

**METROPOLIS ANNUAL MEETING
JOBURG 2013 – CARING CITIES
Session 5 – Engaged Citizens**

[Thanks to facilitator]

I am delighted and suitably humbled to be invited to speak at this Metropolis Annual Conference and to have the opportunity to engage with this compelling exchange network, eager to strive towards more socially, spatially just and sustainable cities. I am all the more excited to be engaging in a conference with a theme such as the age-old and embryonic concept of the 'Caring city', to guide our thinking and acting out of our urban futures. It seems a particularly apt ambition, in the intensely difficult context we find ourselves in.

As I have been listening to interventions over the past couple of days, and their attempts to define and redefine the notion of the 'caring city' through various references and appropriations of the concept of 'Ubuntu', I have been struck by a persistent and clear message coming through: a caring city is one that engages with its citizens. At the heart of this concept of caring cities, most seem to agree, is the idea of participation - reinvigorated through the notions of engaged citizenship, co-production or more radically still, as Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi put it at the SACN session on Tuesday, putting the poor, those living on the periphery of cities, at the centre of planning and the production of our cities. Admittedly, this session on 'Engaged Citizens' is crucial for the configuration of caring cities.



I have no powerpoint but would like to keep as a backdrop to this short presentation, the following illustration - which some of you will recognize.¹ It's a graphic take on the famous photo taken in Gezi Park of a young woman being forcefully pushed back by police with water canons. In the picture, the Brazilian flag on the police's shield, along with the almost Persian feel of the graphics (or does it come from further East still?) hint at an international phenomenon: from Gezi Park to Rio, to other contexts, we are witnessing an upsurge of mass mobilization. This mobilization takes on many different hues but there is, clearly identifiable, a specifically *urban* tint to them: at heart are issues of public space, managing diversity in public space, city-wide concerns over mobility in contexts of deep socio-spatial inequalities, etc. These protests reveal a widespread dissatisfaction with the current configuration of our cities and their modes of production.

As was raised yesterday, it is particularly unnerving that mass dissatisfaction should also be surfacing in Brazil which, for the last couple decades (and especially with the City Statute), has emerged as a beacon of innovative and progressive participatory governance for cities. Undoubtedly, the roots of the current crisis have a lot to do with what the Deputy Mayor of São Paulo, Nadia Campeão, described yesterday: concerns with mobility issues, with creeping corruption. But I would argue that there is potentially another element, key to our concern here; I would argue that the crisis underscores just how much of a journey remains, to make these celebrated institutionalized processes of participation work, to overcome long-established inequalities and unequal ways in which people have been able to shape and create their cities 'to their hearts' desire' (borrowing Harvey's words, quoted yesterday by Mayor Parks Tau).

This journey, this 'way to go', is a challenge to us, a challenge to be creative and, especially, a challenge to act. We certainly have a lot to learn still from unpacking recent processes in Brazil - and a lot to learn from unpacking processes elsewhere.

I would like to share with you briefly here, attempts to engage citizens in the long-term strategic planning of cities *at the city-wide scale*. The examples are from the so-called Global North (London) and Global South (Johannesburg) – and both the London and Johannesburg cases are often considered as good practices of participatory governance. Both metropolitan areas initiated processes of long-term strategic planning in the early 2000s, which means they have had a decade of experimenting with such forms of planning. Over that time-period, both approaches have become increasingly participatory – through different means. And, as we will see, both still have some way to go.

To sketch out the terrain very succinctly: in *London*, participation in strategic planning at the city-wide scale has broadly taken two routes. One through consultation in the draft document of the Plan – and it is fair to argue that participation here has largely been dominated by business interests. And participation through a particular institutional arrangement – an 'Examination in Public' (EiP), moderated by an independent planning inspector. This EiP has provided stakeholders with a debating platform for putting forward alternative evidences for policy making, different knowledges of the city, as well as the possibility to argue them out, argue the inevitable trade-offs that are the stuff of planning – all of which under the moderating guidance of an independent inspector. In the major review of the London Plan under the new mayor Boris Johnson, the EiP was carried out over a six months period of on-off deliberations.

In *Johannesburg*, participation to long-term strategic planning first took the form of a stakeholder forum. In its most recent incarnation (the Growth and Development Strategy 2040), citizen engagement took on a multiplicity of formats over an intense period of nine weeks. The flurry of participatory mechanisms involved, amongst others, themed stakeholders meetings (focused around nine sectors, but also actor-based meetings), public hearings, the use of social networking (twitter, FB) and invited international perspectives.

Were these experiences successful? Well, yes and no and the answer depends on how you read the outcomes of the processes.

In *London*, an increasingly mobilized, networked constituency has indeed been able – over time - to use the deliberative instrument (the Examination in Public) to put new issues on the agenda such as housing affordability, health issues linked to inequalities in the capital city, travellers’ rights. But the participatory process was structurally limited by the nature of the Greater London Authority (GLA) who drove the strategic planning exercise: the GLA plays a strategic role and is only minimally involved in policy implementation which is largely the mandate of sub-municipal structures, the boroughs.

In *Johannesburg*, community voices canvassed in the participatory process have altered the long-term strategic plan to some extent, with an added emphasis, in the final plan and following the process of ‘citizen engagement’, on food vulnerability, urban agriculture and issues around violence. In that sense, participation was a success. But many canvassed poorer community groups continue to feel frustrated about the lack of ‘real engagement’ (and business groups too for that matter!).

Clearly, there is room for improvement on both counts. But then again, participatory governance – especially at the *city-wide scale* – requires a massive learning process.

On the part of *communities*, the learning process entails at least the following issues:

- an understanding of how particular (neighbourhood or sectoral) concerns relate to city-wide strategic processes and trade-offs;
- literacy about planning processes, budgets and resource allocations;
- the development of strategies and tactics about how/when to cooperate with government /when not;
- learning the strength of numbers and networks – however difficult collective action can be (cf. the experience of the Just Space network in London is an interesting example – and other examples abound, such as the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA, linked to the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights), or indeed Shack Dwellers International which Rose Molokoane will tell us more about)

Note that this learning process is bound to take time, and might start through addressing immediate (material) concerns before the complex issue of city-wide planning starts to take hold (e.g. of the mobilization process and creation of Just Space in London; eg. of the ACCA programme where, in some cases, community mobilisation is gradually shifting from slum-upgrading to participatory planning in order to reconfigure cities in favour of poorer men and women).

And *metropolitan governments can help in this learning process*, through:

- improving information flows (this was a critique of many community and business groups in the Joburg process - and elsewhere)
- financial resources: the Just Space network in London was able to coalesce and grow to some degree thanks to government grants aimed at boosting community engagement in London strategic planning; ever since, governmental funding (however meager, however fragmented) is a key resource for the network – without necessarily leading to cooptation. In Thailand, poor communities have been able to address slum upgrading and start mobilizing for bottom-up participatory planning thanks to the Baan Mankong programme funded by CODI, a state agency.
- *Real* openness to the input of participation. In London, the Just Space group submissions have increasingly been read as a nuisance by City officials; in

Johannesburg some voices have struggled to be heard: foreigners, at times oppositional voices. All of this –despite official invitation to ‘participate’. Clearly, there is some learning to be done here.

And beyond these issues, the learning curve, the curve of experimentation for ‘caring’ metropolitan local authorities involves:

- Devising/reviewing participatory governance institutional set-ups so that they ‘make sense’ in terms of planning cycles, they don’t contradict each other, they link strategy-making and real delivery, they are resourced, etc. i.e. getting the basic rights of ‘caring local governance’. This is not a small matter – London, Johannesburg, or Sao Paulo which was described to us yesterday - are all huge metropolises with incredibly complex governance structures!
- Finally and perhaps more crucially still, becoming *learning institutions*:
 - o that support staff (officials and politicians) in developing a city-wide conscience, a multi-scalar perspective whereby metropolitan dynamics relate to local and even neighbourhood concerns and areas/scales of prerogatives;
 - o that develop feedback and learning processes, with other actors in the city, and within the metropolitan institution; so that what works, what doesn’t gets reflected upon, dissected, replicated/improved;
 - o that are keen to develop and push boundaries of knowing and ‘engaging’; that cultivate in their staff the activist desire to know other ways of working/living the city, where staff is encouraged to experiment with novel ways of working with and from the most vulnerable in our cities. There are fantastic examples out there (mapping with school children in the City of Johannesburg for example, working through art to overcome boundaries, e.g. of Medellin, etc.) – so how to scale these out and up, how to ‘integrate’ them into broader scales of planning? This should be the enduring objective of ‘caring’ metropolitan officials, of metropolitan government.

A huge task ahead then – but this pressing task is certainly an exciting one!

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ⁱ I would like to thank my colleague Alexandre Apsan Frediani for sharing this picture with me.