
Participatory planning, justice, and climate change in Durban, South Africa

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Abstract. A changing climate seriously challenges our sociopolitical and economic systems. Elaborating on one possible element of a successful human response, this paper looks at how participatory governance is treated in the literatures on social justice and climate change. This paper applies the works of Habermas and Foucault, as well as recent work from the fields of urban and environmental planning, to clarify how the balance between structure, power, and agency influences attempts to address social inequality and climate change. Applying this general framework to a case study of Durban, South Africa, the paper then discusses the effectiveness of participatory structures in practice. This case study provides a productive space to study the intersection of social and environmental concerns. It also allows us to explore how interactions between formal and informal participation expose the limits both of confrontational (Foucauldian) and of consensus-based (Habermasian) approaches to governance. These limitations are instructive as we attempt to create cities that are both socially just and environmentally sustainable.

Introduction

Participatory local democracy has inspired hopes, in both social and environmental policy circles, that popular participation beyond the ballot box will produce more just and environmentally sound development. Radical bioregionalists like Carr (2004) have proffered their support, as have organs of global trade liberalization like the World Bank (1997; 2000a; 2000b) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001). In its 2007 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) also began discussing the merits of participation (Sathaye et al, 2007; Yohe et al, 2007). Agreement among such an ideologically diverse set of actors calls for closer scrutiny of ‘participatory governance’. My intent in this paper is to review the literatures surrounding the social and environmental impacts of participatory processes, and to look critically at claims that participation can help local governments address climate change in the context of uneven development.

Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas, as well as recent work from the fields of urban and environmental planning, I parse the various forms that participation can assume in order to develop a clearer understanding of its broad appeal. This provides context for a case study of the coastal city of Durban, South Africa, a city that has committed significant resources to designing participatory processes that address the apartheid legacy of social and economic inequality.⁽¹⁾ As part of these processes, it has also declared an increased commitment to environmental sustainability (eThekweni, 2006). In addition, the city is home to an active civil society community which pursues its aims both within and outside of these formal channels. Durban is therefore an excellent site to observe the relationship between consensus and conflict within participatory planning. It also makes Durban a productive location

⁽¹⁾ Following a merger with its extended metropolitan area, Durban became known officially as the municipality of eThekweni. In the areas where I conducted my interviews, however, ‘Durban’ is still the name most commonly used to refer to the city, while eThekweni is used for official municipal documents. This paper follows those conventions.

to test the hopes of the IPCC and others that participatory local practices can lead to successful responses to global warming (Smit et al, 2001; Yohe et al, 2007). Finally, Durban's racialized and highly polarized inequalities in terms of quality of life and access to basic services make it a microcosm of the international economic and environmental apartheid currently frustrating the formation of an international climate regime.

The analysis of Durban presents the results of three months of fieldwork within the municipal bureaucracy as well as with community groups in the South Durban Basin, an industrial–residential area particularly affected by urban environmental issues. Site visits, workshop participation, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and informal conversation with community members all provided a view of the evolving but still precarious balance between environmental and socioeconomic concerns within the municipality. For this paper, the case study is focused specifically on the participatory facets of the municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process, which guides the prioritization and implementation of development goals within the city.

Public participation: social justice, democracy, and climate change

Despite some similarities, the arguments which the literatures on social justice and climate change develop around participatory processes are very different. These two broad areas of study are themselves composed of competing schools of thought. They range from Foucauldian treatises on resistance and struggle (Pithouse, 2006) to visions of deliberation and consensus that owe more to Habermas's concept of institutionalized communicative rationality (Jenssen, 2008, McGee et al, 2003, Pelletier et al, 1999). What follows will give a brief taste of these debates and set the stage for an analysis of Durban's participatory planning initiatives.

Participatory paths to social justice

There is a basic bundle of benefits seen to arise from broadening political participation: better informed policy makers produce better policy, and government transparency and accountability increase, as do citizens' rights and the perceived legitimacy of government policy (CPP, 2005; Melo and Baiocchi, 2006; OECD, 2001). This reduces public opposition, and creates consensus over the direction of development, and facilitates implementation (Holmes and Scoones, 2000, Pelletier et al, 1999; Taylor and Fransman, 2004).

Advocates for social justice argue that participatory democracy succeeds where representative democracy fails. In situations of preexisting social inequality, traditional representative systems magnify disparities by empowering those with the resources (ie time, money, and education) to participate while further excluding others (Abrahamsen, 2000; CPP, 2005; McGee et al, 2003). In contrast, participatory democratic processes encourage the traditionally excluded to make their needs known. Further, truly deliberative forums are celebrated for creating an environment where participants can gain the skills, understanding, and organizing capabilities to interact more effectively with the state and to participate more meaningfully in decision-making processes (Abers, 2000; McGee et al, 2003).

But new participatory structures can also perpetuate and amplify inequality. By providing new avenues for the already powerful and politically savvy to exercise their influence, further marginalization may occur (Fung and Wright, 2001; Mansbridge, 1983, Saunders, 1997). Participation can also produce new forms of inequality by playing into the retreat of the welfare state and the offloading of service delivery to NGOs, community groups, or local residents (Ackerman, 2004; Heller, 2001, Mohan, 2002a).

In addition, participatory processes can be used by state or development agencies to increase the efficiency of rolling out predetermined projects, without truly empowering local residents to question the projects' objectives or the market-based logics which often underpin them (Mohan, 1999; 2002a; 2002b; Shah, 1997).

The coexistence of these conflicting hopes and fears can be clarified by being more specific about what is meant by 'participation'. To this end, the literature on participatory processes discusses hierarchies of participation—often depicted as ladders. Arnstein's (1969) foundational paper began this trend with a typology that moves from manipulation and therapy (two forms of nonparticipation) at the bottom, to the top rung of full citizen control. Coming out of the confrontational urban politics of 1960s America, this model portrays a transition between competing forms of exclusive control (with power *either* in the hands of citizens *or* those of the state) based on an oppositional juxtaposition between the powerful and the powerless. Subsequent models, arising from very different contexts, have modified both the nature and the number of the rungs, and the underlying perception of power and the relationship between the state and its constituents (see figure 1).

Reworking Arnstein's work in light of UK-based community-development work, Wilcox (1994) produced a widely cited guide to effective participation based on five key stages (see figure 1). Rather than emphasizing conflict, this model takes collaborative consensus building as the fundamental basis for the relationship between communities and the state. Tilting the ladder in yet another direction, Eyben (2003) provides an overview of the shifting perception of participation within international development

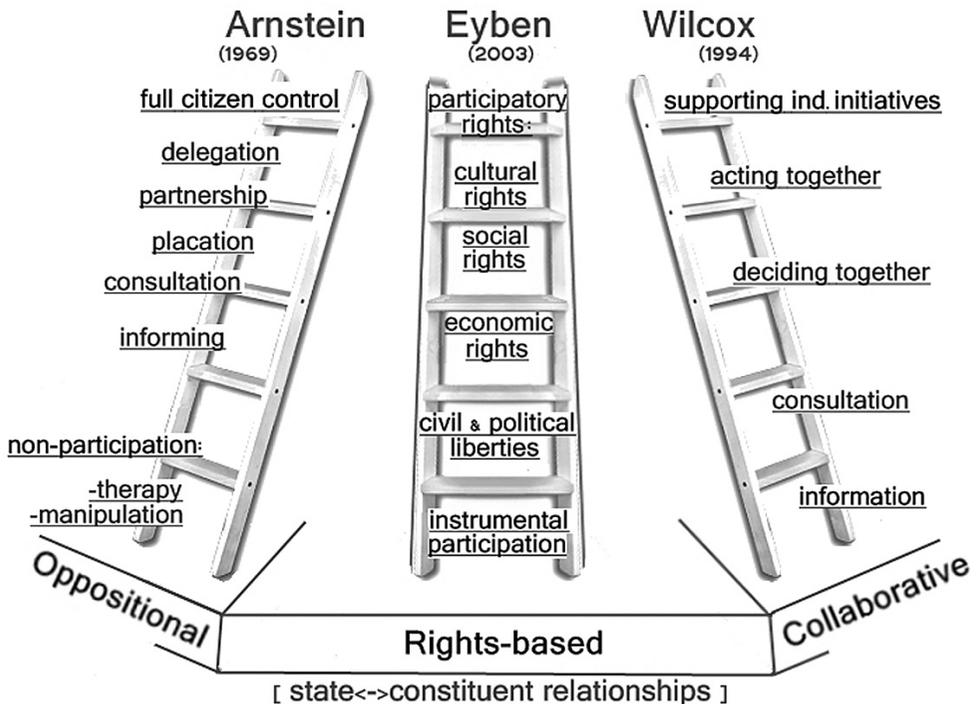


Figure 1. Models of participation. Three models of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Eyben, 2003; Wilcox, 1994) are summarized using the common visual metaphor of the ladder. Participatory processes are seen to progress up the rungs of the ladder from insincere and manipulative fora, to ones which give citizens increasing power and autonomy. At the base of each ladder is a term denoting the perceived nature of power and state–society relationships implicit in each model.

agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank (WB), and Oxfam. She argues that a shift has taken place: away from a technical and instrumental approach to participation (intended to increase the effectiveness of foreign aid), to a rights-based approach based on recognition of the importance of local political processes. In this model the right to participation presides, because it is only through participation that other rights can be prioritized and resources assigned to support them (see also CPP, 2005). These diverse participatory models carry within them the imprint of the struggles that shaped them, and their differences in many ways mirror the debate between Foucault and Habermas on the role of struggle and consensus within the modern state.

Structure and power: Habermas and Foucault

The debate between Habermas and Foucault provides a theoretical foundation and valuable critical tools for discussing the value of conflict and consensus within social organizations.⁽²⁾ Habermas's concept of a 'communicative rationality' is often cited as the root for the popular association between participation and consensus. For Habermas, debate is a "unifying, consensus-bringing force a 'central experience' in the life of a human being" (1983, page 10). At the societal level, it is deliberation's ability to create consensus that makes social action possible (Flyvbjerg, 1998a, page 212). Recognizing that social and political inequalities often exclude and disempower specific actors, Habermas argues that properly designed institutions and procedural rules can ensure equal participation and that decisions are based on consensus brought about by rational argument not coercion or violence. At its most profound, deliberation becomes a transformative process both for the individual and for the group. Rather than taking values and interests as fixed, the deliberative process allows participants to debate and shape the shared ethical values which guide their community and allows individual actors to discover new interests linked to the common good (Habermas, 1983; 1996).

Echoes of this vision of participation can be seen in the works of Eyben and Wilcox, discussed above, and have been taken up to varying degrees by development organizations like the UNDP, the WB, Oxfam, and the OECD (Eyben, 2003; OECD, 2001). In many instances, however, while these organizations maintain Habermas's institutional design and consensus, they stop short of pursuing true transformative deliberation. They are criticized for simply creating venues for bargaining and manipulation to increase efficient project implementation (Clever, 1999; Cook and Kothari, 2001). The WB has warned its staff that, while inclusion and consensus are to be aimed for, engaging with civil society organizations can result in problems of "conflict and antagonisms... between government and CSOs or among CSOs" (World Bank, 2000a, page 7). As Mohan (2002a) argues, "surely, such differences of opinion are part and parcel of a vibrant democracy and should not be regarded as problems" (page 129).

A significant critique of this approach argues that a focus on perfecting the techniques and institutions of participation encourages instrumentalism, and distances practitioners and participants from the truly transformative potential of participatory processes (Clever, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 1998a; Mohan, 2002a; 2002b; Owens, 2000). Clever, lamenting participation's transformation into a "managerial exercise based on 'toolboxes' of procedures and techniques... 'domesticated' away

⁽²⁾This debate has been assembled from published works by contemporary scholars, and is not one that actually took place between the two men. Although both were aware of each other's work, and had made attempts to create a forum where a real debate could take place, these plans were never carried out. See Flyvbjerg's (1998a) excellent discussion of this debate.

from its radical roots” calls on researchers to be more attentive to issues of power within communities (1999, page 608). Power can determine not only who is included in participatory processes, but the way in which they participate and the conclusions that are reached (Cleaver, 1999; Hajer, 2005; Mohan, 2002b; Pellizzoni, 2001). Returning to a view similar to Arnstein’s, Mohan (2002b, page 46) emphasizes that participatory development “is fundamentally about power.... Even many supposedly pro-participation Development Agencies are incredibly powerful and show a marked reluctance to release control. Participation is a conflictual and, sometimes, violent process whereby the less powerful must struggle for increased control over their lives.”

Given this, a useful response would be to shift our energies away from attempts to eliminate conflict, to the creation of participatory structures able to work with conflict in productive ways (Flyvbjerg, 1998b; Holmes and Scoones, 2001; Owens, 2000). One approach to this has been to take into account the role of social movements in catalyzing meaningful social change and state action. A variety of studies have covered the contributions of civil society, both inside and outside of formal participatory channels (Aylett, 2010; Ballard, 2007; Barnett and Scott, 2007; de Souza, 2006). Although each discusses widely different levels of conflict, their findings support Hajer’s (2005) more general conclusion [building on Foucault’s (1986) concept of heterotopic spaces] that civil society interventions can break the dominance of any one powerful group or discourse by creating a space where multiple alternative logics and values can enter into the process.

The work of Foucault has been foundational for discussions of resistance to established structures of power, value, and control. For Foucault all exchanges are always permeated by power. Effective political engagement begins with an understanding of and resistance to inequalities of power and the logics that are used to justify and normalize them (Foucault, 1981, pages 253–254). If ‘communicative rationality’ is for Habermas the ideal form of political engagement, for Foucault it is freedom. Freedom not as an abstract ideal, but as a continuous act of identifying and resisting injustice. As Flyvbjerg synthesizes, for Foucault “freedom is a practice, and its ideal is not a utopian absence of power. Resistance and struggle—in contrast to consensus—is for Foucault the most solid basis for the practice of freedom” (Flyvbjerg, 1998a, page 223).

Missing from Flyvbjerg’s analysis is that Foucault was also precise about where this resistance should be applied: it is not institutions or unjust relationships themselves, but the ways in which these inequalities are rationalized that needs our attention. Identifying and resisting the underlying logics of oppressive value systems, ideals, and metrics “is the only way to avoid other institutions, with the same objectives and the same effects, from taking their stead” (Foucault, 1981, page 254). A critique of the way the state produces and disseminates knowledge is central to this effort. Foucault highlights the way in which forms of record keeping and statistics selectively portray reality in order to justify and disseminate the logic of the state across the population (Foucault, 1991; Rutland and Aylett, 2008).

Foucault’s argument that oppressive relationships can persist despite seemingly positive institutional reform recalls the earlier concern that participatory institutions can exacerbate inequalities rather than break them down. In this vision, and for those who have applied Foucault’s work more specifically to participatory processes (de Souza, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 1998a; Heller, 2001; Pithouse, 2006), struggle and conflict between civil society and the state is crucial to maintaining the struggle for more profound change.

At first glance the Foucauldian and Habermasian conceptions of participation may seem diametrically opposed. But both contain oversimplifications and idealizations. Habermas's more technocratic approach idealizes institutions and overlooks the importance of grassroots mobilization and conflict. It ignores the role of conflict in energizing continued community participation, counterbalancing the influence of business on local government, and pushing the state to expand what is considered in participatory processes.

Similarly, focusing solely on conflict ignores the ability of stable state-managed structures to balance out the often cyclical and uneven nature of community-based mobilization (Cohen, 1996; Melo and Baiocchi, 2006) and promote capacity building within civil society groups (Fagotto and Fung, 2006). Also, given the local state's ability to mobilize resources and regulate certain aspects of local development, participatory forums provide community-based organizations with an opportunity to institutionalize and scale up their concerns to the level of the city as a whole.

Participation and climate change

The IPCC, whose assessment reports synthesize the best existing research on climate change, adopts an institutional and instrumental approach to participation similar to those of the OECD and the WB. For the IPCC, participation is a tool for policy design, a method for building consensus, and a component of structures of local governance which unites state, civil society and business interests the better to regulate the environment (Aylett, 2010; Sathaye et al 2007; Yohe et al 2007).

Since the IPCC's Special Report on Emissions Scenarios (2000), however, a broader conception of the role of participatory processes has emerged. The report established that lifestyle choices and local and national development paths will have a far greater effect on the climate than any form of environmental policy. This has led to a push to extend debate beyond individual or technological solutions to a more fundamental discussion of alternative courses for our collective futures (Banuri et al, 2001; Munasinghe and Swart, 2005; Swart et al, 2003). Responding to climate change in this context means asking fundamental questions about how we wish to live our lives, what our goals are, and by which means we as a society will pursue them.⁽³⁾

These are, as Robinson argues, "profoundly moral and political issues, which require thoughtful deliberation and collective resolution. And on those issues, the principles of democracy imply that every citizen has equal expertise." The challenge becomes one of "creating methods of deliberation and decision making that actively engage the relevant interests and communities in thinking through and deciding upon the kind of future they want to try and create" (Robinson, 2004, page 380).

It is worth asking whether we are expecting too much of institutional processes of consensus-driven participation to think that they might lead to this type of fundamental deliberative rethink of our current path. At the same time, given the need to produce and inform debate with locally relevant expert knowledge on climate change, as well as to directly modify concrete planning decisions, bylaws, and development strategies, is it realistic to think that conflict and mobilized civil society groups can accomplish it any better?

To see how these questions play out in practice I now turn to one place where answers are being sought. Reflecting the institutionalist bias of both the IPCC and Durban's local government, the following case study will emphasize the formal structures of municipally led participation. To highlight the shortcomings of this approach, in the closing section I turn to the important role of independent (and often confrontational) community involvement.

⁽³⁾ I provide a more detailed discussion of participatory governance within the expanding scope of the IPCC's analysis of climate change elsewhere (see Aylett, 2010).

As we will see, in Durban's case neither Foucault nor Habermas fully capture the city's experiences with public participation. Researchers working in South Africa (Ballard, 2007; Barnett and Scott, 2007) and elsewhere (Aylett, 2010; de Souza, 2006; Heller, 2001) have argued that this is in fact a flawed dichotomy. Rather than accept it, they propose that we approach participation from a position that combines an optimistic view of political institutions' ability to manage conflict with a realistic appreciation both of the inevitability and of the value of conflict within participatory processes.

Participation in Durban, South Africa: promise and problems

Participatory governance at the municipal level takes on a variety of shapes, from the now-famous participatory budgeting done since 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to the recent large-scale public visioning processes carried out by North American cities like Calgary, Chicago, and Portland.⁽⁴⁾ As a South African city, Durban is set apart from these other examples because of the role that participatory processes played in the resistance to apartheid and the process of postapartheid rebuilding (Cronin, 2006). Its approach to participation and sustainable development has also been influenced by its early experiences with Local Agenda 21 (Roberts and Diedrichs, 2002). Among South African cities, Durban stands out for the attention and resources it has dedicated to implementing new forms of public consultation and new bureaucratic structures which are supportive of more inclusive municipal planning. Politically, Durban is strongly aligned with the dominant national party—the African National Congress (ANC).

Durban is South Africa's second-largest city. Home to 3.5 million people, it is a major player both in the regional and in the national economies. As well as recent event-driven development in the lead-up to the 2010 football World Cup, and a future bid for the 2020 Olympics, the city is home to the busiest port in Africa and an industrial and chemical sector which is both the economic hub of the province of KwaZulu-Natal and the source of 8% of the national GDP (DEAT, 2007). The distribution of the benefits of this economic activity is highly uneven: 27% of the Black households live in informal settlements (compared with 0.4% for Whites) and over 50% of the Black and Coloured population is unemployed. Access to key infrastructure like sewerage, running water, and electricity follows similar patterns (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

In 2001 the city, now a larger metro known as eThekweni, began integrating public participation into its long-term planning process. Since then, the municipality has developed participatory processes that involve stakeholders both in its planning and in its budgeting processes (see Robinson, 2008). After looking briefly at the evolution of these initiatives, I discuss recent changes in the municipality's approach to participation. Durban's projects are still at an early stage, but they contain some valuable lessons about the links between participation, social justice, and climate change.

The primary form of state-led participation, both for individual citizens and for nongovernmental and community-based organizations, takes place as part of the city's five-year Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), which are federally mandated and reviewed annually. IDPs are directly linked to the role that South African cities play in repairing apartheid-era backlogs in essential service delivery, while also managing economic growth in the context of globalization (Ballard et al, 2008; Freund, 2002). These IDPs aim to provide clear direction for municipal development,

⁽⁴⁾ I am referring here to the imagineCalgary, imagineChicago, and Portland's visionPDX programs, which engaged residents in producing a long-term vision of what they wanted their city to become.

and their goals and targets are directly linked both to the municipal budget and to the performance contracts of senior municipal officials—most notably the city manager.⁽⁵⁾ Public participation in the drafting and revision of the IDPs could potentially place real power in the hands of municipal residents and stakeholder groups.

In the lead-up to the first IDP, released in 2002, the city ran an intensive and ambitious program of ward-level consultations throughout the city, demonstrating a Habermasian dedication to proper process and the value of public debate. The city is divided into 100 wards: administrative areas with populations ranging from 10 892 to 88 384, and spanning everything from gated luxury communities to informal settlements (eThekweni, 2007). Over six months in 2001–02 IDP facilitators visited each ward three times to host public workshops (eThekweni Municipality, 2004). Genevieve Hartley, who oversaw the entire first round of consultation as part of the city's Development Planning Unit, remembers this as a Herculean task, with day-long workshops held almost entirely on weekends and facilitated by a dedicated and enthusiastic team (interview Hartley, 9 April, 2008). On average 100 people attended each workshop, but turnout could range from as few as 34 (in traditionally wealthy White wards) to as many as 600 people.

Despite such an ambitious effort, which negotiated historically rooted distrust of the government as well as complex and confrontational geometries of power within each ward, the end results were modest. During consultations, held in community centers and public halls, facilitators first introduced participants to the city's planning processes and then led group discussions to identify the communities' needs. At the close of the day they asked participants to condense their input into a ranked list for each ward (a 'needs assessment') which in turn would influence (to some degree) how the budget was spent in that area. At this point, the desire to create a real platform for deliberation met with the institutional constraints of a process that was also designed to increase the efficiency of the municipality's attempts to meet its developmental goals. The resulting simplification of participants' input produced a list of key priorities that were not terribly surprising. Aggregated across the city the top concerns were ranked as follows (eThekweni, 2004, page 23):

1. housing and household services;
2. safety and security;
3. jobs/economic development;
4. community infrastructure;
5. health services;
6. governance issues;
7. transport;
8. education; and
9. social issues.

As Ballard et al (2008) point out, a team of competent planners and elected officials could have produced a similar list without much trouble. In addition, both ward-level politicians, such as ward Councilor Aubrey Snyman, and municipal officials express doubts about the real influence of these needs assessments on municipal projects and spending (interview Aubrey Snyman, 13 March, 2008; see also interview Jacquie Subban, Corporate Policy Unit, 4 November, 2003, quoted by Ballard et al, 2008). Despite the lengths the city has gone to to hold them, the impact of these consultations on the management of the city seems relatively slight.

⁽⁵⁾ In eThekweni the position of city manager is an important one with considerable influence over executive decisions.

When asked about the limited influence of community input on the IDP, Hartley, of the city's Development Planning Unit, offered one explanation:

“What people were saying informed the budget. But it didn't drastically change the shape of the IDP. The IDP is a strategic document, and the average person out there doesn't think strategy. So you often found, when you were in the wards, that all they could think of was their immediate surroundings” (interview Hartley, 9 April, 2008).

Both Hartley and the officials interviewed by Ballard et al (2008) conclude that the major achievement of this first round of consultation was that participants felt that they were part of the city and had a say in what was happening.

Strategic thinking: bridging the gap

A focus only on these limitations overlooks the impacts of the process itself, and the skills that were built in this early phase of participation. Hartley's comment about a lack of strategic thinking highlights the fact that citizens will rarely analyze issues from the same perspective as does the municipality. Municipal 'strategic thinking' is, in fact, based on complex systems of data collection and analysis—in Durban's case, one that is linked to a computer-based geographic information system (GIS) which spatially represents variables such as population growth, employment rates, and access to services. It is no surprise that work needs to be done before productive conversations can be held which integrate this technocratic perspective with the daily experience of residents.

Municipal facilitators began this work during the consultation processes by introducing participants to outcomes-based planning (OBP)—the underlying logic of the city's approach to service delivery. By first explaining OBP methods to participants, they aimed to shift participants' thinking away from large capital projects to lateral ways of meeting the same needs. Rooted in attempts to meet multiple demands with scarce resources, OBP is linked to the city's GIS-based access modeling. OBP and access modeling take a holistic view of the city—mapping citizens' access to services, rather than simply counting facilities on a ward-by-ward basis. They work from the premise that citizens can (and do) cross administrative boundaries to access services, and that increasing access does not necessarily mean building new facilities: that is, your ward may not have a clinic or a library, but better transport might easily provide access to facilities in a neighbouring ward (presentation by Mark Byerley, eThekweni Housing Unit, imagineDurban Accessibility Workshop, 19 March, 2008)

By teaching community members to situate themselves within the metro as a whole, and to frame their concerns in the terms of OBP, consultation for the first IDP began the process of developing communities' abilities both to read the planning logic of the city and to make their needs legible to city planners. This is a modest example of the way in which, as discussed by Abers and others above, participatory processes can provide an opportunity for citizens to build skills that facilitate further participation.

Despite accepted oppositional views of the relationship between the state and civil society (Arnstein, 1969; Ballard et al, 2008) there remain important functions for central state bodies in fostering participation. In terms of producing information, coordinating integrated action, and managing the bureaucratic structures that both sustain regular participatory processes and transform their inputs into usable outputs, the state plays a key role (Heller, 2001). While these functions will, as Foucault has made clear, inevitably reflect the interests of the state, they also define an important part of the planning process. Introducing citizens to the language of the state is an important contribution to communities' abilities to participate meaningfully and critically in the planning processes.

Following the second IDP, introduced in 2006, the city centralized participation in ten-member ward committees made up of locally elected community representatives. These committees, formed in 2007, are tasked to work both with the community and with the ward councilor throughout the year and are the only representatives of their wards included in the IDP consultations. The ward committees came about as a result of national legislation [the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (South Africa, 1998)] intended to create a stable unit for participation and skills development and make possible more in-depth local input into city planning and more regular and sustained participation with community members.

However, the ward committees so closely mirror existing state structures that their role as independent bodies needs to be questioned (see Cleaver, 1999). Interviewees reported that ward-committee elections were heavily influenced by the dominant political party in a given ward (most often the ANC), making them an extension of the national party system. Although not always the case, similar problems have also been reported in other areas (Piper and Deacon, 2006).

Participation and the environment

During ward-level consultations, concerns over environmental issues were voiced almost exclusively by participants in areas which faced immediate environmental problems. In the industrial areas of the municipality, particularly the South Durban Basin, residents face high levels of air pollution with serious health impacts, including high rates of asthma, leukemia, and cancer (groundWork, 2003). During the initial consultations (2001–02) Hartley reported that apart from this little else in the way of environmental concern emerged during ward-level meetings (interview, Hartley, 9 April, 2008). Attending the consultations carried out in 2008, I observed a similar situation.

There is, however, a more general concern with large-scale environmental issues, and climate change in particular, in wealthier areas of the city, as well as among local NGOs and in parts of the municipal bureaucracy itself. Their input during another phase of consultation—large meetings of key stakeholders, dubbed ‘Big Mama Workshops,’ and held annually—reframed the entire IDP in terms of sustainability. The city reports that discussions at these events, which provide a venue for deliberation among municipal officials and community members, increased the emphasis placed on sustainability (eThekweni, 2004, page 33).

The second IDP, released in July 2006, upgraded the priority on sustainability of the natural and built environment to top position. Echoing the now iconic language of early writing on sustainable development (see WCED, 1987), the city committed to balancing “social, environmental and economic goals” (eThekweni, 2006, page 22), and committed to address the potential impacts of climate change on the municipality (page 28). These changes also took their cue from the national Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, whose comments on climate change one year prior prompted the first detailed discussion of climate change in the IDP (eThekweni, 2005). As proof of this commitment, the IDP points to policies and programs aimed at preventing sprawl, providing public transit, maintaining functioning local ecosystems, and managing waste methane (eThekweni, 2006, pages 9, 10, 14, 20, 48). While the success of most of these programs has yet to be proven, they are an important beginning which touches on many key sources of municipal carbon emissions. But the city’s commitment to financial transparency, which has led it to publish budget expenditure prominently in the IDP document itself, reveals a clear contradiction.

Despite the high priority of environmental goals on paper, the budget for environmental programs is a small fraction of what has been set aside for other areas: a total

of 6 R million (US \$0.8 million) over three years—less than half the amount of the next-lowest of 12.689 R million (US \$ 1.6 million) for Celebrating Cultural Diversity, and well below the largest budget of 6302.399 R million (US \$834 million) for Quality Living Environments (Housing) (eThekwini, 2006).

While many environmental goals can be achieved through proper planning in other sectors and do not require a dedicated capital budget, such a low level of spending calls into question the city's commitment to sustainability. This mirrors what has happened at the national level, where the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has adopted the language of sustainable development but this has had little effect on the government's industrial policies (Wiley et al, 2002). Despite the appearance of sustainability on paper, environmental priorities in South Africa are trumped by "a neo-liberal paradigm, which dominates society and the economy" (Scott and Oelofse, 2005, page 446)

Attendance at the 2008 IPD review during research for this article brought to light another important issue. The ranked-needs assessments, which have remained a core component of ward-level consultations, are guided by two key sources of information: the eight overarching goals of the IDP (of which environmental sustainability comes first) and a ward profile containing demographic information about the ward as well as about access to key services and infrastructure within the ward (from running water and roads to housing, health care, and education). The ward committees both review the accuracy of this profile and use its contents to guide their discussions of local needs. Nowhere in the profile is there any information that relates to or enables discussions of environmental sustainability. Issues such as average per capita electricity and water use, waste production, or access to public transportation, for example, are completely overlooked. Committee members are then placed in the awkward and disingenuous position of having to relate their goals back to the issue of environmental sustainability (enshrined in the IDP), without having been given even the most basic materials to engage in a substantive discussion of the issue (this despite the fact that much of this information is already gathered by the city).

With electricity, for example, the ward profiles provide no information on average rates of consumption: included statistics cover only the percentage of households connected to the grid. This successfully steers participants' attention towards the city's goal of increasing access to key services, but it completely masks the fact that in areas of high connectivity (particularly historically wealthy White wards) there is a second electricity problem—disproportionately high and wasteful electricity consumption. This illustrates how statistics can be used as a way to communicate state values and goals, while also acting as a repository for specific logics which can remain stable across political and structural change. In this case, while the new participatory process squarely addresses issues of unjust distribution, it preserves patterns of overconsumption established as desirable long before the end of apartheid. The socially transformative here also embodies a relationship to natural resources that is both reactionary and unsustainable.

As Foucault argues, despite structural changes, the underlying logics of oppression and injustice persist, manifested and transmitted by the metrics of the local state. This has both environmental and economic repercussions: the majority of the country's electricity is produced by burning coal, and South Africa is currently suffering from a debilitating electricity shortage which could cost tens of thousands of jobs (Hartley, 2008). But without reliable information it is very difficult for community members to engage with or even truly perceive the issue. These shortcomings serve as an important reminder that participatory processes in and of themselves are not enough to increase a community's ability to address climate change effectively: processes must also be properly informed and strongly linked to the budget.

The confrontational contribution of civil society

As mentioned at the outset, this paper has so far dealt only with the large-scale participatory planning process run by the municipality as part of the IDP. This is one approach to urban participation and one that sits well with the conception of consensus-based processes promoted by international development agencies and discussed by the IPCC. As we have seen, it is a technocratic, process-driven system. While it benefits from being well supported by municipal staff and resources, it is also vulnerable to being carried out in a perfunctory, symbolic manner to increase the perceived legitimacy of the local state or simply to meet the requirements set out by national legislation.

There is something that has been overlooked however: mirroring a flaw in the IDP process itself, we have overlooked the fact that state-led participation is not happening in a vacuum. Grassroots mobilization around environmental issues is strong in Durban. This is particularly so in the South Durban Basin, a key site in the transformation of local environmental politics from a (largely White) green conservation movement, to a more democratic and popular brown movement which links environmental and social concerns (Freund, 2001). It is also an area where much municipal energy was placed during the city's Local Agenda 21 program (Wiley et al, 2002). A coalition of NGOs and CBOs (the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, SDCEA) is active there on issues ranging from air pollution from petroleum refineries, to wastewater treatment, and, more recently, climate change. In fact, they are uniquely well placed to make climate change understandable and relevant to a community focused on immediate environmental health risks. They participate actively in Environmental Impact Assessments as well as in oppositional activism and protest.

The combining of both collaborative and highly confrontational forms of participation (including street protests and a variety of colorful media events) has allowed them to expand the scope of local air quality monitoring and impact assessment processes successfully. Local scholars like Barnett and Scott (2007), and Ballard (2007) have highlighted the ways in which this mixture of tactics has helped to push the boundaries of which issues are considered by formal participatory structures, to hold the municipality to its promises, and to resist the 'domesticating' influence that formal participatory avenues can have on community-based groups.

One of the biggest accomplishments announced at the end of the 2008 IDP process was a more comprehensive air-quality monitoring system for the industrial basin (the Multi-Point Plan, MPP). Celebrated as a success under the rubric of the IDP's plan to promote environmental sustainability, the MPP had in fact been created eight years earlier—completely outside the IDP process (DEAT, 2007). It was in large part the result of SDCEA's mixture of conflict and collaboration that had managed to draw the attention of national government to conditions in the South Durban Basin. Des D'Sa, SDCEA's leader and main spokesperson, had little knowledge of or interest in the IDP process, had not been invited to participate in that year's consultations, and clearly valued street protest and community-based scientific monitoring on par with, if not above, formal participatory processes (interview Des D'Sa, 17 March, 2008). Other SDCEA staff reported similar views (interviews Varsha Naidu, 11 March, 2008; Stephen VanWyk, 28 March, 2008).

The MPP is a good example of what happens when conflict and collaboration collide. Despite its sometimes unpleasant face, disagreement and confrontation can be forces that mobilize and produce new knowledge, pushing the continued evolution of institutional participatory processes by identifying weaknesses and proposing remedies (see Aylett, 2010). That the IDP process glossed over the real roots of its main environmental accomplishment to date, and failed to invite SDCEA to participate in

the 2008 IDP review, is telling. Barnett and Scott (2007) report that key municipal figures, including the City Manager and the head of the Environmental Management Department, perceive NGOs and CBOs as largely negative forces within the city. More than simple frustration, Barnett and Scott (2007) argue that the municipality's reaction is an expression of a specific vision of how participatory processes should proceed—one which will by now be familiar to us:

“Deliberative environmental governance in South Africa puts a premium on norms of participation, conciliation, and consensus. Any departure from these norms is looked on as obstructive, and even as an index of the lack of legitimacy of the SMOs [social movement organizations] who adopt such adversarial activism” (page 2627).

This is an example of the institutional blindness that can result from the pursuit of ideal models of participation focused exclusively on state-led and process-oriented visions of deliberative participation.

Discussion

Despite past accomplishments, current participatory practices in Durban are not delivering in the areas necessary to address climate change or to design just and sustainable urban planning through popular participation. This is not to marginalize what has been accomplished so far: following Habermasian goals of creating ideal deliberative structures, Durban has begun the process of fully institutionalizing public participation in its planning and budgetary process. It has also carried out institutional reforms designed to make the municipal government more transparent, accountable, and responsive. These projects have engaged communities historically marginalized by apartheid, and demonstrate a political will within the municipality to realize the socially transformative potential of participatory practice. As we have seen, though, the impact of these consultations on implementation and policy has been limited.

The hopes that climate-change studies pin on participatory processes hang on their ability to increase local adaptive and mitigative capacity, both by giving communities the political and technical skills to respond to a changing climate and by creating structured opportunities for a more fundamental discussion of the lifestyles and modes of development which we as a population will pursue. Participatory processes are also celebrated for their ability to address issues of social, political, and economic inequality and for building local social capital. These facets may also contribute to our ability to respond to climate change. But, in and of themselves, they are not enough.

If communities are to participate meaningfully in establishing more sustainable modes of urban development, participatory processes must begin to influence municipal development decisions directly and be more closely linked to the way the budget is spent. Participants must also be given sustainability metrics and indicators that are comparable to those used in areas like health and economic development. It is relevant to note that these types of metrics are not irrelevant to issues of social justice. Rates of resource consumption (and not simply access to resources) offer a fine-grained gauge of disparity within a city, and they will provide necessary information for communities as they plan past the initial stages of development towards a more equitable and sustainable future in the context of increasingly scarce resources.

But beyond changes to the techniques and structure of participation, Durban's IDP process would benefit from a shift away from its focus on consensus-driven consultation to a more active recognition of the contributions of civil society mobilization within the city—even when this takes the form of conflict and confrontation. More active participation from NGOs and CBOs in the IDP would bring new energy to the process. Although not a ‘silver bullet’, greater civil society involvement would help

address both the uneven success of ward committees across the city and the clear gaps in information and action on environmental issues noted above.

Recalling the potential middle ground between Foucault and Habermas, Heller (2001, page 158) argues that, rather than focus strictly on either confrontational grassroots mobilization or on more centralized and consensus-driven systems of participation (as if they were in opposition to each other), we instead need to explore and promote an intermixing of the two. This seems nowhere more true than at the intersection between social equity and environmental sustainability.

Climate change will have increasingly negative impacts on human well-being and poses a serious challenge to both the viability and the legitimacy of our current socio-economic order. Engaging effectively with the fundamental questions now ahead of us will require both conflict and consensus. Current estimates call for annual emissions reductions for OECD countries which far surpass even those which resulted from the collapse of the former Soviet economy in the 1990s, and warn of a likely average warming of 4°C by 2100 (Anderson and Bows, 2008). In that reality, it is hard to imagine a sincere response to climate change without some measure of conflict.

Making conflict productive will be our challenge and, if we are to do so democratically, state-supported participatory processes that help to create synergies between governments, social movements, and citizens may be our surest hope. As it stands, there is a bias among major agencies, like the IPCC, towards consensus-driven participation—something mirrored by municipal practices in Durban. Addressing this means paying attention not only to robust institutional design, but also to the deep-rooted manifestations and justifications of injustice (whether social or environmental), and becoming comfortable acknowledging and harnessing the beneficial contributions of confrontation.

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