

## Exploring the potential for ‘networked spaces’ to foster communities of practice during the participatory upgrading of informal settlements

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### *Abstract*

The participatory upgrading of informal settlements presents officials, professionals and communities with a particularly stark set of challenges around the production and management of knowledge(s), complex processes of priority setting and the negotiation of trade-offs. While much of the literature on participation is focused on either improving existing ‘invited’ spaces or valorising the innovation occurring outside of the state in ‘invented’ spaces, this paper argues for the creation of ‘networked spaces’ to create communities of practice between vested actors in order to explicitly negotiate differences in knowledge systems, power relations and priorities. The processes involved in establishing and maintaining such ‘network spaces’ are described and illustrated drawing on the experience of the integrated Serviced Land Project. It also proposes a mnemonic device, SQUIRREL, to describe the different characteristics of a successful ‘networked space’. Finally, the paper concludes by noting the opportunities created by the re-emphasising of informal settlement upgrading in the targets and discourse of the Department of Human Settlements but warns that these opportunities must be pursued by learning from and building upon past experiences with participatory human settlements development.

## Exploring the potential for 'networked spaces' to foster communities of practice during the participatory upgrading of informal settlements

A proactive approach to community involvement is not common amongst local councils, yet the reforms to the planning system and to local government generally increasingly require, and necessitate, both proactivity and systematisation of involvement as well as an implied need to build and sustain a widened network of stakeholder interests in local governance. The answer, in both the short and the long term, might be to see these new reforms as part of a process: *a process in which overt network building takes centre stage*. From this perspective, building the network in certain managed/controlled ways through frameworks, practices, rights of access, best practice and capacity-building activities means that a range of interests can be enrolled and maintained in a new network of governance (Doak and Parker, 2005: 36-7; added emphasis).

The *dramatis personae* in this story included bounty-hunting businessmen, dictatorial warlords, impecunious civic leaders, conspirators within and around government, anxious civil servants, ambitious leaders of NGOs, consultants with reputations to protect, politicians with assorted agendas and political parties that were carefully building their image and constituencies. Every major project is likely to involve and attract such characters. A lesson worth learning is to anticipate them, obtain broad support for a simple set of project values and principles before anything else and then defend them to the hilt (Adlard, 2011: 22).

While the Department of Housing has remained the state's primary urban intervention since the advent of democracy (Royston, 2003; Charlton and Kihato, 2006; Cross, 2008; Pieterse, 2009), the name change to the Department of Human Settlements in 2009 confirmed an increased recognition of the need for the department to plan and act as an integrating force in the development of South African cities. There are three sets of inherent challenges involved in this new vision: (1) the integration of project-led housing developments and informal settlement upgrading interventions into a wider strategy of spatial planning and investment to increase the equality, efficiency and sustainability of cities, a *planning challenge*; (2) the *technical challenges* associated with a partnership approach to the delivery of sustainable, low-cost housing and incremental processes of informal settlement upgrading; and (3), cutting across these first two, the necessity and opportunity of involving city inhabitants and beneficiaries in the planning, decision-making, implementation and assessment of current and future interventions in the urban fabric (which include the delivery of housing projects, the delivery of social services/infrastructure to informal settlements and planning interventions to incentivise specific forms of private sector development), a *participation challenge*. As practical experience has shown over the last sixteen years, it is this third challenge that ultimately determines the success of solutions to the previous two as well as whether a housing development becomes a sustainable human settlement. However, instead of addressing participation as a stand-alone issue, this paper argues that thinking strategically about increasing citizen participation in informal settlement upgrading, although its arguments also apply more widely to human settlement development, creates an opportunity to reconceptualise and address a range of planning and technical challenges concomitantly.

There is a growing disconnect between the formal 'invited' spaces created by the state, which have proven to be ineffectual at empowering and articulating the voices of the poor, and the informal 'invented' spaces of community organisation that have emerged to articulate their needs and aspirations (Ramjee and van Donk, 2011). While this trend demands immediate and concerted action to 'open up' invited spaces to community participation, strengthen initiatives creating productive invented spaces and create explicit links between them, we argue for the creation of a new category of participatory space – 'networked spaces'. These spaces are intended to function as

discrete sites of engagement between communities, civil society organisations, professionals and state officials to build 'communities of practice'. These communities of practice will have the task of generating pragmatic solutions to planning and technical challenges through processes of knowledge sharing and capacity building and the explicit negotiation of priorities and trade-offs. They, therefore, signal a movement away from state-centric planning and decision-making towards a co-operative, partnerships model to the 'co-production' of urban space and resources (De Souza, 2006; Mitlin, 2008). However, as the two opening quotations indicate, these spaces can become very quickly dominated by vested interests and powerful stakeholder groups and so it is imperative that we can be as explicit and deliberate as possible about their design and functioning – paying particular attention to issues relating to power, knowledge, learning, capacities and resources. This paper draws on 'best practice' drawn from the literature and practical experiences from the integrated Serviced Land Project (iSLP), which used a participating methodology to deliver 32,000 houses to 30 distinct communities in Cape Town between 1991 and 2005, to identify and 'unpack' some of the key elements of an approach using 'networked spaces' to facilitate the process of participatory informal settlement upgrading.

## 1. Participation in South African housing development

The history of housing policy and practice in South Africa is marked by a complex set of dynamics between a state determined to provide decent housing to a poor majority, a private sector cast in an ambiguous role of being both the mechanism for the rapid delivery of low-cost housing and an enduring reason for a lack of participation and sense of ownership amongst recipients, and poor communities increasingly frustrated by a lack of delivery but paralysed by their isolation from the state and private sector (Laloo, 1999; Charlton and Kihato, 2006; Harrison et al., 2008). Reviewing the experience of government housing policy Landman and Napier (2010: 303-4) conclude that the

...domination of RDP housing in the emerging affordable and low-income housing landscape [is] effectively exerting an outward pressure on other delivery models to both sides, including bank mortgaged and credit-link housing on the one side, and PHP on the other... This dominance of state allocated housing is as a result of the increased expectations from potential beneficiaries, where a fully subsidised and completed house (so-called 'giveaway houses') is preferred above self-built options that require some physical input (sweat equity) or some financial equity... Ironically therefore, the efficiency of state delivery of housing in South Africa has left less space for aided self-help housing where in other countries less state intervention allows self-help to be the main source of formal low-income housing production.

The frenetic success of the state at providing housing opportunities<sup>1</sup>, while it has done little to address an ever-growing backlog, has had the deleterious effect of demobilising and delegitimising the initiative of the urban poor to develop 'self-help housing'.

The historical difficulties of the approach adopted after 1995 were acknowledged in the policy review and research process that resulted in *Breaking New Ground* (BNG) in 2004. It emphasised that "the dominant production of single houses on single plots in distant locations with initially weak socio-economic infrastructure is inflexible to local dynamics and changes in demand. [And so] the new human settlements plan moves away from the current commoditised focus of housing delivery towards more responsive mechanisms which addresses the multi-dimensional needs of sustainable human settlements" (DoH, 2004: 8). Its formulation, therefore, signalled a policy-led movement away from a private developer-driven approach towards one that is increasingly more local government-centred and state-driven (Charlton and Kihato, 2006; Tissington, 2011a). There are a range of reasons for this shift<sup>2</sup> but it notably continues a pattern of 'state-centrism'<sup>3</sup> that tends to position the state as the primary actor. Therefore, while it explicitly moves away from the previous

supply-centred model to a model driven by the needs of those on the ground (i.e. demand driven approach), it places the responsibility on municipalities to determine the *location* and *nature of the housing* that is developed in their areas of jurisdiction. Furthermore, the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP), described in the National Housing Code as “*one of the most important programmes of government* which seeks to upgrade the living conditions of millions of poor people by providing secure tenure and access to basic services and housing”, places municipalities (depending on whether they are accredited and capacitated) and/or provincial government in the role of developers (DHS, 2009: 16; added emphasis). They are expected to initiate, plan and formulate applications for projects under the UISP for the surveying, registration, participation, facilitation, dispute resolution as well as the geotechnical investigation, land acquisition, pre-planning and provision of interim engineering services to informal settlements (in Phase 1). The municipality can apply for funding to access external capacity in order to support the processes involved in the formulation of a ‘participation agreement’ with communities, including the “socio-economic surveying of households; facilitating community participation; project information-sharing and progress reporting; conflict resolution (where applicable); and housing support services (i.e. training and education on housing rights and obligations, capacity-building of housing beneficiaries, assistance with the selection of housing options, management of building materials, and relocation assistance)” (Tissington, 2011a: 87). The key assumption, however, is that local government (potentially in collaboration with the provincial department) is the primary actor and in control of shaping the participatory process. Where communities want to exert control, the UISP suggests that this participation “should be undertaken through Ward Committees with ongoing effort in promoting and ensuring the inclusion of key stakeholders and vulnerable groups in the process” (DHS, 2009: 15).

Unfortunately, despite its existence since the formulation of BNG in 2004, “at all levels of government and in all parts of the country, there has been a systemic failure to implement the substantive content of BNG that recommends and makes financial provision for participatory and collective *in-situ* upgrades” (Pithouse, 2009: 2; see also Huchzermeyer, 2008). Indeed, a national assessment by the National Upgrading Support Programme (NUSP, 2011) concludes that there is little awareness and use of UISP and Part 3 of The National Housing Code at sub-national levels; sectoral coordination around upgrading is weak; informality is approached with an emphasis on ‘eradication’ rather than ‘upgrading’; implementation was proceeding with very little information about communities and how upgrading can support livelihoods strategies; there are low levels of community-based participation; layouts of housing continue to be monotonous, low-density and located at the urban periphery; and service levels are inappropriate which leads to higher future costs for the municipality.

Considering the position of local government in housing provision and informal settlement upgrading in BNG, sketched above, these results demand a reconceptualised role for the state in relation to *community-driven* development. Much of this role is described in the progressive aspects of the initial formulation of Chapter 13, some of which has been rolled back in the revised 2009 Code<sup>4</sup> (Huchzermeyer, 2009). This goes beyond a matter of emphasis or technical know-how; it is about structuring the relationship between local government and communities to encourage dynamic interactions between local government officials, civil society and communities to ‘co-produce’ processes of settlement design and decision-making.

Rather than expecting low-income residents to adopt the professionalized practices of the rich, co-production builds on much more familiar social relations, albeit within a context of transparency and practical collaboration between state and citizens. Rather than looking back at a romantic idea of how things used to be, co-production offers a chance to address systemic weaknesses in a “Weberian” model of service delivery to identify new solutions that support local democratic practice as well as improved services. Finally, it should be

noted that not only does co-production help to address the political and material needs of those living in low-income settlements, it also helps to build a consciousness of self-worth among these residents who become aware of their own central contribution to progressive social change (Mitlin, 2008: 358).

Adopting such a co-productive approach, then, changes the ways in which we engage with questions about intra-governmental integration and technical considerations because they have to be answered *in light of* established or desired processes of engagement with communities. While there are a range of rights-based and efficacy arguments for this reconceptualisation, the financial bottom line<sup>5</sup> of pursuing a state-centric development model seems to have become increasingly apparent to the Department of Human Settlements. For example, the Minister's recent comment that "[t]here has got to be a cut-off date. We are discussing that. You can't cut off the poor right now, particularly in the current national economic environment. But we can't sustain what we are doing for a long time"<sup>6</sup>. However, in order to avoid such a suggestion being converted into a neoliberal programme of the 'outsourcing' of responsibility to the urban poor, the conceptualisation and functioning of these 'co-productive spaces' needs to be carefully spelled-out.

## **2. Understanding the need for and nature of networked spaces**

Given South Africa's history of the disenfranchisement of the majority of its inhabitants, the new constitutional order has placed a particular emphasis on constructing a framework of legislation and policies that give ordinary citizens a range of participatory mechanisms and rights. Recent evidence reveals that the 'invited spaces' created by the state largely function in a technocratic manner that favour local elites and exclude the majority, while 'invented spaces' are increasingly resulting in assertive, occasionally violent, communities protests (Ramjee and van Donk, 2011). The dominant response by the state has been efforts to address the deficits in the formal spaces, while delegitimising alternative spaces of decision-making and mobilisation – especially where they may be associated with violence (Oldfield, 2008; Pithouse, 2009). It is worth foreshadowing here that while we find this analysis of the interaction between participatory spaces useful, it creates and reproduces a dichotomy that is not adequately sensitive to the key differentiating features of the spaces and the complexities of their interaction.

Nonetheless, this invited-invented dichotomy would seem to suggest that an interest in inspiring greater co-production may be pursued by 'pushing' invited and invented spaces closer together (sometimes even to the point of blurring the boundaries). For example, after years of lobbying the government to support community-driven initiatives that were already occurring, the state officially adopted the People's Housing Process in 1998 (and recommitted itself in the late 2000 through the Enhanced People's Housing Process). In the international literature Mohan and Stokke (2000) have pointed out the 'revisionist neoliberals', on the right, and 'neo-Marxists', on the left, have come to such a consensus – arguing increasingly for very similar 'localist' prescriptions: decentralised service delivery, participatory development, social capital formation and local development, and collective actions for 'radical democracy'. Underpinning this convergence is an overwhelming faith in the efficiency and empowering effects of participation in communities. However, examining the rise of this participatory consensus, Cooke and Kothari (2001: 12) have warned about "the naivete of assumptions about the authenticity of motivations and behaviour in participatory processes; how the language of empowerment masks a real concern for managerialist effectiveness; the quasi-religious associations of participatory rhetoric and practice; and how an emphasis on the micro-level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, or macro-level inequalities and injustice." They suggest that the only way in which participation can be rescued from its 'tyrannical potential' is "to build more sophisticated and genuinely reflexive understanding of power and its manifestations and dynamics" (Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 15). The People's Housing Process example, unfortunately, illustrates this pattern. Soon after its adoption, it became clear that

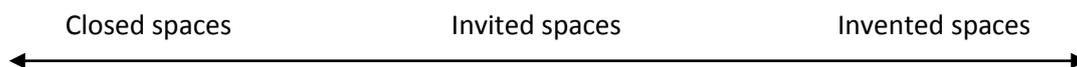
...the state has adopted the PHP in a partial and selective manner... The government focuses narrowly on outputs, with production strictly controlled by the state. The emphasis on outputs restricts claim making through 'projects', wherein the poor become bound to development solutions that are defined and designed by others. The 'project'/'projectised' model has a short-term logic of investment, accounting, reporting and assessment... It is for this reason that the OPHP [official PHP] becomes narrowly equated with 'sweat equity', individualism and cost reduction rather than collective beneficiary planning, decision-making, and more productive housing delivery (Khan and Pieterse, 2004: 17-8).

Rather than seeking to 'populate' formal invited spaces with informal elements or formalise the productive aspects of invited spaces, therefore, we suggest that a better strategy would be to pursue a strategy that affirms the need for all of these spaces – even closed spaces are inescapable in democracies – but advocates for a clearer differentiation between what types of processes should fulfil the characteristics of each space, and elucidating a more systematic relationship between them which inspires dialectical, rather than adversarial, relationships between their modes of functioning<sup>7</sup>.

Human settlements design and development, however, present us with two sets of key challenges that we feel require the conceptualisation of a new form of participatory space. First, there are a range of technical challenges associated with informal settlement upgrading and housing delivery (e.g. the provision of interim engineering services or township establishment) that, legislatively, require community input but are technical processes usually conducted by professional consultants. These processes therefore tend to be highly exclusionary processes that, at best, address communities in instrumental and disempowering ways and frequently produce poor results because of a lack of contextual input from communities about local dynamics and desires. For example, drawing on the experience of the struggle for the upgrading of Slovo Park in Johannesburg, Tissington (2011b) concludes that "the reliance on consultants in a context of complex technical policies and processes, non-integrated planning and overzealousness of politicians, is a recipe for failure. Particularly as consultants are often ill-equipped to deal adequately with the myriad problems that arise." Furthermore, from the community perspective, "there seems to be a lack of understanding and clarity... around the roles and responsibilities, legislative imperatives, obstacles and time-frames implicit in these land use planning processes, particularly in relation to the establishment of a new township. Indeed, this is no fault of communities, as these processes as they exist are alienating and inaccessible, as well as being time-consuming and unstreamlined." Optimal outcomes can really only be achieved by combining the technical knowledges involved in these processes with genuine, substantive input from communities. However, this reconsideration of different types of knowledge is a fraught process shot through with extreme power differentials and epistemic challenges.

Second, human settlements development and informal settlement upgrading necessarily involve negotiating processes of priority setting and a wide range of trade-offs. Ramjee and van Donk (2011: 22) argue that the state's response has thus far focused on the reform of existing participatory 'invited' spaces but that the "the debate about the weaknesses of the 'invited spaces' is largely silent [about the fact] that participatory governance involves prioritisation, negotiation, trade-offs and compromise. The temptation to remove or minimise these tricky and complex characteristics and sidestep contestation is perhaps understandable, but not particularly helpful if the intention is to strengthen local governance, (re)build trust in local government and facilitate the expression of voice, particularly by those who are marginalised." These processes, in much the same way as the technical processes outlined above, require careful 'rules of engagement' to enable participants, particularly those with less social and financial power, to be equal participants in the process.

As Cooke and Kothari (2001) emphasise, the success of these spaces is their ability to identify and work with existing power relations between stakeholders. The most basic definition of power in participatory space, drawing on the work of Hayward (1998: 2), is “the network of social boundaries that delimit fields of possible action” and so the experience of power in the spaces “is the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible.” Drawing on the schema created by Gaventa (2006), we can ‘map’ the spaces as existing on a continuum: from *closed spaces* where decision-making occurs behind closed doors, to *invited spaces* created by the state to involve citizens in decision-making, to *invented spaces* created by citizens to self-organise and formulate extra-state responses to issues.



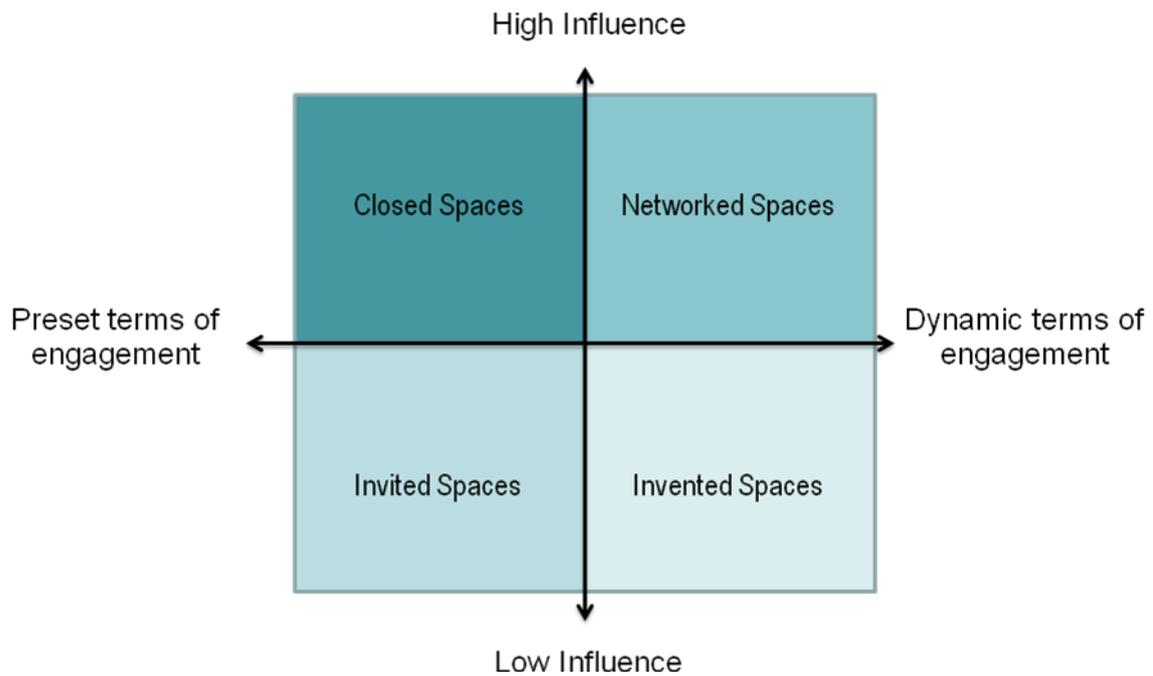
**Figure 1: Continuum of participatory spaces**

It is vital, however, to remember that these spaces all exist in dynamic relationship to one another; they are constantly shaped by struggles the legitimacy, co-option, transformation and resistance. And actors move fluidly between spaces, ‘invited spaces’ need to be understood in “institutional landscapes as one amongst a host of other domains of association into and out of which actors move, carrying with them relationships, knowledge, connections, resources, identities and identifications” (Cornwall, 2003: 9).

Reviewing the international literature, Fung (2005) argues that three questions of institutional design are particularly important for understanding the potential and limits of various forms of citizen participation:

- Who participates?
- How do they communicate and make decisions?
- What is the connection between their conclusions and opinions on one hand and public policy and action on the other?

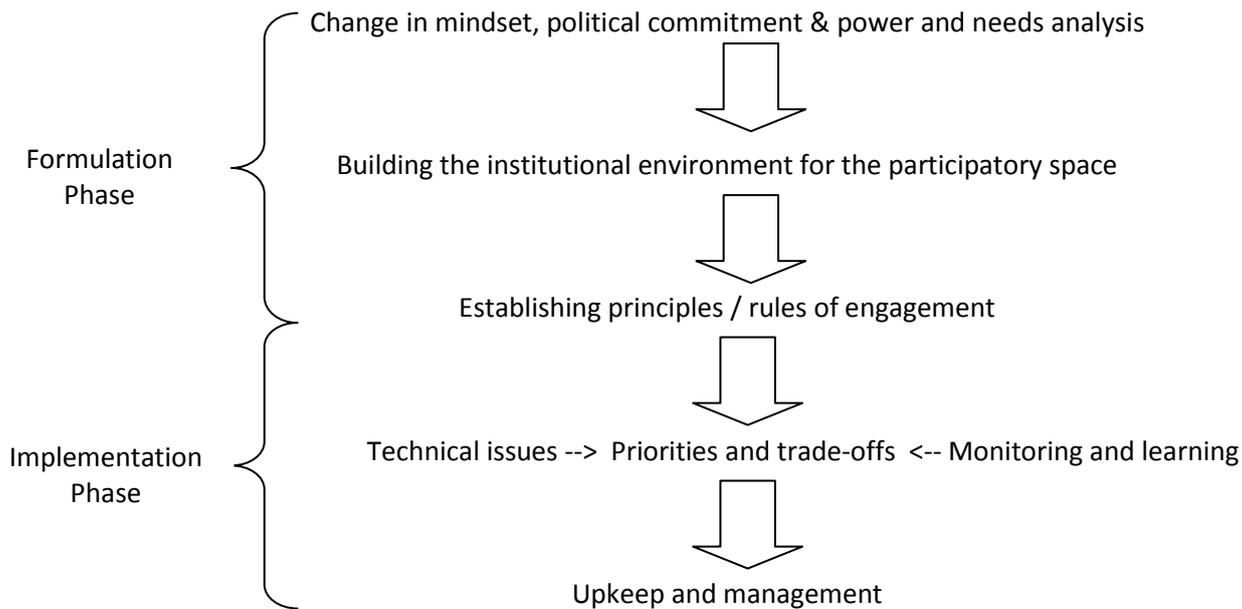
We suggest that these can be consolidated into two axes which characterise the differences between participatory spaces: the degree to which their *terms of engagement* (including who participates and how decisions are made) are preset or dynamic (i.e. determined by the body creating the space or the participants who occupy the space) and the degree to which they are able to *influence* the actions of government. We would therefore ‘map’ different participatory spaces in the following way:



**Figure 2: Locating 'networked spaces' in relation to other participatory spaces**

As outlined above, then, we think it is important to recognise the role that each of these spaces can and must play in processes of governance. *Closed spaces* within the state, which tend to be exclusive spaces that have a focus on technical decision-making and follow clear rules and procedures, will remain a part of governance. For example, the decision to apply and the process of formulating an application for Urban Settlements Development Grant will typically occur without wide public consultation. *Invited spaces* are state-created spaces that follow specific rules to consult citizens about plans and/or decision-making occurring within the state, however, the plans or decisions are typically formulated outside of the spaces and comments or suggestions have limited impact. These may include regular spaces, such as IDP representative forums or ward committees, or more ad hoc spaces, such as Izimbizos and IDPs hearings. *Invented spaces* “range from ones created by social movements and community associations, to those simply involving natural places where people gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalised policy arenas” (Gaventa, 2006: 27). They, therefore, include extra-state community mobilisation, the activities of social movements and processes of community protest but, because they are treated with suspicion by politicians and officials, often have limited effects on wider processes of decision-making. We conceptualise ‘networked spaces’, therefore, as spaces carefully designed to enable the building of *communities of practice* between the state, consultants, civil society and communities to *generate pragmatic solutions* to problems identified during informal settlement upgrading. Particular emphasis is placed on designing spaces that enable genuine *participant control of processes and outcomes*, the explicit *negotiation of priorities and trade-offs* and productive processes of *knowledge sharing and capacity building*. In this conceptualisation, then, they exist as discrete spaces which are dynamic enough to ensure that ‘co-productive’ partnerships are able to emerge, and function to strengthen other existing participatory spaces.

The process of bringing such spaces into being involved two broad phases: their initialisation and their operation in practice. Each of these, in turn, consist of a number of 'steps' that must be carefully and pragmatically designed to ensure that they contribute to the genuine construction of a community of practice.



**Figure 3: The phases and steps involved in 'opening' networked spaces**

It is worth noting that despite the use of linear language here, it is probable that these processes will unfold concurrently, overlap or occur in iterative loops. This is not a danger to the outcomes of these spaces, provided that sufficient care is taken to satisfy the core characteristics of networked spaces outlined in the definition above - control, negotiation and learning. Each of these stages and steps will be unpacked in more detail in the remainder of the document, drawing on the experiences of the integrated Serviced Land Project (iSLP) to illustrate the complexities of achieving them in practice<sup>8</sup>.

### 3. Initialising networked spaces

As Fung (2005) argues, a great deal of the success of participatory space is determined by its ability to involve the right stakeholders and 'rules of engagement' that will determine how participants are able to contribute to and/or control the outcomes. While aligning the right participants in such a process is an ongoing process, there are two important initial stages: identifying a core group of stakeholders with an interest in pursuing a process such as informal settlement upgrading and ensuring they have adequate political backing for a reasonable chance at success, and the construction of the institutional environment that will enable genuine participation during the 'practical' stages of the process.

As was outlined above, informal settlement upgrading remains a poorly understood option for most state officials, politicians and communities. An indispensable aspect of such a process, then, is attaining the clear backing of politicians to bring together officials, professionals and community groups to pursue informal settlement upgrading as a human settlement option. Without high-level political support lengthy, complex and expensive processes such as informal settlement upgrading are unlikely to succeed. Once support is secured the initiating official or department can begin to assemble the difference stakeholder groups that will be required to build a 'community of practice' able to sustain the project. Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter (2005) suggest that communities of practice are important because they:

- Connect people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact, either infrequently or at all.
- Provide a shared context for people to communicate and share information, stories, and personal experiences in a way that builds understanding and insight.
- Enable dialogue between people who come together to explore new possibilities, solve challenging problems, and create new, mutually beneficial opportunities.
- Stimulate learning by serving as a vehicle for authentic communication, mentoring, coaching, and self-reflection.
- Capture and diffuse existing knowledge to help people improve their practice by providing a forum to identify solutions to common problems and a process to collect and evaluate best practices.
- Introduce collaborative processes to groups and organizations as well as between organizations to encourage the free flow of ideas and exchange of information.
- Help people organize around purposeful actions that deliver tangible results.
- Generate new knowledge to help people transform their practice to accommodate changes in needs and technologies.

**Box 1: Building a community of practice**

The county of Reading in the UK has suggested that the following steps are involved in building an inclusive 'community of practice' for collaborative planning:

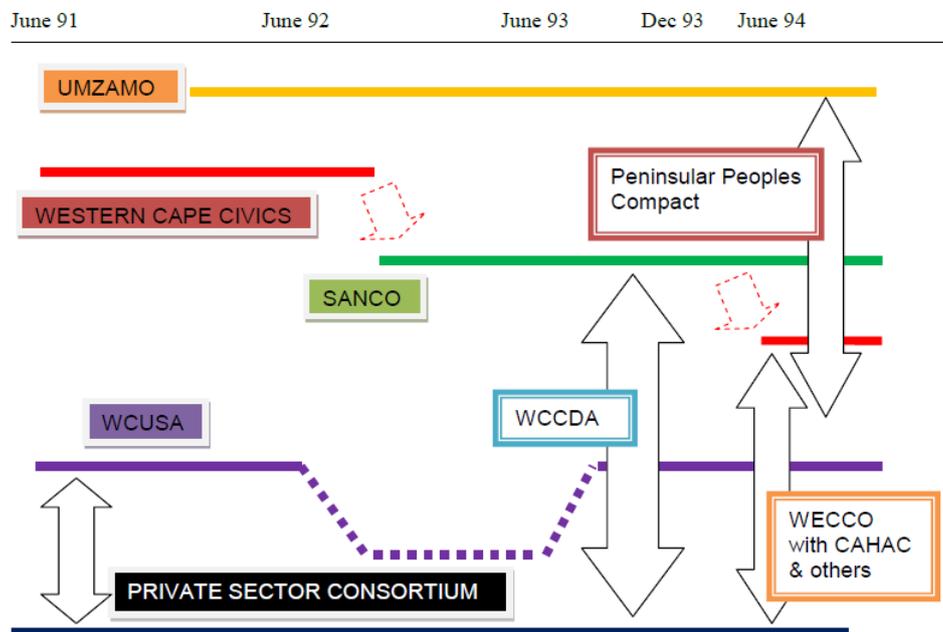
- establish a database of community and stakeholder organisations and interests, which will be added to as the process moves forward;
- identify the key (spatial and policy) areas where the involvement of the community and stakeholders will be required to prepare the plan;
- discuss with community and stakeholders how they wish to be involved;
- assess resources available;
- detail appropriate methods and timing of community involvement;
- identify the process and procedures for reporting back to community interests

(Doak and Parker, 2005)

Beyond the difficulties in finding individuals interested in informal settlement upgrading, however, there are two key problems with evolving this initial community of practice. First, as the quote from Adlard (2011) at the opening of the paper illustrates, the availability of resources in these processes inevitably triggers a range of competing claims to represent the legitimate interests of different stakeholder groups. From the state these may be from competing officials or departments at the local government level or between the different spheres of government, different politicians or political parties may vie for control, different professions and consulting firms may position themselves to contribute technical skills, and different groups within society and community leadership structures may compete to represent 'the people'.

Adlard (2011) illustrates the incredible complexity that all of these competing claims can generate by 'mapping' the dynamics that occurred within civil society at the beginning of the iSLP process. The process began in 1991 which was a time of great political uncertainty and social flux and when the facilitator began to canvass for support three groups of stakeholders emerged: those falling under the UDF banner, including the Western Cape Civic Association (WCCA), the Western Cape United Civic Association (WCUCA), the Western Cape United Independent Civic Congress (WCUICC) and the Western Cape Hostel Dwellers Association (WCHDA); the Western Cape United Squatters Association (WCUSA), which it quickly emerged did not represent squatters but their autocratic warlords; and the various political parties including the newly unbanned ANC and, briefly, the PAC. Over the next three years these different groups formed an array of partnerships and alliances to try to influence the outcomes to the benefit of particular communities. Perhaps the starkest illustration of this was the backing of the undemocratic WCUSA by a private sector consortium and elements within the outgoing government who sought to use the opportunity to secure large development

contracts. After an initial failed attempt to pre-empt the entire project, this grouping tried to form an almost overwhelming series of alliances with the other community organisations, negotiating tactics and walkouts to control the outcomes of the process (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: iSLP Policy Phase - Takeover Bid Collaborations**  
(Adlard, 2011: 19)

The ultimate success of the programme in surviving the change in administration after 1994 and the systematic expansion of a base of genuine support in these communities was grounded in its *initial* willingness to engage with all partners (without immediate demands for them to prove their legitimacy and representativeness) *while building an institutional framework and core set of principles* that would enable fruitful negotiations and working relationships later in the process. That is, expanding the tent wide enough to initially include all *potential* partners expands the opportunities created for by-in and provides a more stable base from which to generate the scaffolding that will support the rest of the project. The initial time devoted to ensuring a solid base of support pre-empted a multitude of delays that can occur when communities feel alienated from the process – most vividly illustrated by the difficulties experienced during the rollout of the far less consultative N2 Gateway Project.

The second core problem with building a community of practice with diverse stakeholders with competing interests is the need to develop *trust*. Wilson (2006) suggests that developing a sense of trust lies at the heart of the successful combining knowledges and working relationships, especially across deep power differentials.

When it is largely absent, people are more guarded in what they say, less prepared to expose themselves and explore difference. In such circumstances it is difficult to see how a transformatory dialogue might emerge from the engagement between actors. By contrast, its presence within an engagement can be gauged by willingness to expose oneself before others, push the boundaries of what one knows, explore radical ideas together, and to embrace disagreement where necessary. In these ways trust between actors suggests the potential for ‘learning with’ to go beyond the purpose of reinforcing and tweaking existing practice (Wilson, 2006: 518).

In a South African context, where local government, civil society and communities often have a long history of antagonistic relationships, the pursuit of trust is a difficult goal. One possible solution is to generate a set of institutional relationships and 'rules of engagement' that have broad 'buy in' - rather than trusting one another, the different stakeholders can trust 'the process'.

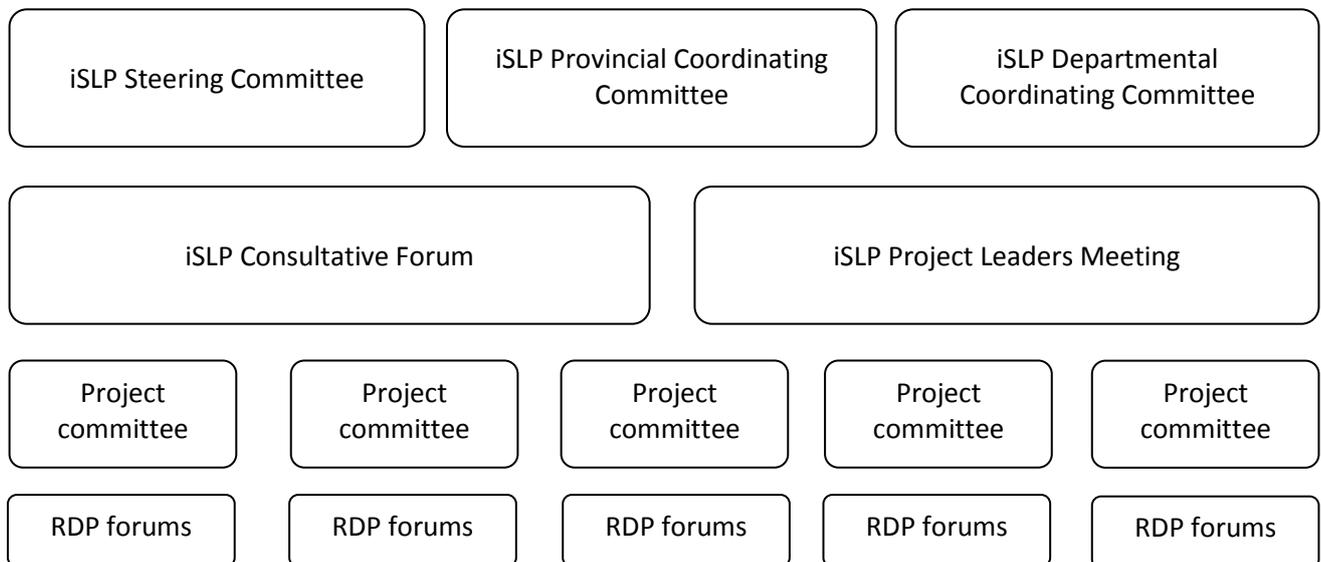
In projects working at scale, building a clear institutional framework is important to build stakeholder confidence in the final outcomes of particular processes and allows the project to negotiate the trade-off between inclusiveness and the need for efficacy in decision-making. As indicated above, informal settlement upgrading involves the complex coordination of different departments and spheres within the state, the management of different professionals with different timeframes and modes of engagement, the input of politically elected representatives, and the broad-based involvement of community groups and leadership structures.

The key initial step in the iSLP was for the authorities to appoint an independent facilitator for the whole process who not only could build relationships but also understood the housing development process. The facilitation function in the UISP could easily be enlarged to fit this role. The iSLP, because of the scale of contestation between parties, went further and found an independent, volunteer chairperson for its policy-making process. The networked space was held together at its centre by the chair while its structure was constantly lubricated and repaired by the facilitator. Once the principles and policies had been finalised the facilitator was well-positioned to coordinate the implementation. In a UISP project that role could be financed as part of the allocation for project management

The iSLP began its institutional journey relatively simply: a Technical Committee and two parallel Policy Committees were established - one with the extra-parliamentary community representatives and the other with the largely discredited local authority personnel - with representatives of the provincial and regional government sitting on both. While the local authority group fell away relatively quickly, the work of the remaining Policy Committee was instrumental in building a robust base for the wider project and establishing its credibility as a process seeking genuine community involvement. After 1994 its adoption as a flagship project of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, with a budget of R 1.2 billion, also saw the dissolution of the Policy Committee and the vesting of control in individual project committees.

This shift into the 'practice phase', then, required the building of a more elaborate set of institutional relations (see Figure 5). At its core were participatory forums for communities to come together and give input into planning processes; these were initially Residents Development Committees (RDCs) facilitated by iSLP staff but became taken over by the RDP Forums after 1994. A Project Committee was created for each housing project within the iSLP, the membership of which comprised representatives of the developing authority, nominees of RDP Forums representing communities from which beneficiaries would be drawn and the iSLP Project Coordinator – with consultants to the developer (and communities, if available) attending by invitation. The iSLP Consultative Forum, then, was made up of representatives from all the RDP Forums in the iSLP as well as representatives from the various municipal structures (which existed before their unification into the City of Cape Town in 2000). It was the primary 'generating' body tasked with discussing issues emerging out of the different Project Committees, producing recommendations and guidance to individual organisations and recommendations to the Steering Committee. The iSLP Steering Committee was the official policy-making body, made up of the various provincial ministers and local councillors responsible for the different areas covered by the iSLP as well as representatives from the Consultative Forum. Finally, on the state's side, the Project Leaders Meeting was a forum for the provincial staff directly responsible for the project to meet with the various Project Leaders, municipal and consultant project managers to meet with the Project Coordinator to discuss specific technical issues emerging

from individual projects. There were also regular meetings of Departmental and Provincial Coordinating Committees tasked with ensuring effective coordination amongst the different provincial and local government departments.



**Figure 5: iSLP Institutional Framework**

Above all other ingredients, however, Adlard (2011) credits the success of the overall project to the painstaking development of a common set of principles and guidelines during the first three years of the project through the Policy Committees. The iSLP Principles included a thorough outline of the different organisational principles and responsibilities of parties involved in implementation, the principles that govern land allocation, development techniques, and appointment of consultants, as well as general guidelines on the densities, planning principles and levels of service expected from the project<sup>9</sup>.

Issues on which there was no agreement were referred to sub-committees for further work to be done. In the event some pragmatic decisions were required along the way to counter obfuscation and attempts at deviation, but these were taken only after painstaking attempts to achieve consensus. As a result the SLP policy-making process developed a reputation for integrity which was remembered by stakeholders throughout the long implementation phase that followed. The clearest indicator of this was the powerful and authoritative status that became ascribed to the iSLP Principles – on the very few occasions when they were challenged in the years ahead they were upheld – even at the expense of political reputations or of the institutional arrangements of the time (Adlard, 2011: 22).

This process of finding the 'common ground' and vision of a project is undoubtedly a lightning rod for clashes between different institutional interests, priorities and modes of engagement. And yet it is only through the negotiation of this complex process that a working core of committed stakeholder groups can emerge. Furthermore, the conscientious process of negotiating these differences, even when it becomes antagonistic, is an important part of building a basic level of trust that will enable momentum during the 'practical' phase of the project.

The experience of the iSLP has also underlined the importance of key individuals in ensuring the success of these participatory spaces. Cornwall (2008: 47) emphasises that these guardians of process and transformative outcomes are important because

[t]hose doing the inviting often take their own ways of seeing and doing for granted. Those who enter invited spaces may consciously or unconsciously mimic the kinds of behaviour they have witnessed in these and other spaces, in order to gain voice and influence. Simply creating a space does not mean that the space will not be filled with old ways of working, entrenched hierarchies, disabling assumptions and relations of power that reproduce the generally undemocratic institutions of the family, community and polity. Breaking with these patterns takes intensive investment in processes that restore to people a sense of their own agency as well as enable those in positions of power to recognise the limiting effects of their own beliefs and conduct.

They are individuals able to surpass the limits of their institutional positionings, or consultants trusted by all stakeholder groups, to give primacy to the promotion and protection of the foundational principles and vision that underpin the project. Their work is typically an invisible contribution to ensuring that different parties find common ground or that particular agreed-upon processes occur even when these may be time-consuming or unpopular with some stakeholder groups.

#### 4. Creating network spaces that enable practice

The different aspects of initiating network spaces discussed thus far are vital to the building of the scaffolding required to support participation in the complex and often fraught processes involved in informal settlements upgrading. While there are a number of 'steps' involved in informal settlement upgrading (for a more thorough overview see the recent work of the Project Preparation Trust), this section focuses on discussing ways to maximise participation in decision-making, particularly with regards to input into the technical processes, the structuring of deliberative spaces to negotiate priority setting and trade-offs, and ensuring active processes of monitoring and decision-making.

Informal settlement upgrading represents complex terrain for technical decision making because settlements are often located on sub optimal land (from a development perspective such as being located on a floodplain or dolomite), technical processes rely on formality and structure that do not exist in these settlements, and because the necessity of community involvement requires a blending of different knowledges (or epistemic paradigms). There are very real constraining factors to the full participation of poor communities in joint planning spaces. This is because of “the capacities expected of participants in structured participation exercises – the ability to engage, usually in English, with technical issues in settings where the degree of technical background expected, the ambience and the way in which meetings are run, [which] combine to make these forums at which the voice of the poor cannot be heard, even if they happen to get to the table” (Friedman 2006: 14). However, in a comprehensive review of the place of the technocrat in development Wilson (2006) argues that there has been a shift in the normative expectations about how knowledge is produced and used – from a ‘knowledge elite’ that is expected to know the answers, to a ‘learning elite’ that seeks knowledge from and about beneficiary communities. But he calls for a further shift towards genuine attempts to partner with communities to learn *with* them how to tackle social problems.



Figure 6: Wilson's (2006) continuum of knowledges

This involves recognising that communities have important contributions to make to such processes *and* that the *process of producing knowledge is an important part of determining its usefulness*. It is a widely-held idea that (social) knowledge does not exist in the abstract – constructivism – and that, after Foucault, it is always an expression of power. Therefore, De Souza (2008: 330) asserts that

Since 'knowledge is power', even oppressed groups can exert some kind of power on the basis of their knowledge... For social movements it means that the more they use their 'local knowledge' (knowledge of the space, of people's needs and 'language') in terms of planning by means of combining it with the technical knowledge produced by the state apparatus and universities (in order both to criticize some aspects of this knowledge and to 'recycle' and use some other ones), the more strategic can be the way they think and act. This kind of knowledge (and of power) should not be underestimated, even if social movements obviously do not (and cannot) 'plan' the city as the state apparatus does it.

The process of bringing knowledges into contact with one another, in productive spaces seeking to produce concrete outcomes, is therefore an opportunity to improve outcomes as well as creating room for communities to reassert their agency in the planning and decision-making about their environment.

The iSLP tackled this complexity head on to both insure community control of the process, and improve the community's ability to understand the processes involved in development. A huge contribution to getting off on the right track was that community members of Project Committees were allowed to recommend the appointment of consultants for their project from a panel of 3 provided by the Province. Each firm was required to give a presentation to the Project Committee and a recommendation was then made to the Province. That process got the relationships in place right from the start. As has been outlined, the first step for each Project Committee was constructing the institutional frameworks needed to create participatory spaces - particularly in the formation of representative Project Committees empowered by the wider community to actively oversee and participate in decision-making. The first workshop organised by the iSLP aimed to build the capacity of the Project Committee and other project representatives to address all of the core issues involved in the development (e.g. fundamentals of urban planning, budgeting) and clarify the type of community input that would be required into the planning and decision-making process. The second workshop was the responsibility of the Project Committee to introduce the consultants and developers to the needs and different aspects of the settlement. The third workshop was a follow-up led by these consultants to allow them to present back to the community those aspects that had been identified in the first visit (translated into some of their more technical tools). These two workshops, then, begin to build the common ontological experience that will form the basis for the cross-epistemic conversation.

The possibilities of developing community-based knowledge systems focused on securing tenure in informal settlements has been the focus of a 'Social Tenure Domain Model' (STDM) recently proposed by the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG), Global Land Tool Network (GLTN) and UN-Habitat. The focus of the model is to support all forms of land rights, social tenure relations, and overlapping claims to land by collecting information about the *attribute data*, which is based on data collected through community-administered questionnaires, and the *spatial data*, which is normally a base map showing the entire area of the informal settlement but may include maps produced through collaborative planning processes, to capture the different *social tenure relations* ('people – land' relationships) in the settlement. Once collected by the community through a process of 'participatory enumeration'<sup>10</sup>, this data can be used for a range of immediate and more long-term purposes, including enabling the residents to demand their rights as citizens, improving land tenure, to plan for the provision of infrastructure and services, assist in land allocation and adjudication, to redevelop/ upgrade the slum, to guide housing improvement, and to use in land administration and

information systems (UN-Habitat, 2010). Antonio (2011) suggests that experiences in India and Kenya have emphasised four lessons. First, for the STDM implementation to be successful, the engagement of local residents and stakeholders from the design to implementation phase is extremely important in order to get wide scale buy-in and ownership. Second, there is a tendency to implement data gathering process in 'one go' for different uses and purposes without considering costs, timing and the existing level of capacity. Instead it is best to implement the data collection process in an incremental and phased approach. Third, there is often a culture among technical people, from government institutions and NGOs, that the acquired data are not freely shared, even though the data may actually be used for other development purposes and may actually benefit a similar organisation or the community. This data must be jointly owned and be easily accessible. Finally, a clear challenge is how to change the mindsets of technical people in various institutions including those working with civil society groups and local communities, to embrace the concepts behind STDM and start working outside the 'conventions'. It is also worth noting the important role that 'intermediary' organisations (e.g. NGOs in the STDM cases or iSLP facilitators) play in bridging the formal/informal interfaces in these processes.

The fourth iSLP workshop aimed to discuss the options for the high priority issues identified at the previous workshop (e.g. site size and shape, layout configurations, the standard of infrastructure, the position of major land uses and the various cost implications). The capacitating of the community, and its role in actively introducing the consultants to and debating development options within the settlement, are all vital steps but are relatively conventional aspects of informal settlement upgrading. On their own, however, they limit the control of the community to acting as informants to a 'learning elite'. As Cornwall (2008: 62) reminds us:

Equipping people with the skills to negotiate within a system that continues to disadvantage them may give them some tools but, as Audre Lorde observed, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. Learning the language and styles of argumentation of the white, middle-class men who have traditionally dominated public institutions may give people from other social groups some advantage. But this in itself may do little to change these institutions and make them more inclusive of diverse forms of expression, styles of reasoning and testimony, and forms of dialogue and negotiation. For this, much more far-reaching changes to the political system are needed.

The important part of ensuring community control was achieved in the next steps. Consultants needed to return to the community with draft plans, based on input from the previous workshops, which are accessible to Committee Members and produced in a form that can be 'taken away' for wider discussion within the community. Based on the feedback from this workshop, then, consultants were asked to return with a second draft plan, which also included the inputs of providers of community facilities (typically provincial departments) and an indication of the likely cost of service sites so the community could gauge the impact of the plan on their individual housing subsidies. These presentations and revisions would then continue until the planning adequately captured the community's needs and aspirations. The final workshop, of the planning phase, involved a presentation of the final plan, including explanations of all previous changes and cost estimates, so that a mandate from the Project Committee could be given for the project to go to tender. While undoubtedly a slower and more nebulous process for state officials to oversee than conventional housing development efforts, this unprecedented transfer of control from the state and professionals to poor communities creates the opportunity for genuine popular input, novel locally-proposed priorities and solutions to problems, and plans that are widely understood and supported by beneficiaries. It is worth reasserting that the success of the implementation phase relies heavily on the more macro alignment of different social actors that occurred in the original overall policy-making phase.

As has already been outlined, the active process of overseeing the implementation of the project, the negotiation of unforeseen differences in opinion and newly emerging priorities, and the coordination of the different spheres of government in the delivery of community facilities was managed through the complex institutional framework. Project Committees are held accountable by the wider communities (through forums such as the RDP Forum) who, in turn, are able to hold the developers and project managers accountable. The negotiation of difficult issues emerging from the communities and the project managers are supported through monthly or fortnightly meetings of the iSLP Consultative Forum and iSLP Project Leaders Meeting respectively. These were the two primary 'working spaces' for representatives from the individual projects to identify crosscutting themes, solve common problems and hold one another accountable. They were, therefore, key spaces to engage in macro processes of priority setting and the negotiation of trade-offs but were also imperative for individuals and the wider project to monitor, learn and improve practice.

### **Box 2: Creating productive communities of practice**

Creating forums to facilitate learning is an imperative part of constructing a functional community of practice. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) suggest that the efficacy of such spaces can be improved by some key pragmatic design features:

- Communities of practice tend to be dynamic with different stakeholders introducing and negotiating different interests, goals and modes of engagement, and so they must be *designed to evolve naturally*.
- The success of such groups are often dependent on finding a *regular rhythm or pace* for meetings, engagements and activities to sustain interest in and the vibrancy of the community
- Recognise that these communities of practice will *inspire and require different levels of participation*, each of which should be accommodated. These will include a core group that typically takes a leadership role and participate intensely, an group that are active participants in the community but do not take on leadership roles, and a peripheral groups that remains relatively passively involved but who will learn from their involvement.
- The community of practice must not become an exclusive or inward looking group, instead its evolving ideas *should be brought into open dialogue with outside perspectives*.
- The community of practice should seek to create *both public and private community spaces for interaction*. While many of the activities of the group should be done in public spaces for all to see and share, there may be appropriate moments for members of the community to meet separately to consolidate perspectives (planners have long recognised the need for marginalised or vulnerable groups to have independent spaces so as not to be drowned out by the wider group; Fraser, 2008).
- There should regular opportunities for participants in the community of practice to have *explicit discussions about the value and productivity of their involvement in the group*.
- The activities of the community of practice need to *combine familiar structure and ideas with radical or exciting opportunities to stretch the thinking of the group*.

The process of establishing these spaces, therefore, should not be thought of as a static and once-off process, but rather a dynamic process in which all participants actively seek to ensure their inclusiveness. Extending the work of Doak and Parker's (2005) about participatory governance in the

UK, we believe that these spaces can be assessed against a set of standards that make up the acronym 'SQUIRREL':

- a plan of how to **Sustain** dialogue and interaction;
- the **Q**uality of engagement;
- the **I**ntegration of different documents and processes relating to community involvement in local governance (i.e. do they meet statutory requirements);
- clear, commonly-held **R**ules of engagement that are agreed upon by all participants, facilitate negotiation and account for the impact of power differentials;
- the **R**esourcing of community involvement; and
- ensuring there is proactive **L**eadership, representivity and accountability amongst all stakeholders

With these formal elements in place we can thereby maximise the possibility of parties 'coming to the table' and slowly building a sense of co-ownership of the outcomes.

How long does this approach take? In the case of Weltevreden Valley Phases 1 and 2, which consisted of 2205 sites, it took about 2 and a half years to plan, do the bulk earthworks (i.e. clear and level the ground) and create serviced sites. Housing delivery took another 3 years – had it been 'mass housing' by one or two commercial contractors the housing would have taken under 2 years. Projects that were politically contested (e.g. Crossroads) were delayed, usually before planning began<sup>11</sup>.

Finally, as noted in Figure 3, the ultimate test of the success of participation in the processes of planning and decision-making in the development of the neighbourhood is the degree to which the local community is willing to contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the infrastructure created by the project. This is not a neoliberal acid test or Trojan horse - the question is not whether communities can now 'pay their way' - but whether there is an interest in ensuring that physical and social gains are not lost. Therefore, while the community may still have mixed success at contributing to formal institutions (e.g. payment for services), local community organisations may contribute time and effort to ensuring the continued improvement of the settlement (e.g. involvement in community policing or active involvement in school activities). Making this an explicit objective of the wider project, and assessing appropriate possibilities in forums such as the Project Committees or the wider Consultative Forum, is an important opportunity to strengthen the sustainability of local participating the process and develop ongoing 'partnerships' between different state actors and these communities.

## 5. Conclusion

One of the primary challenges that needs to be acknowledged when advocating for a more participatory approach, such as the building of networked spaces, is the tension between the need and urgency felt on the ground and the time it takes to run a participatory process. The N2 Gateway Project followed hot on the heels of the iSLP in the Western Cape but was driven by a fundamentally different set of political priorities and technocratic modes of engagement. Despite the initial intention of its initiators, it became about illustrating the delivery of a particular type of housing on well-located land as quickly as possible (both for political and technocratic reasons), thereby sacrificing key participatory lessons learnt during the iSLP, particularly in terms of the importance of the formulation phase. It seems likely that any goodwill and good practice built during the iSLP process, and the difference in approach indicated by the *policy* of BNG, has now been blunted by the bitter contestation over the N2 Gateway Project. The 'performance' imperative created by a specific target for informal settlement upgrading in Outcome 8, while it does represent the first concrete

prioritisation of it as an approach, is also likely to reinforce the prioritisation of speed over process in the pursuit of this target. While not infallible, it is important that we learn the hard-earned lessons of the iSLP process that represents a concerted attempt to find ways to coproduce human settlements. It is only through the pragmatic creation of spaces able to construct networks of officials, practitioners, leaders, community-based organisations and professionals that we will be able to address the challenges and contradictions that are an inextricable part of informal settlement upgrading.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Treasury, R49 billion was spent on the IHSD grant between 1995 and mid-2008, which provided a total of 2.6 million housing opportunities at an average annual delivery rate of 200 000 units a year. According to the department, “although accurate data is not readily available, the bulk of this spending occurs through project-linked subsidies, where developers implement housing projects at scale and a qualifying household obtains ownership of a complete residential unit” (in Tissington, 2011: 31).

<sup>2</sup> According to Charlton and Kihato (2006), the reasons for this include a combination of the following: a move towards the creation of a strong local state more generally after 1999; the political imperative of local government councillors to gain greater influence over a visible aspect of state delivery; the need for spatial and programmatic alignment with integrated development planning (particularly with respect to the delivery of bulk services); reaction to the negative perceptions of the white construction industry; a concern for getting the best deal for beneficiaries through maximising the value of the subsidy and perceptions of poor construction and abuse by private developers; the withdrawal of private sector actors from low-income housing delivery due to tightening environmental regulations; delays in township registration and transfer of title deeds; and increasing financial risk (in Tissington, 2011: 64).

<sup>3</sup> De Souza (2006: 328) explains the attraction of ‘state-centrism’: “Why do people give so much importance to the state apparatus in regard to planning? There are both ‘good’ (importance and centrality of the state apparatus as a regulatory institution, access to public resources) and bad (ideology, ‘state-centrism’, the myth of the state as a guarantor of ‘common good’ and ‘public interest’) reasons for that.”

<sup>4</sup> For example, in its initial formulation it signalled a shift towards area-based subsidies that were based on the overall cost of upgrading settlements, in an attempt to encourage differentiated, contextually-appropriate and responsive planning; however, these subsidies have subsequently been linked to qualifying beneficiaries, thereby largely undercutting the original rationality.

<sup>5</sup> “From 1994 to 2010 the housing backlog has grown from 1.5 million to an approximate figure of over 2.1 million, according to the DHS... In 2007 the Minister of Housing stated that in 3 years, R102 billion would be required to clear the housing backlog and that this amount would more than double to R253 billion in 2016 (this is nearly 20 times the entire current annual housing budget)” (Tissington, 2011: 33-4).

<sup>6</sup> Comment at 12th International Housing and Home Warranty Conference 25-28th September 2011 in Cape Town, South Africa see <http://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/set-deadline-for-free-housing-sexwale-1.1144782>

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<sup>7</sup> Reviewing international experience Cornwall and Coelho (2008: 24-25; added emphasis) suggest that this can best be achieved by pursuing action on three fronts: “[1] catalysing and supporting processes of social mobilization through which marginalized groups can nurture new leaders, enhance their political agency and seek representation in these arenas as well as efficacy outside them; [2] instituting measures to address exclusionary elements within the institutional structure of the participatory sphere, from rules of representation to strategies that foster more inclusive deliberation, such as the use of facilitation; and [3] articulating participatory sphere institutions more effectively with other governance institutions, providing them with resources as well as with political ‘teeth.’”

<sup>8</sup> We would like to give a special acknowledgement to Gerry Adlard and Seth Maqetuka for sharing their experiences with the iSLP and comments about the paper.

<sup>9</sup> While they are not explicitly referred to in the iSLP, it is worth adding that a clear system for recourse needs to be included in the agreed-upon principles. Both participants in the process and citizens outside of the representative groups should have a clear method for registering disagreements with the dominant positions emerging within particular projects, or within the wider programme.

<sup>10</sup> UN-HABITAT (2010) draws on the processes and ‘rituals’ of the Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), which include: the decision to undertake the enumeration; building of trust and laying the foundation for participation between the parties; planning and establishing who will do what; finding resources; putting together and training an implementation team; informing and mobilising the community; gathering secondary information; designing enumeration instruments and procedures; obtaining materials and equipment; conducting the enumerations; capturing the data; verifying the data; analysis; reporting; using the information; storing and accessing the information; and updating the information.

<sup>11</sup> These timeframes are drawn from personal communication with Gerry Adlard, 11 October 2011.