



JULY 2013
FUTURE CAPE TOWN SUMMIT

Summit Discussion Paper: Engaged City

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Urban Intelligence Unit (UIU)

These Summit Proceedings have been produced and compiled by the Urban Intelligence Unit (UIU), the research wing of Future Cape Town.

We would like to thank all of our Summit Panelists for their attendance and a great discussion.

UIU's research agenda currently focuses on public space and public engagement.

Further information about UIU and copies of UIU work can be found at:

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SUMMIT PROCEEDINGS 29 JULY 2013

INTRODUCTION

On Monday 29 July 2013, Future Cape Town hosted its third summit on the topic of public participation and engagement. This session was sponsored and hosted by the Taj Hotel Cape Town, and included a small gathering of urban planning, design and architecture professionals, city officials, as well as NGOs with an interest in urban issues.

The aim of this meeting was to discuss the issue of how various levels of government, as well as professionals in the built environment, engage with the general public and each other around projects in the urban space, particularly large-scale ones. Recent events in the City of Cape Town have created a sense that public participation is a contested issue, with processes often mired in red tape or failing to reach the correct audiences in a meaningful way. Further afield, the recent spate of unrest in Istanbul, Cairo, Rio de Janeiro and other cities of the Global South has highlighted the fact that effective public participation is a critical part of functioning urban societies in the 21st century.

ATTENDEES

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ISSUES RAISED

One of the first points to arise was the fact that there are often unpopular decisions to be made which are necessitated by issues in the wider society, and that there is a need to effectively balance participative processes between those mandated to produce change, those with the requisite expertise in a particular field and the needs of local communities. Further issues were raised around who exactly falls into the communities to be consulted, and how to expedite this process and avoid excessive delays in the project. The distinction was also drawn between public decision-making and public participation.

There was a clear sense that some of particularly vocal groups in the City are often motivated by NIMBYism. This is a problematic issue in our unequal society as many new developments, including those beneficial to the entire city, are often opposed in favour of the status-quo. It is often the case that some interest groups have enough wealth, free time and access to lawyers and other professionals that they are able to make their voices inordinately loud, and effectively shut down projects that might benefit weaker groups. Efforts should be made during the public participation process not simply to create a neutral space, but to empower the quieter voices to be heard such as to acknowledge the deep inequalities in our society.

In addition, some voices are often not present because of their spatial and social distance from the debated project. A particular project may have a significant impact on a community quite distant from it, for example, the proposed Wescap development would draw resources and money away from poor communities elsewhere in the city. Efforts should be made to connect the dots and include these affected communities.

The speed and cost of the participation process is important. It is clear that it should be budgeted for, but its limits need to be clearly set out, in order that costs do not spiral out of control. Furthermore, it should happen at a pace so that communities do not become fatigued by excessive delays, or projects bankrupted. Following on from this, there must be clear expectations about what the scope and power of the participative process will be, so as not to create unrealistic expectations. At the same time, it is clear that communities need to feel that their concerns are adequately addressed. In many cases, opposition to a particular project is created simply because it is thrust upon a community without explanation or warning, rather than some failure in the project itself.

A point was made that in many countries politicians who do not act according to the public interest are swiftly voted out of power. In South Africa, we have separated our political lives from practice, creating a situation where City officials are often seen as being responsible for problems, rather than the political councillors who hold the final authority. There was an overwhelming sense that while much has been done to support democratic processes, that more could still be done if innovative proposals are received from the private sector.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies were mentioned as significant examples of public engagement:

1. MANCHESTER: The regeneration of Moss Side and Hulme areas in Manchester, UK during the 1990s was presented as an excellent example of a bottom-up approach to urban regeneration., with significant factors being the provision of a large budget to the public participation process, with significant community involvement and say-so over the project.
2. GRASSY PARK, CAPE TOWN: The Princess Vlei community vision. Amidst a highly controversial plan driven by local government and developers to develop the Princess Vlei wetland into a shopping mall, the affected community has created its own vision for the area, after an extensive process of engagement with its own constituents. This exhibits how mobilization around issues can be used as a process to empower communities. Furthermore, the visioning process was carried out without any additional cost to the City – demonstrating that where communities are deeply engaged in participative processes, it does not necessarily make them more costly.
3. GUGULETHU, CAPE TOWN: One of the sites where the Name Your Hood and Name Your Street programs were run. *Name Your Street* seeks to solicit proposals for the renaming of streets prefixed “NY” (Native Yard) by the Apartheid Government, while *Name Your Hood* seeks to create or consolidate the identities of neighbourhoods through the process of naming and associating particular characteristics with them. In Gugulethu the programs had over 30 000 people participating, resulting in the renaming of 91 streets and the creation of 8 ‘hoods.’
4. NEW YORK CITY: The Municipal Arts Society of New York (MASNYC), a non-profit organisation, was mentioned as an example which draws on citizens and professionals to engage in urban issues and build a vision for the city. One of their most recent projects was the creation of a visioning and lobbying process around the future of the overcrowded and grim Penn Train Station, beneath Madison Square Garden (MSG) multi-purpose arena. MSG’s land use permit was under review, with the potential of granting them rights to the site in perpetuity, an event which would likely prevent the substantial upgrading of the space. MASNYC’s approach consisted of the creation of a coalition of interested parties to lobby for a shorter permit, as well as a design-envisioning process to produce alternative concepts for the space. These concepts were developed by leading architectural firms and presented for public comment.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

1. Ensure adequate budgeting and planning: Ensure that a significant percentage of the project budget is allocated for the public participation process, and that this process is properly planned and delineated as part of the overall building scheme.
2. Communicate a vision: Designers and planners should submit mock-ups of their designs and buildings models where relevant, to the affected communities for scrutiny and comment. This could be done by creating a mini-exhibition at the nearest town hall or public space, or by creating an informational website.
3. Give the public a stake in decision making: A significant proportion of the weighting of the final choice of project should be given to the community. For example, a proposed public building should allow for 5-20% (or higher) of the final choice of design to be decided by public vote.
4. Plasticity: minor changes to project scope or design should be easier to action, without the extensive application process they currently have to undergo. These changes should not affect projects in other parts of the city.
5. Build local ownership: Local ownership of the project should be fostered from the get-go, through engagement, education and community involvement in the process. This will help reduce vandalism and other forms of property crime.
6. A representative committee: The creation of a project steering committee that has significant and representative numbers of locals sitting on it.
7. Empowerment of people: It is not simply enough to create a neutral space for comment, one must ensure that the voiceless are empowered to make themselves heard. Extensive investment in engagement becomes a tool for educating communities about civic issues, and will build a culture of active citizenship over time.
8. Timing of public participation: Stakeholders are generally only brought in for participative processes after the parameters of a project have already been set (for example, by city planners), and the public can then only respond within that framework. Participatory planning should allow the public to help define the *questions* that need to be answered by the planning process. This applies mostly to statutory processes like developing a Spatial Development Framework, not to developer-led proposals.
9. Empowerment of citizen organizations: If citizens are to be empowered to engage actively in city-making issues, NGOs and community-based organisations that deal directly with urban development issues need to be encouraged and supported with development strategies and funding. It was noted that there has been a scarcity of these sorts of much-needed organisations in South Africa since 1994.

SUMMIT DISCUSSION PAPER

“the drama playing out in global cities is not only, and perhaps not even principally, a struggle between haves and have-nots. It goes deeper. Today’s urban citizens, whether in Istanbul, Cairo or New York, want to be listened to; they want their city to work better and more equitably; they want dignity.” - John Rossant, Chair of the New Cities Foundation

INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of public participation in all aspects of the democratic process cannot be understated. This is particularly true in the urban context of developing regions, where cities are struggling to keep up with the pace of development demands as more people move in.
2. The protests and unrests in Istanbul, Cairo, Rio de Janeiro and other cities of the Global South which have made global headlines are recent reminders the pitfalls of insufficient public engagement by all actors in a city.
3. In Cape Town, engagement is seen as slow and crippled by red-tape. The purpose of the summit is to tackle the issue of public participation, with a focus on Cape Town, and engagement around urban developments and policies, and to find practical ways forward.

CASE STUDIES

4. The process public input in the city’s developments has come under the magnifying glass, as a result of two policy proposals by the City of Cape Town. The first relates to the centralisation of land use planning decisions with one public official, which would limit public participation in large scale development applications, while the second entails the repeal of existing policies on public engagement requiring consultation with just the landowner. In an open letter to the Mayor of Cape Town, Len Swimmer, the Chairman of the Greater Cape Town Civic Alliance describes these policy proposals as the “very antithesis of democracy and its belief in the rights of a population to partake in matters affecting their daily lives”.
5. Wescap is a future 3,100 hectare housing development located 25 kilometres from Cape Town CBD. The development requires the extension of the City’s urban edge but also proposes to place up to 1 million people with the “red” evacuation zone of Koeberg nuclear power station. This development shows the current system’s flaws by the fact that a development of this magnitude, and requiring the contradiction of existing City policies and many established urban design principles, can pass muster with no more than a handful of public submissions for and against. As a result, the majority of opposition has had to be voiced through the press, civic organisations and social media.

6. The Trans-Israel, or Yitzhak Rabin Highway began operating in the early 2000s, as a north-south transport corridor through Israel, allowing travellers to bypass the congested Tel-Aviv region. Parts are still currently under construction, and it lengthens as this construction proceeds. The case represents a failure of public participation, as its proposers managed to exclude alternative voices through a variety of rhetorical ploys that created a sense that the project was inevitable: that is, it was the only logical and reasonable answer to transport issues in the country, out of a variety of possible solutions. This was accomplished by a number of means. Firstly, the problem was defined in such a way as to ensure that that the project appeared to be the inescapable solution. Secondly, efforts were made to limit any debate to questions internal to the project itself i.e one could question 'how' it should proceed, but not 'if' it should proceed. Thirdly, project components were presented as achieved or approved before this was actually the case; and lastly, the project history was retold as the smooth unfolding of a well-executed plan, rather than the haphazard and contested process it actually was.

7. The Southbank Centre is a well known public space for its recreation activities and skateboarding in particular in Britain. However, plans have been put forth to transform this space into a 120 million Pound retail development. This will mean finding an alternative area for the existing skateboarding park and there have been suggestions to move it further down the Southbank river. The situation though is not as clear-cut as proposed, since the Southbank Centre is a culturally rich heritage, being that it is the oldest recognised skate park in the world. Given the sensitivity about moving the park to another site, an online petition has been drawn and directed to the Mayor of London as a matter for national attention. The petition not only addresses the concern for the threat of a heritage space but also the possible erosion of a thriving community identity born as a result of that cultural space. Other efforts to encourage public engagement on the matter is awareness campaigns such as an open air concert and social media efforts with a Twitter page @SouthBankCentre. The proposed redevelopment has been delayed, but the case does raise some interesting questions about rights to public spaces.

8. Between 2001 and 2008, Parisian authorities recognised the need for public consultation in the development of public spaces in the city of Paris. In order to do so, they experimented with a variety of approaches to apply public engagement in the redevelopment of two public spaces in particular, namely Place de la République and Boulevard Diderot. The consultation process in Place de la République was divided into a number of phases; the first phase comprised a series of surveys, which were undertaken while other phases involved consultation workshops. These workshops were based on gathering the expertise of individuals in the respective neighbourhoods on the redevelopment of the public spaces concerned. The consultation on the regeneration of

the Boulevard Diderot involved a holistic approach involving all stakeholders to apply their user expertise in the further planning of the project. The public engagement strategies for both cases contribute to "the evolution of public design processes", that shies away from the traditional top-down approach towards a more user-experience approach to design.

9. Downtown Vancouver in British Columbia is considered to be one of most sought after districts in the city. The real estate boom in the area has resulted in the lack of public space outdoors. Following this, the city has made efforts to close the 800 block of Robson Street, which runs through the centre of the downtown area. The area has been temporarily closed off to traffic, thus allowing vendors, artists, pedestrians and all other members of the public to occupy and access the space creatively. The temporary public space has become a success thereby enabling the City of Vancouver to launch a public consultation process in order to determine whether this space should be permanently closed off to traffic. The consultation initiative includes the launch of a social media 'Twitter' campaign, an online survey, a letter and petition campaign, an electronic mailing list and a number of public events highlighting the number of traffic usage and patterns, to be hosted around the city. This move is said to be encouraging an interesting shift towards the democratization of urban design for the city.
10. Denver's South Lincoln neighbourhood is currently undergoing a regeneration process which can only be described as the ideal model for revitalizing old and derelict public housing sites. What makes this project so unique from other public housing projects however, is the predevelopment public engagement initiative by the Denver Housing Authority (DHA). The South Lincoln revitalization project is the projected redevelopment of a 17,5 acre area where the DHA aims to replace 182 apartments with the inclusion of 457 homes of which 300 will be public housing, workforce homes and other forms of affordable housing. The end result of this housing project will be to produce a sustainable, green and affordable mixed income neighbourhood. The project was shaped by a number of community engagement activities that consisted of group interviews and community meetings, a 30-member steering committee to oversee development, and ongoing public commentary in order to further the goals and design of the project. Such activities also included community members determining the location of public spaces and facilities, as well as the introduction of new concepts. This approach to include community engagement in the predevelopment phase was sought to usher a new integrated approach to urban design and planning, and a community where groups of individuals were able to choose types of livability as a best fit for community identity.
11. During March 2012, the White House Office for Public Engagement together with the General Services Administration in the United States gathered a conglomerate of more than 300

community leaders and federal agencies to a series of summits which started in Columbus, Ohio.

The conversation sparked a social media buzz via the Twitter hashtag #WHSummit whereby people attending and not attending the summit were able to participate and bring their thoughts and ideas to the fore. This series of summits otherwise known as Open Spaces - a public engagement initiative aimed at encouraging participation through social media particularly through the use of Twitter. This allows the conversation to continue well after the summit and establishing a conversation and knowledge network on a global scale. The initiative was well received and favourably adopted by participants worldwide.

12. Bogota, Colombia's capital city is taking a positive turn for its urban development. The city has experienced pressures of increasing urban growth with an average of 5.5 % persons added to the population annually. Also with approximately 1.7 million commuters in the downtown area alone has created municipal instability and an increasing demand for services. This has resulted in the full realisation that the traditional top-down approach to solving urban problems has been unrealistic, authoritarian and ineffective. Alternatively, the city authorities have considered a bottom-up approach to urban planning whereby citizens of Bogota are able to have their say on big urban projects for their city. One such initiative has been the launch of 'My Ideal City' - a web portal aimed at allowing residents to provide their views and suggestions on improving public spaces in the downtown area. This has since progressed into a forum where citizens could debate about urban planning from issues ranging from housing to disaster management initiatives. The 'My Ideal City' initiative was recently exhibited in Berlin. Here, the exhibition demonstrated five bottom-up approaches to Berliners as workable solutions that may be applicable to cities faced with similar urban concerns.

13. The Chicago Police Department have decided to start a Twitter account in order to engage citizens more on issues of crime in Chicago. The move to experiment with social media was part of a plan to modify their Alternative Policing Strategy in the wake of a crime spree in the wake of the recent Fourth of July celebrations. The Twitter account(s) were purposed to encourage citizens to share anonymous tip offs with the police as well as tweet photos and video evidence, while the police will be able to share various events with community members. However the public has dismissed this social media initiative as nothing more than "a harmless brand page" that merely focuses on event dates and periodical notices, than sharing actual updates on crime in the districts. Another criticism was that anonymity could not be guaranteed via Twitter, the use of social media by criminals and that some tweets will be effective in spreading rumours and unnecessary panic on criminal activities. This gap between the community and the police could still be lessened if the police maintain social media connections with the public thereby enabling a relationship of trust over the long run.

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