶ and few are independent from the government administration’s “representations”²⁷. They are the same actors in different guises. Moreover, external consultants on development projects are chosen for technical assistance among three CVs proposed by the national party.²⁸

The impact of these variables is visible in the “methodology” of ADG implementation. Consultants have to be integrated in the “system” and that is the reason why their implementation methodologies refer back to their professional identity, a “card” enabling them to work. Their methodologies and in a way their opinion must be validated and corroborated by national authorities, and they have to work under time pressure. As a consequence, consultants work under two constraints, being recruited and working according to the efficiency imperative; they are assessed on the quick implementation of ADGs, i.e. on their capacity to organize groups as fast as possible. The methodology includes either the international discourse on the whole population participating (which means not focusing on local “leaders”), or the “usual” practices, the ones stemming from an authoritarian system. In other words, consultants need to have two approvals: one from international organizations and one from national authorities.

²⁴ Interview with international staff’s member (2005).

²⁵ This remark can be extended to the field of rural sociology and local process analysis.

²⁶ Rural economists in international organisations become rural sociologists according to the emergence of new development catchwords and their stakes.

²⁷ Representation of farmers or representation of territory for instance.

²⁸ Hence there is only a small room of maneuver for the international technical assistance.

In this context, the methodology overlaps with DCR cells’ territory in terms of its administrative territory, using an administrative concept of territory, guarantor of a sort of “security” for the institutional system. During the actual implementation, people’s participation and attention to leaders are different from the international discourse: the “political authorities” (cell presidents) and the “local authorities” (*omda* and *délégué*) intervene to delimit the ADG area by validating the candidates’ list for the board committee, or by defining the functions once this committee is elected.²⁹ Besides, modalities to represent the population are pre-determined: on an area gathering three micro-areas, six candidates, that is to say two candidates per zone, are required by the consultant to form a six people committee board. In this way, the designation process is already done before the “official” elections.

In short, implementing the participatory approach is supported by persuasive instruments and it also leads to the appearance of new actors, the consultants from private agencies. Nonetheless, even if they depend on the private sector, their career path and their training do not change. Their vision and their methodology, once implemented, include administration practices and political issues. Thus, the interest in participatory approaches and in people’s participation appears to be closer to discursive practices than to the practice itself. ADGs therefore illustrate continuity in practices and administrative conceptions.

4. ADGs: A Rural Framework Technique

ADGs represent a “rural framework technique”, which Pierre Gourou defined as “techniques for elementary administration to monitor large areas, a large population, and this in a sustainable manner”³⁰ (1969) and combining the Tunisian case political, social and land tenure dimensions. They are in line with a rural framework that has lasted since the late nineteenth century. Nowadays the frame rests on both an upstream and downstream control of the groups and still appeals to coercive instruments. Besides, even if some activities seem to improve participation, some of their dimensions show limits: they re-involve the government administration and there is no significant shift in instrumentation. As we shall see, the vagueness of the

²⁹ In ADG’s, president and treasurer are the most important functions.

³⁰ “... *des techniques d’administration élémentaire permettant de contrôler de vastes surfaces, une population nombreuse, et cela de façon durable*”.

ADGs' status is also a way to frame the groups enabling and/or forbidding activities, depending on the situation.

4.1. The Roots of the Framework

Whereas ADGs appear to be part of a new strategy incorporating discourses on people's participation and governance, they are in fact part of the rural framework's continuity whose roots can be found in the Protectorate. The first sign of this framework goes back to the natural resource management groups in the late nineteenth century. The Protectorate created water syndicates and unions of water associations in 1897. The executive board of the latter was composed of members appointed by the government, and administration agents were invited to general meetings. The committee board was directly linked to the general assembly and had to explain its management activities every year.

The inclusion of the state in local population activities lasted throughout the various reforms. In 1920, les *Associations Spéciales d'Intérêt Hydraulique* (Special Associations with Water Interest, SAWI) were created to be in charge of works implementation, maintenance and water usage. Membership was free but could be compulsory for public hygiene, health, or public order matters. "The state controlled these associations in the same way as the water syndicates: it was able to force members to respect 'the founder project' " (Baduel, 1985); the director was appointed among the members of the executive board, which required subsequent agreement from the Ministry of the Interior.

The *Code des Eaux* in 1933 strengthened these associations and created a new structure, the *Groupements d'Intérêt Hydraulique* (Water Interest Groups, WIG) which still exist. WIG membership was obligatory if the population survival was at stake (like in southern and central Tunisia). The WIG board was directly under the control of the administration and had to submit reports about its activities directly to them and not only to part of the general assembly. The WIG director was designed by the Prime Minister for three years.

In 1936, a legal decision modified the constitution and changed the organization. The WIGs carried out a study about all individual and collective projects in the water field that could enhance the country and improve rural livelihoods. It supported farmer membership in Collective Interest Associations (CIAs) to make them be involved in implementation,

equipment maintenance and management. The same legal decision created these CIAs (antecedents of the ADGs) and the *Comité Supérieur d’Hydraulique Agricole* (Higher Committee of Agricultural Water). CIAs were created based on farmers’ personal interests or through a governmental decision. Here, the instrumentation was coercive, based on procedural and legal dimensions; article 4 indicated that “within one year from the promulgation of the constitutive decree of each group, users of agricultural water equipment entirely or partially paid by state, regions or municipalities and who would not be part of a SAWI according to the decree from 5th August 1933, will be organized through CIA” (Baduel, 1985).

4.2. The Involvement of the Ministry of the Interior and Local Development

ADG implementation also reveals continuity in territorial public action: the state broadly steps in through its representatives at different levels. ADGs are at the core of an institutional and, more precisely, administrative environment.

Three actors are involved in ADG’s policy: the Ministry of Financial Affairs but mainly the Ministry of the Interior that is called “Ministry of the Interior and Local Development” since 2002. Their function essentially concerns territory and population control and in this way they can be considered as a control administration. ADGs are now under their control and no longer under that of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MAWR) is however in charge of ADG monitoring and implementation; their functions are limited to executive ones.³¹ Different General Departments are involved, especially the General Department of Financing and Investment of Producers Organizations (DG/FIOP) and other departments in accordance with group activities: water (DG/GR), water and soil conservation (DG/ACTA), and forest (DG/Forêt). Besides, the Agency for Agricultural Popularization and Training which “popularizes” at the micro level is also concerned with ADGs due to their new prerogatives related to spreading best practices and techniques.

³¹ Some agents are “personally” involved in monitoring the ADGs, e.g. by correcting the ADG budget.

But ADGs are not only a group to be established: their efficiency is linked to the efficiency of MAWR's services: all administration regional departments (CRDAs) are represented in a follow up committee on professional organizations at the regional level, the president of which is the governor (see Figure 2 in the appendix for a map of the ADGs' institutional environment).

4.3. Policy Continuity Through the Use of Coercive Instruments

There has not been a significant shift in the instrumentation. Even though reforms of rural institutions are supported by training for the purpose of CRDA (the regional departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources) administrative agents in charge of ADGs' implementation and for the purpose of beneficiaries, it appears from interviews that these instruments do not (yet?) concern the CRDA of all governorates and persuasive instruments are not the main ones. The main instrument remains the coercive one with a procedural and legal base (Hood, 1986; Larrue, 2000). Indeed, ADG constitution modalities are both a coercive instrument and a procedural one. Initially, an authorization from the Ministry of the Interior's regional services was needed to create an ADG. After some reforms to ease the administration's procedures, ADGs are now created by a declaration; nonetheless, this declaration must be proved by a deposit slip (and farmers may have to wait for it for a year); besides, the term "authorization" remains in the vocabulary.³²

ADGs can also be dissolved by the *gouverneur*, invoking several reasons. First of all, the creation of ADGs is compulsory and former natural resource management groups will be dissolved if they do not evolve into ADGs.³³ Poor budgetary management is also a cause for dissolution: the *gouverneur* can initiate a budgetary audit through the regional financial comptroller from the Ministry of Financial Affairs.³⁴

The ADG constitution is strongly defined by the legal framework. First of all, a temporary committee with land owners, local farmers and

³² Interviews 2006 and 2007.

³³ The deadline was fixed for the 17th of March 2008.

³⁴ The *gouverneur* can also initiate an audit based on other reasons. Besides, the recommendations from the Ministry of Financial Affairs' representative are not inevitably followed. This is another illustration of the Ministry of the Interior's preeminence.

possibly fishermen prepares a list of people who would be interested in participating in an ADG. The legal status is written down following a legal procedure. A temporary committee organizes the general constitutive meeting where at least half of all members must take part, and statutes are approved and elections are organized. The first governing board is elected and this meeting can be regarded as a local electoral process as the final committee board is elected. The board members elect the president and decide who will be treasurer and secretary.³⁵ The minutes are written down and are sent to the *délégué* and to the relevant CRDA services.

The next steps relate to administrative procedures and legalization: the case file (ADG’s name, membership lists, status, area concerned, goals, activities) is deposited at the governorate or at the delegation offices; in return, members receive a deposit slip and an official number. A legal announcement is published in the *Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*. The minutes of each meeting are sent to the MILD representative.

In brief, the governor, and more broadly the Ministry of the Interior, has an *in itinervis* control, that is to say throughout ADGs’ creation and activities.

4.4. Vagueness in Defining ADG Activities as a Way to Limit and to Frame Bottom-up Local Development

In practice, ADGs are located at the crossroads between the administration, associations and local entrepreneurs, considering the vagueness and the different conceptions of them revealed during on-site visits.

The creation of ADGs implies new activities. Nonetheless, some of them are based on a re-involvement of the government administration and their vagueness is also a way of framing them. Firstly, even if the former technical and economic study required to create an ADG, and regional services previously realized by the MAWR, has disappeared from the legal framework, it remains in practice. In the case of an evolution from a specialized group (water, forest, etc.) to an ADG, the choice is made by the administration: they “sensitize” people from the area in to order to make them accept the ADG. The administration can also decide not to make a group evolve, which means dissolving it.

³⁵ As said before, in practice the *délégué* can intercede.

Secondly, two shifts appeared in 2004. First, the ADGs are not considered as the only actors responsible for spreading techniques, rather they are one among many. Second, there was a legal modification concerning the removal of natural resource police competencies,³⁶ a privilege that the *Groupements Forestiers d'Intérêt Collectif* (Collective Forest Interest Groups) and *Associations de Propriétaires d'Olivettes* (Olive Grove Landlords Associations) previously had. Since that year, only regional administration services have been allowed to exercise this right. Through these modifications, the state gets back all its privileges, and the administration is fully (re)involved.

Finally, the vagueness of ADG status (private sector? Administration? Local entrepreneurship?) is fostered in practice. “National orientations”, translated in para-statutory documents (guidelines for administration services for instance), or norms even without being law, as well as interviewees in central departments put the emphasis on distinguishing ADGs’ associative status from their economic one. Thus, ADGs cannot sell inputs anymore or rent incubators for animals, activities only the Reciprocal Organizations for Agricultural Services are allowed to perform. Yet, most “successful” ADGs do carry out these kinds of activities. Besides, ADGs can benefit from investment grants allocated in the field of agriculture and fishery, so enterprises and other actors external to the government administration (especially consultants) consider ADGs as local entrepreneurs. Thus consultancy missions related to ADG implementation and durability (social and economic viability analysis) clearly associate ADG with local entrepreneurship. They identify supply *and* marketing channels, giving clues to promote enterprises’ micro-projects. Lastly, the budget composition and the Ministry of Financial Affairs representative’s intervention contribute to the confusion around ADGs being part of the government administration and/or autonomous local bodies. Indeed, ADGs are at the crossroads between the public and private sectors. Nonetheless, government control is *ex post* and not *ex ante*.

However, as mentioned earlier, ADGs can be dissolved when their economic activities produce profits. The administration can allow ADGs conduct these kinds of activities, but they can also sanction them. As a consequence, ADGs can potentially be dissolved on the basis of inappropriate activities. This also raises the question of ADGs who do not have many natural resources to manage: what will their activities be? To

³⁶ Recording an offence.

what extent will farmers be interested in them? A financial problem occurs for ADGs with few natural resources to exploit. This distinction is thus a real constraint and leads to farmers’ lack of interest for this kind of group, all the more so as in cases of dissolution by the state (made possible due to non-conformist activities), ADGs’ goods become property of the state.

The solution to encourage farmers’ interest in and to ensure viability of ADGs is to consider ADGs as local entrepreneurs; on the other hand, these economic activities, opposed to legislation and to the administration’s central services, constitute a sort of “sword of Damocles”, making control – and dissolution – possible.

Conclusion

The Tunisian rural sector has known several reforms, including civil society participation and state withdrawal which are at the core of institutional discourses and strategies. ADGs are presented as a way to improve participation, local development and to revitalize the economy, implicating farmers in equipment maintenance and in the local decision-making process through a formal electoral process. They constitute an illustration of participation and governance strategies that would be a vehicle to make the local level efficient, transferring competencies to farmers, supported by the diffusion of persuasive instruments by international technical assistance.

Tunisian development programs are said to have evolved from technical to sociological and participative ones. However, having considered the linkages between the government administration and ADGs, participation should be seen as being of the “framed provoked” type. The government administration is still strong and ADGs, at the crossroads between the public and private sectors, remain a rural framework technique. In the light of ADG implementation, participation and governance in Tunisia imply a territorial state redeployment and population control through the involvement of the Ministry of the Interior and Local Development. The control is *in itinervis*, i.e. at all stages. ADGs remain a rural framework technique, the roots of which can be found in the Protectorate, and supported by a coercive instrument. Contrary to the official discourse, the relations between state and society do not really change.

Although the concept of “good governance” in the terminology of international organizations is based on liberal ideology and refers to state withdrawal, the Tunisian way of implementing it implies state redeployment on society. When analyzing governance and participation, this case study

points to the necessity to take politics into account and not to restrict the analysis to technical and quantitative issues.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Rural Institutions in Tunisia

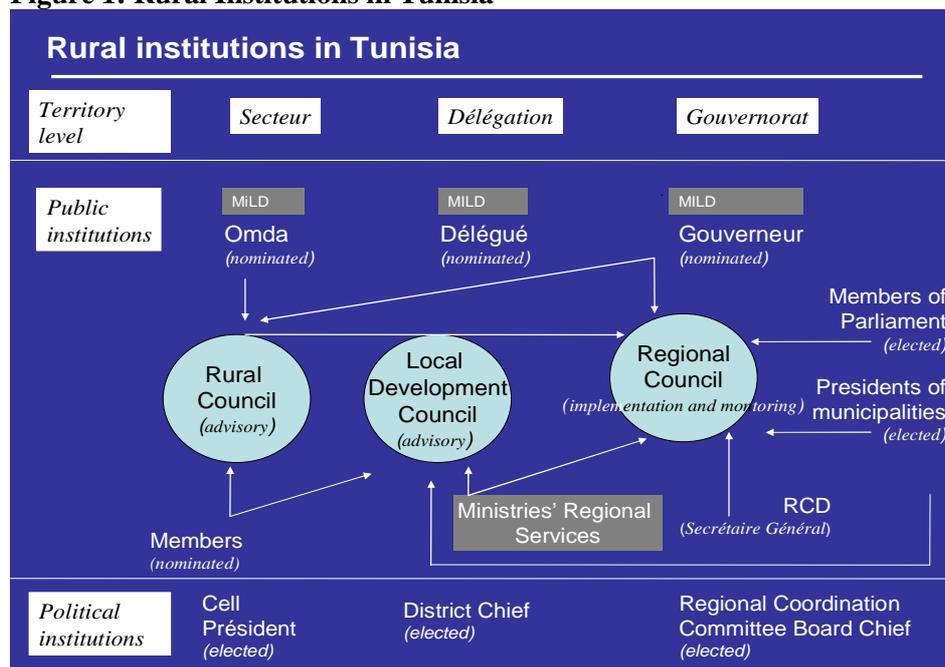


Figure 2: ADGs' Institutional Environment

