General introduction: Critical thought in post-apartheid South Africa

This paper forms part of my research on social change, a topic often neglected in the scholarly world of the new South Africa, as if the floating signifier 'new' necessarily designates a new lived experience for ordinary people at grassroots level. Hence the apparent presupposition that there is no longer any need to probe, disclose and understand the contradictions, tensions, fissures and struggles associated with transforming the unequal relations of power institutionally. Contrary to this assumption that conflates the ushering in of a new political order with social change, the daily lived experiences of ordinary people at grassroots level suggest in very graphic terms that the existing relations of power, especially institutionally, in the planning bureaucracies of local authorities, councils and municipalities, are yet to be transformed to make real the promises of participatory democracy as ensconced in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

This research, then, highlights the disjuncture between the constitutional provision for community participation in local governance and the absence of such institutional space, bureaucratic orientation and political will to introduce, create, foster and maintain appropriate spaces/opportunities for participatory democracy at grassroots level. This research documents specifically the story of Areas Co-ordinating Teams (ACTs) in the cases of Hanover Park, Heideveld, Manenberg, Langa and Guguletu in the historically black ghettos (locally referred to as townships) of South Africa. My problem state-

ment, methodology and key arguments are briefly summarised below, followed by an exposition of the fieldwork and the research results.

The problematique of planning a new social order at grassroots level

Everyday life in post-apartheid South Africa – the materiality of citizenship

Cape Town has no IDP framework to guide, monitor and evaluate the extent to which there is institutional compliance with the constitutional requirement of community participation in the affairs of local government. Hence the apparent continued existence of 'islands of affluence in a sea of poverty and historical neglect'. Indeed, it could be readily suggested that the continuities of the past overwhelm the discontinuities, which seems to be borne out in the 'mother city' of South Africa, Cape Town.

Cape Town is one of South Africa's largest cities. It has a population of approximately 3.2 million and, like other metropolitan areas throughout the world, finds itself at a crossroads at the beginning of the 21st century in relation to social change, sustainable development, participatory democracy and transparent and accountable governance. In this regard, it would appear that the city is economically well positioned not merely to manage existing and emerging tensions and crises in the domain of planning, but most importantly, perhaps also to acknowledge and ensure, commensurate with the constitutional provisions, that ordinary people are co-creators of the post-apartheid city. The colonial-cum-apartheid practices of socio-economic neglect in historically deprived black townships, collectively and euphemistically dubbed the 'Cape Flats', appear to be largely intact as new business development programmes still occur predominantly in former white areas (Turok, 2000: 16–17). Regrettably, therefore, even eight years after the 1994 democratic elections, Cape Town remains one of the most divided cities in the world. Thus the observation by one researcher that Cape Town is not a city but a conglomeration of villages:

> *The marks left by apartheid will fade in course of time. But its spatial logic will continue to affect people's daily lives for gen-*

> *erations to come. Because of apartheid, people live great distances from where they work; standards of urban infrastructure vary enormously; parts of the city* [are] *devoid* [of] *shops, businesses, entertainment venues and schools, while others are saturated with them; chasms separate one citizen from another, so much so that people feel like tourists in their own town* (Bremer, 2000: 8).

This means, among other things, that the socio-spatial[2] problematique of the apartheid city continues to influence the rate of change in the South African society to a great extent, particularly after the inauguration of the first democratic government in 1994. It would, therefore, be no exaggeration to suggest that the South African city reflects the state of the nation and the welfare of its people (Williams, 2000a). The cities continue to reflect the racist planning frameworks of the successive white-controlled governments, *a la* Hendrik Verwoerd, who explicitly declared on 30 May 1952, in Parliament, that:

- *Every town or city, especially industrial cities, must have a single corresponding black township;*
- *townships must be large, and must be situated to allow for expansion without spilling over into another racial group area;*
- *townships must be located an adequate distance from white areas;*
- *black townships should be separated from white areas by an area of industrial sites where industries exist or are being planned;*
- *townships should be within easy transport distance of the city, preferably by rail and not by road transport;*
- *all race group areas should be situated so as to allow access to the common industrial areas and the CBD without necessitating travel through the group area of another race;*
- *there should be suitable open buffer spaces around the black township, the breadth of which should depend on whether the border touches on densely or sparsely populated white area;*
- *townships should be a considerable distance from main, and more particularly national roads, the use of which as local transportation routes should be discouraged;*

- *existing wrongly situated areas should be moved;* [and]
- *everybody wants his servants and his labourers, but nobody wants to have a native location near his own suburb* (*Cape Times*, 14 July 1949; 31 May 1950; Durban City Council, 1951).

This explicitly racially motivated planning framework was systematically enforced by the administrative functionaries of the apartheid state, catering mostly for the needs of its 'white' citizens. It is the cumulative impact of these racially contrived planning frameworks that has resulted in 'islands of spatial affluence' in a 'sea of geographical misery' at the beginning of the 21st Century South Africa (Marais, 1998; Mabin, 1999a; Simone, 1999; Saul, 1999; Bond, 1999a, Williams, 2000d). It is this largely historically constructed uneven form of development that is the subject of transformation in the post-1994 democratic South Africa (Lodge, 1999).

Indeed, as accented by Williams (2000a) elsewhere, within a year of its 1994 democratic dispensation the South African government spelled out the importance of the urban domain for the country in a document entitled *Remaking the urban sector: The Government of National Unity's strategy for South Africa's cities, towns and neighbourhoods*:

> *Following a global trend, South Africa is experiencing explosive urban growth. Approximately 26 million people, 65% of a 40 million strong national population, already live in metropolitan areas, cities and towns. This urban sector accounts for some 80% of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product. As economic activities and social and cultural opportunities expand in our cities and towns, urbanisation will persist and more than likely accelerate. By 2000, the urban population will be above 70% of the country's total. By 2010, this proportion will likely have risen to 75%* (RSA, 1995: 1).

In a revised version of the above document, entitled *Urban development framework* (1997), the Government observes that:

> *International experience has shown that ultimately, the success or failure of national development initiatives will largely be shaped in cities and towns. National economic success depends upon urban success* (RSA, 1997: 2).

However, ensuring the vitality of South Africa's cities and towns depends to a great extent on how South Africans understand the

dynamics and overall trajectory of their society at the dawn of the 21st century, particularly in the light of the enduring legacy of apartheid *vis-à-vis* the welfare of ordinary people. In this regard, for example, Statistics South Africa, (1998; *Cape Times*, 21 October 1998) indicated in 1998 that there are large socio-economic differences among South Africans: 43% have no formal housing, 20% have no education, 62% earn less than US $300 per month, 34% are unemployed, 72% have no telephones, 50% have no toilet facilities and 55% have no indoor taps (faucets). In the light of the import of urban life and the associated socio-economic distinctions underlying its multi-facetted dimensions, frequently driven by racial, gender and class antinomies, understanding the historical antecedents and structural differentiations of urban South Africa is, therefore, crucial for securing the overall welfare of the country in the 21st century. These multi-facetted differentiated experiences of people in space (geographically specific localities), punctuated by particular historical phenomena (archived, indexed, remembered and narrated in distinct memory forms) necessitate, therefore, that the concept of people-driven development, as officially proclaimed in the 1998 *White Paper on Local Government* (RSA, 1998), be a defining element of transforming the apartheid state and its related institutional practices and spatial manifestations. In like manner, the Government's *Green Paper on Development and Planning* (RSA, 1999a) and the Municipal Systems Bill (RSA, 1999b) point out that recognising the historically driven social processes underpinning the South African urban landscape is vital for understanding (and solving) the multiplicity of problems such as homelessness, unemployment and overall squalor characterising South African society in general and urban life in particular. Accordingly, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP),[3] and all related legislation, operational frameworks and development policies and guidelines, acknowledge the historical antecedents/practices underlying the current planning initiatives to create a more equitable dispensation (McCarthy & Smit, 1984; Smit, 1989; RSA, 1995, 1997, 1998c, Williams, 2000a).

Even so, prevailing structural and socio-pathological conditions impede the overall improvement of the daily lived experiences of ordinary people, including, among others, high unemployment, increased levels of alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual abuse and the resultant social dislocation, especially in so-called

Coloured communities. These, in turn, are exacerbated by the spread of diseases associated with poverty and poor environmental health, such as tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS. It is into such a socio-economic context that ACTs have been born as vehicles to empower ordinary people at grassroots level *a la* community participation in local government development planning.

Major arguments

Social change through community participation: The construction of the post-apartheid city?

Social change does not roll in under the wheels of inevitably. On the contrary, we have to organise for it, mobilise for it, struggle for it and indeed, plan for it – especially in a country such as South Africa where planning bureaucracies through centuries of colonial-cum-apartheid thought and practices have managed to create socio-economic patterns of uneven development and neglect amid the geographies of affluence, fear, and collective othering of the unemployed, homeless, destitute, the angry and alienated, who are increasingly demanding their basic rights as enshrined in the post-apartheid Constitution. Hence the import of the constitutional requirements of transparent, accountable, democratic practices in all areas of governance and the right of communities to participate in defining and prioritising the form, content and dimensions of integrated development planning (IDP) at local level.

It would, however, appear that the City of Cape Town (CCT) has yet to embrace, both in theory and practice, the principles of bottom-up, grassroots-driven, people oriented development planning. It is in this regard where the nascent forms of para-planning *a la* ACTs present a structural nexus between the citizenry and the local government of Cape Town. In this regard, several points can be made with regard to the potential role of local government in transforming the uneven patterns of development at grassroots level in South Africa:

First, local government is the smallest and most approachable unit in the total public administration system, and can play a major role in breaking down the barriers between the citizenry and government. It is therefore in the unique position to determine how best the needs of a local community can be met.

Second, being intimately involved in the affairs of ordinary people at grassroots level, it has more channels to use than other spheres of government to provide effective, equitable and efficient services to people at this level as well as to enhance transparent, accountable, participatory practices in all aspects of local governance.

Third, internationally the past few years have seen an increasing interest in local governance as a result of the confluence of a number of factors such as its potentially developmental role, the local impacts of globalisation, the need for civic education, and the resultant demand for more democratic and sustainable structures in local communities.

Most importantly, perhaps, the increasing focus on a dialogical/symbiotic relationship between government and its citizens in democratic states has heightened the demands not merely for political legitimacy, but also the effective, enduring translation of socio-economic rights into practical, development oriented planning projects and programmes within and across specific local communities.

Until the early 1990s local government in South Africa had no constitutional safeguard, as it was perceived as a structural extension of the state and a function of provincial government. South African history reflects very little opportunity for community participation. The fact that most of the population had no political rights until 1994 demonstrates the total absence of participation of any sort prior to this date. Instead the method of government was highly centralised, deeply authoritarian and secretive, which ensured that fundamental public services were not accessible to black people (SALGA, 2001; Williams, 2000c). The approach to planning in general was influenced by early planning in Britain, which stressed 'efficiency concerns' and was dominated by scientists such as architects and engineers, who held the view that all planning had technical solutions (McCarthy & Smit, 1984). To a large extent, technically oriented planning frameworks, as borne out by the planning history of South Africa itself, considers humans as objects of planning and not necessarily as the creators and shapers of the very tools that are used by planners to structure and give material content to the human experience in time and space (Smit, 1989). It is in this crucial aspect that the post-apartheid Constitution seeks to make a fundamental difference in the lives of ordinary people in particular, in that it centres the human being as the provenance and recipient of development planning. Accordingly, insight from the majority of people,

especially those who were historically denied political rights, and who quite clearly have a collective stake in the outcomes of development planning at local level, will, commensurate with the ethos of democratic practice in all spheres of governance, assume critical importance in transforming the unequal relations of power in the institutional planning bureaucracies in the new South Africa.

Indeed, in the wake of the abolition of apartheid in 1990, local government assumed an important role *vis-à-vis* institutional transformation. Hence public policies were formulated to create 'people centred development', predicated on, among other things, democratic practices such as equity, transparency, accountability and respect for the rights of citizens, especially ordinary people: the poor, homeless and destitute.

Accordingly, the RDP (ANC, 1994), the political manifesto of the African National Congress (ANC) during their election campaign for the first democratic elections on 27 April 1994, would constitute the overall planning framework for the transition to post-apartheid South Africa. The RDP stresses the importance of nation building through an improved standard of living and quality of life for all South Africans. Hence the import of local government *vis-à-vis* development planning at grassroots level. Appropriately, therefore, since 1996 local government has been a sphere of government in its own right: it is no longer a function of national or provincial government. On the contrary, it is an integral component of the democratic state. In terms of the Chapter 3 of the Constitution, however, all spheres of government are obliged to observe the principles of co-operative government with the view to giving meaningful effect to the basic rights of all citizens, especially black people, the historically neglected and excluded, who, in both absolute and proportional terms, still form the overwhelming majority of those who are homeless, unemployed and destitute in the post-1994 democratic order.

With a view to ensuring bottom-up, people-centred IDP at grassroots level, the Constitution in subsection 152(e) states that the objective of local government is:

> *...to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.*

As a broad theoretical statement of intent this constitutional provision for community participation in the affairs of local government

appears to be quite a radical posture, insofar as it ensconces the right of citizens to contribute towards the form, substance and overall dimensions of their respective communities. In practice, however, this constitutional right encounters profound structural limitations in the midst of bureaucratic institutions where uneven relations of power militate severely against such a constitutionally-driven community participatory model of development planning at grassroots level.

Furthermore, the Constitution does not identify clear measurements for the success and failure of community participation in development planning at grassroots level. The implementation of community participation thus constitutes a veritable problem in the planning bureaucracies, which hail from the oppressive and exclusionary relations of power of the apartheid era. In short, most of the senior officials in these bureaucracies were directly responsible for the implementation of apartheid planning frameworks and by some strange logic, are, in the new South Africa, expected to be directly responsible for participatory development planning practice at grassroots level. Here the question naturally arises: Have the planning bureaucrats from the apartheid era really experienced a mind shift, attitudinal change and epistemological reorientation to allow for adequate and meaningful community participation in the affairs of local government, especially by the historically excluded and marginalised black citizens of South Africa? Or are these planning bureaucrats crypto-apartheid planners parading in the guise of 'people-driven development' *a la* the democratic ethos of the new South Africa? And even if community participation does occur, is such participation considered by planning bureaucracies with the requisite seriousness and respect guaranteed by the post-apartheid Constitution? Or do planning authorities in the new order view community participation as an unfortunate constitutional nuisance? Hence its apparent manipulation and largely symbolic value in the corridors of power at local level? (See, for example, Makube, 1996: 12.)

Still, though, this constitutionally entrenched right to participate in the development planning in local government is reinforced in related legislative frameworks and policy documents, accenting without fail the need for, and import of, people-driven development at grassroots level. Thus, for example, the *White Paper on Local Government* (RSA, 1998c) as well as the Local Government Municipal

Systems Act, (RSA, 2000) (the Systems Act) highlight a number of interrelated development oriented goals, such as meeting the social, economic and material needs of all citizens, especially the historically neglected, marginalised black communities. With the view to bringing as many stakeholders together as possible to delineate, define and promote their common interests, the Systems Act makes IDP mandatory at local level. Theoretically, this means the IDP is a process in which a municipality can establish a development plan for the short-, medium- and long-term, through which it can enable communities to define their goals, needs, and related priorities.

This paper therefore examines ACTs as a mode of engagement by the CCT to 'foster' community participation in development planning at grassroots level in the historically neglected areas of Hanover Park, Heideveld, Manenberg, Langa and Guguletu.

Methodology

This research is exploratory. It uses both open-ended interviews and structured questionnaires to ascertain the levels of understanding, co-operation and commitment to community participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of IDP projects and programmes in Metropolitan Cape Town. (The methodology will be further elaborated upon the presentation of the research results.)

Structure of this study

This paper comprises a number of interrelated subsections each accenting a particular aspect of ACTs. The first locates ACTs within the socio-economic and political dynamics of the colonial-cum-apartheid city. This section is followed by an outline of the constitutional and related statutory frameworks that underpin the concept and practice of community participation in local government. The remaining sections of the paper discuss the trajectory and directory of ACTs as well as their merits and demerits. The paper concludes with several suggestions as to how community participation could be promoted and become embedded in local governance, a *sine qua non* for the construction of the post-apartheid City.

The Area Co-ordinating Teams (ACTs)

There are various ways in which community participation can take place at local level, according to the various policy frameworks that have been developed by the ANC-led government. For example, the Municipal Structures Act, Chapter 4, states:

> *The participation of citizens in the structures will... revolutionise the way that local governance happens at the metropolitan level. Individual municipalities will be empowered to decide what is best for their situation, with the guidance of national legislation that permits a variety of forms of local participation* (RSA, 1998b).

The CCT acknowledges that community participation is a legislative requirement and should be a cornerstone of CCT governance. Observes an official in this regard: 'In many instances community participation is already happening within the organisation, albeit in an *ad hoc* and uncoordinated way'. Accordingly, the CCT's IDP team has set out to find a corporate approach to ensure effective community participation in all the CCT projects. To this end, the CCT undertook a consultative process with communities in its jurisdiction using a range of mechanisms, such as:

- community meetings, in which communities assisted Council in compiling an integrated development framework as the basis of the IDP;
- discussions with community groupings to refine the contents of the IDP once compiled by Council; and
- surveys to determine priorities (community needs assessment).

Five elements have been identified for community participation by the IDP team. They include the establishment of the ACTs, holding open days, mounting a photo exhibition, conducting surveys and making comment/suggestion boxes available. This list is not exhaustive in any way, but provides a core group of activities that can be implemented corporately, as a comprehensive package for community participation, or separately, in response to the needs of the community. Other community participation mechanisms include the development of local level partnerships, service-specific consultation, toll-free telephone lines and 'one-stop-shops' to register complaints.

Since 1999, ACTs have been established in six areas within the CCT. Their origin differs from place to place. In Hanover Park and Heideveld, they were established in response to communities' requests and pressures for a place to meet officials and councillors with a view to solving problems in these areas. However, in Manenberg, Guguletu and Langa, ACTs originated from the City's need to find a system or a point of interface with the local communities.

ACTs were piloted in Hanover Park in 1999, and the idea was to use the lessons learnt there to implement them pro-actively – and thus more successfully – in the surrounding areas. In their formative stages, it was considered important that the structure of each ACT be adapted in line with the specific needs of particular communities.

The objectives of the ACTs are to:

- co-ordinate council services in the area, to improve the flow of information between the community, officials and councillors, and to facilitate a better understanding of council services by the community;
- be the first line of contact for the community in terms of all the public services being provided in a specific area. By decentralising problem solving to the grassroots level it is hoped that the community can deal with complaints and problems within the area directly. If they cannot be resolved there, then only they should be addressed to the district level and finally, as a last resort, be referred to higher management;
- develop an Area IDP for both the short- and long-term, by involving the communities in needs analysis and prioritisation, and to monitor and co-ordinate local projects, which should ideally facilitate community empowerment; and
- consolidate operational services and special projects in the area to develop public/private partnership and public/community partnerships.

Here it is important to note that ACTs have been conceptualised not as decision-making forums, but more as co-ordinating bodies. In practice this would mean, among other things, that issues raised at ACTs meetings have to be addressed or resolved by the appropriate planning branch/cluster of the CCT. ACTs are not supposed to

function as gatekeepers and therefore all organisations should/could have access to them.

Structurally ACTs comprise three key parts. The first component of the ACTs includes the officials from respective service branches operating in specific areas, for example, local line managers in housing, cleansing, roads, sewerage, health, libraries, sport and recreation, parks and bathing etc., as well as senior management officials to sponsor the process in its initial stage. Additionally, the CCT's Development Facilitation Unit is involved and its role includes arranging and recording meetings, and monitoring and facilitating the meeting procedures. The second component of the ACTs consists of proportionate local councillors (i.e. party-specific councillors) and ward councillors (irrespective of party affiliation). Their role is to function as a communication channel between Council and the local community, and to listen to and participate in community proposals, complaints and plans. They are also required to hold the local line managers accountable for service delivery and planning. As they are also supposed to act as political leaders, they consequently have to be accountable to a specific community. The third component of the ACTs is constituted by all community organisations based in, or working in, a particular area. Such organisations include police and sport organisations, taxpayers' associations and others. Their roles include the channelling of community complaints to local officials as well as reporting back to their organisations on issues and information from a particular ACT. They are also supposed to monitor progress with regard to local projects and hold officials and councillors accountable for what they do or fail to do in a specific community. Furthermore, they are required to participate in the development of local IDPs.

It has been recommended by these various components ACTs that a senior manager or director of the CCT be the chairperson of the forum, for two reasons. First, it would contribute towards the credibility of the ACTs as it would ensure that the issues raised by communities are, if required, taken to the highest level within the municipality for appropriate action. Second, it would strengthen the structural relationship between the CCT and the communities within its jurisdiction. Thus, it has also been suggested that officials that participate in ACTs have to represent their respective planning

branches (e.g. economic development) and not only their official area of responsibility (e.g. informal business), thereby ensuring the support, commitment and involvement of all departments within the planning bureaucracy of the City.

Here it is important to point out, however, that ACTs do not replace line functions in the planning bureaucracy in any way, but merely act as a conduit for information flow between the City and the community at large. Ideally, therefore, the establishment of the ACTs throughout the City would facilitate improved co-ordination and delivery of services, for example by forging closer links between service branches, as well as providing Council with a local forum for interaction with communities, their representatives and other interested parties. The underlying principle for the establishment of the ACTs is, therefore, the facilitation and co-ordination of services and resources within a given area. Such a planning role not only includes the management of City resources and services, but also the infrastructural wherewithal that is available within local communities by focussing on the extent to which they could either complement or detract from City-wide initiatives.

Thus ACTs are a concerted effort to foster and implement IDP based on the ethos of a caring and sharing society along the lines of the *Batho Pele* principles, namely consultation, courtesy, provision of reliable information, access to and availability of affordable, quality, sustainable services, i.e. value for money, openness and transparency in dealing with ordinary people, the promotion of integrated development and services, redress and the promotion of democratic practices at grassroots level.

Hence the need to monitor and evaluate the implementation of ACTs in local communities and to determine whether or not they contribute towards grassroots oriented, bottom-up development planning programmes in the CCT. Accordingly, two complementary studies have been executed. The first consisted of informal interviews with councillors and officials. In these interviews the politicians and the bureaucrats expressed their views and understanding of ACTs. The second study was based on a structured questionnaire directed at community-based organisations (CBOs) attending the meetings initiated and/or co-ordinated by the ACTS.

ACTs and CBOs

The study of CBOs was conducted through a questionnaire developed by the Development Facilitation Unit (DFU) in the CCT. In this research there were three main objectives:

1. to audit CBOs by measuring the extent of their influence and accountability to their broader constituencies;
2. to assess the success of ACTs in satisfying the service needs of the CBOs; and
3. to gauge the overall success of ACTs in fulfilling their own objectives.

Through these questions the research wanted to identify the internal structure, function, demographics and relationship the CCT has with specific communities. Additionally, this study sought to understand the extent of the engagement community organisations have with Council and with councillors, prior to and after the creation of ACTs. For the purposes of this survey, respondents were asked to reply on behalf of the particular community organisation they represented.

The ability to mobilise a specific community in the interests of fundamental social change presupposes the existence of an organisation that is informed by reliable information from the state apparatus, such as local planning bureaucracies (see, for example, Williams, 1989). Hence a specific organisation's presence at information sharing sessions conducted by planning bureaucracies is crucial to assess both the reliability and usefulness of the information provided to a specific local community.

It is therefore quite interesting to note that approximately 96% of the organisations surveyed attended ACT meetings. Of those individuals who attended ACT meetings, 55.6% attended the meetings on behalf of more than one organisation. Over 88% of the respondents claimed to be members of a residentially based organisation. Of these organisations, 74% of the respondents claimed that they were associated with other local organisations with similar interests. These residentially based organisations limit their services to the neighbourhoods in which they live: all respondents indicated this. Additionally, 77% of the respondents stated that they represent CBOs, 18.5% claimed that they represent Non-Governmental Organisations

(NGOs), with 3.7% stating that they did not represent either a CBO or an NGO.

The effectiveness of community participation in development programmes of a specific local authority derives in part from the collective skills of the leadership of a particular grassroots organisation (Callaghan, 1997). In this regard, almost a third (i.e. 29.6%) of respondents claimed to be the secretary of their organisation, 14.9% claimed to be the chairperson of the organisation and 11.1% claimed to be an executive member of their organisation. Of the organisations involved in ACTs, 85.2% of the respondents claimed that their organisation was properly constituted. Over 59% of the respondents claimed to believe that most or all of the organisations in their area were properly constituted. Over 70% of the respondents claimed to 'always' attend ACT meetings. However, they also indicated that 74.1% only attend ACT meetings when an issue affecting their organisation is to be discussed. Some 48.1% claimed that they either 'never' or only 'sometimes' discussed the issues raised at ACT meetings with their respective organisations.

The nature of the demographic profile of a particular organisation has a profound bearing on the quality of mobilisation that occurs within and on behalf of a particular community *vis-à-vis* development programmes at grassroots level (Castells, 1997). Survey results indicate that over 66% of the respondents claimed to have a signed up membership.

It is to be expected that the constituent and operational dynamics of the various organisations are about as different as the organisations themselves. Over 48% percent of the organisations claimed to have a membership of over 100 people. When asked to describe the age of their members, the information in Table 1 was provided.

Table 1: Distribution of age profiles within community organisations participating in ACTs

Age group	%
Under 6 years old	3
6–10 years old	3
11–17 years old	3
18–25 years old	2.6
26–35 years old	33
36–45 years old	26.9
45–55 years old	26.9
56–65 years old	1.3
Over 65	0.3
Total	100

How long an organisation is in existence says a lot about how it is able to affect change in a particular community (Williams, 1989). Over 7% of the respondents stated that their organisation has existed for less than six months; over 7% for between six months and a year; over 25% for two to five years; over 22% for six to ten years; over 3% for between eleven and twenty years; and over 14% stated that their organisation has existed for more than twenty years.

The rate of interaction between a particular community and its local representatives in local government provides a fair indication of the extent to which there is an opportunity for CBOs to influence the form, content and overall dimensions of development planning programmes at grassroots level (Chipkin, 1996a). The second section of the survey thus discusses community organisations and their relationship before and after the creation of ACTs.

Over 66% of the respondents stated that they had contact with local officials (Council administration) before the creation of ACTs. Also, over 70% had contact with their ward councillors and over 18% with their proportional councillors (PCs) before the creation of ACTs. When asked to describe how organisations had contact with the various people within Council before ACTs, most respondents found such opportunities at various events open to the public: over 51% had contact with their ward councillor at community meetings. 22.2% met at one-on-one meetings, 7.4% had telephonic contact and 7.4% met by chance on the street. Over 18% of respondents met with their PC at community meetings, 3.7% had telephonic contact with their PC and 14.8% met with their PC at public events.

Since the creation of ACTs, interaction between Council and community organisations has changed. Over 51% stated that their interaction with ward councillors has increased since the creation of ACTs. For more than 18%, their interaction with ward councillors remained unchanged. Over 11% stated that their interaction with ward councillors decreased after the creation of ACTs. With regard to the proportional councillors, 48% of respondents stated that there was an increase in their interaction with PCs since the creation of ACTs. For over 33% their interaction remained unchanged while over 11% stated that it had decreased since ACTs were created.

Assessing an organisation's relationship with government can be very helpful in determining the community's support for various

aspects of public policy (Chipkin, 1996b). In this regard, over 56% felt that their relationship with ward councillors had increased since ACTs, 25.9% stated it remained unchanged and 3.7% felt it decreased since the creation of ACTs. The response in relation to proportional councillors was slightly different: over 25% stated that their relationship with their PC had increased since ACTs, 33.3% stated it remained unchanged and 7.4% felt that their relationship had decreased. Over 74% of the respondents felt that they had become more aware of Council's role since the establishment of ACTs, over 66% had become more aware of Council's responsibilities and more than 74% had become more aware of Council's functions.

The perceived level of community awareness of fora to promote grassroots-driven development programmes provides a useful indication of their degree of identification with particular public policies (cf. e.g. Harvey, 1996). In this regard, two out of every five (i.e. 40.7%) of the respondents believed that residents are generally aware of ACTs. More than 51% felt that communication from Council to the community had improved through ACTs, while more than 48% felt that communication from the community to Council had improved. Most importantly, perhaps, 55.5% of the respondents felt that Council was held accountable through ACTs.

The role of councillors and officials *vis-à-vis* ACTs

The study of the relationship of councillors and officials with regard to ACTs was conducted through informal interviews, comprising open-ended questions about their views on and understanding of ACTs. It is, however, important to point out that the interviewees are people who already attend the ACTs meetings, which means that they already support them; hence the overwhelmingly positive response to ACTs as an ideal model/mechanism for fostering co-operation between the CCT and the communities. In the absence of an appropriate forum to allow for regular contact between CCT and the community at large, the creation of ACTs filled a nagging void in the policy infrastructure of Cape Town local government. ACTs were thus a response to the constitutional requirement for community

participation in determining the form, content and overall dimensions of IDPs at grassroots level. In this regard, the Development Facilitation Unit of CCT claims that ACTs took a clear cue from the RDP principles of accountability, transparency and public participation and democratic principles of governance enshrined in the post-apartheid Constitution.

Indeed, the overall understanding of ACTs among the officials and councillors that chose to attend the meetings is that they are an ideal place for interaction and synergy, for several reasons. First, ACTs are a place for constructive dialogue and conscientisation as information is given to all members of the community about issues that affect their living environments. Second, if the relevant information is given to all stakeholders at an early stage, it can easily be turned into valuable knowledge and prevent costly mistakes in relation to specific development issues and planning projects. Third, regular contact between the CCT and its constituent communities makes it possible for problems to be resolved before they assume crisis proportions, as local communities are important sites of specific knowledge formations, thereby providing important insights to the local government *vis-à-vis* the context of IDPs at grassroots level. In this regard, for example, the environmental health officer, MyaMya, claimed that previously many problems could easily have been resolved if the communities were consulted. He cited the case of providing appropriate sanitation facilities in local communities:

> *There has always been a water shortage in the informal settlement of Joe Slovo, in Langa. When the municipality decided to build latrines in order to prevent a future health risk, they introduced chemical toilets, which would be emptied once a week. This would be the best economical option. But what they were not prepared for was that the people of Langa would use them also* [for] *refuse, which would fill the latrines up on a daily basis. The project failed and ended up to be more expensive than all the other options.*

Though ACTs are theoretically an ideal encapsulation of the varied social relations of power informing/underpinning the IDP, in reality, they fall far short of their true potential. The main problem appears to be related to the fact that, institutionally, in the corridors of power in the CCT, they are not being taken seriously. There

appears to very little if any political commitment to their official continued existence as part of the infrastructure of governance at local level. This lack of political support has substantially emasculated ACTs, as many councillors and officials do not turn up for scheduled meetings. Indeed, the irregular attendance by some officials from specific departments within the planning bureaucracy of the CCT has substantially undermined the important developmental role and impetus that these newly created bodies have to offer – hence the observation by some community members that they no longer attend ACT meetings, as they are not taken seriously by councillors. In fact there is no code of conduct compelling councillors to attend ACT meetings, thus making their presence at the meetings entirely optional. Explained Councillor Isao in this regard:

> *The councillors that do not show up at the meeting are often afraid of confronting the people, or that they will interfere in their affairs, instead of using ACTs as a constructive place for discussion.*

More importantly, perhaps, many councillors feel no ownership of the process, and others clearly do not want to consult some 'difficult' groups, especially in areas where there are community power struggles, imperious traditional leaders and rival gangs.

This problem of non-attendance or non-performance is equally frequent among officials. Just as there are problems in the political and bureaucratic sphere, there are problems within community groups. ACTs meetings appear to be problematic for several reasons. For one thing, they lack an institutional framework setting out criteria of what a community organisation constitutes – hence the meetings have attracted both 'serious' and 'less serious' organisations. This conceptual vacuum about the nature, substance and overall dimensions of a community makes it imperative that rules and criteria are agreed upon by the various constituent parts of ACTs to ensure that local conditions are taken into consideration in the establishment of these fora and that representation by specific communities at ACT meetings does indeed serve to enhance the quality of life ordinary people at grassroots level.

It is crucial that the organisations that claim that they have members report back to them on a regular basis. This concern about the

organic link between community representatives and their respective membership arises in part from the claim by several councillors and officials that in many cases there are only a few active people in a community, who are connected to most organisations within the area, resulting in a form of elitism, which in turn has a negative impact on local area development projects. Also, many attendees present themselves as, 'We, the people of this community', which evidently raises the question, who are 'we'?

Many of the organisations do not have membership lists, constitutions or annual meetings, compounding the question of the legitimacy of their authentic role as 'community representatives'. Furthermore, many community organisations are not equipped to handle information, while others are still not even aware of the existence of ACTs.

The lack of co-ordination of issues sometimes also gets out of hand, often resulting in pointless discussions. In this regard, Brian Cook, CCT's line manager for parks and bathing, states:

> *The meetings sometimes become a political battlefield which is totally against the idea of ACTs, which is to deal with the rendering of municipal services. Other times irrelevant issues like one crack on somebody's wall, or the theft of light bulbs etc. Fortunately many relevant, collective problems are also raised like cockroach invasions, illegal shebeens, taxis and gangsterism, etc.*

In some instances ACTs have become solely meetings for raising complaints, preventing other equally – and perhapre more – relevant issues from being dealt with. It would appear that some ACT meetings have been used to slander officials who are apparently not doing their job. This has led to unfortunate complications and attacks on the officials after the meetings. A common impression is also that the meetings sometimes tend to be disorderly and chaotic, with people running in and out.

Vusi Magagula, a senior development official, claims that many of the organisations only attend when there are issues that concern them, which also reflects poorly on the seriousness with which some organisations approach ACTs. He also admits that meetings are often rushed due to the lack of time as they are usually held in the evenings.

Towards an assessment of ACTs

Through the interviews and surveys with the three relevant parts constituting the ACTs and from observations made during the ACTs meetings several conclusions can be drawn.

Even though the ACTs have initially been perceived as an initiative of the Community Development cluster (Department), nonetheless, through their sustained efforts to engage local communities in development planning projects of the City, they have gained significant support from officials and other clusters in the City, such as Planning and Economic Development and Municipal Services. It is also crucial for the success of the ACTs that all seniors and middle management throughout the municipality ensure that their relevant officials at the local level are actively involved in ACTs and that key issues are addressed at the appropriate level within the City. Commitment from senior managers is essential to ensure that adequate resources and support are provided for the ACTs.

ACTs are an ideal meeting place to discuss development plans prior to their implementation. The fact that many different departments meet in one place also gives the officials a chance to interact with each other, as well as to give the members of the community and themselves a larger perspective on development planning issues facing the City as at large. This inter-departmental co-operation would establish, through sound practice, and in the fullness of time, a 'united Council'. In this regard ACTs therefore contribute towards an ethos of democratic practice and accountability, as they are fora where relationships are initiated, built and sustained, especially between Councillors and officials. Through the largely intact apartheid bureaucratic model of strict hierarchies and exclusive institutional power relations, they are generally not on speaking terms, but through ACTs they can become partners instead of opponents. Consequently, the possibility of constructing such internal partnerships in CCT was much appreciated by both Councillors and officials during the interviews.

Furthermore, ACTs are an ideal body for civic education as both councillors and officials will be informing the communities about their procedures, obligations and the structures within which they work. However, the focus for the communities is to find a familiar place where all demands, issues and complaints can be raised. The

communities can also use ACTs as backup if problems are not resolved, for example in relation to a municipal service where/when complaints are not attended to by the planning bureaucracy. Moreover, ACTs are also a place where organisations can search for volunteers or new members and where groups can mobilise together to address prevailing problems, such as crime and gangsterism.

ACTs can also highlight those resources that do not exist within a specific community and identify how such resource constraints could be addressed.

In short, therefore, the ACTs can narrow the chasm between a particular community and the Council, especially at the local level. ACTs could therefore be the vehicle for the effective implementation of community-driven projects, thereby becoming the centripetal force of grassroots oriented development planning. Thus, properly constructed in terms of democratic governance, transparency and accountability, and organically linked to the development programmes of the planning bureaucracy of the CCT, the ACTs have the potential to make a meaningful and lasting contribution towards equitable, efficient and effective service delivery in the CCT. The fact that other areas have requested to implement ACTs, for example Philippi and Mitchells Plain, shows that the communities are becoming aware of their existence as well as their potential as catalysts for meaningful development planning at grassroots level.

Although the image of ACT is an ideal embodiment of the concepts of community participation and accountability, there remain several significant shortcomings in ACTs operational effectiveness, which in part derive from inadequate conceptualisation. For example, there need to be minimum criteria for community organisations to be able to participate in ACT meetings, such as numbers of members, having a constitution, a limited timespan between Annual General Meetings, having bank accounts, and so forth. Other questions that need to be resolved are whether or not individuals should be encouraged to attend and participate, or to attend but not vote. In some cases ACTs would have to consult other interest groups with regard to the form, dimensions and overall import of a specific project, for example in cases where planning issues also involve other departments such as the Departments of Education and Trade and Industry, the South African Police Services, and so forth.

The first of several shortcomings deals with the lack of political support and the lack of a clear foundation, which leads to non-assurance about the continuation, performance and the long-term vision of the ACTs. Indeed, ACTs have largely remained a political idea, and structurally have not yet become part of City's mode of management. The then-Senior Manager for the Department of Health, Dr Ivan Toms, observed in this regard:

> *…it is astonishing that the ACTs have survived until now,* [they survived despite the] *lack of political support, gang fighting and tornados.*

Still, though, there are no binding mechanisms to hold Council accountable to decisions achieved at the ACT meetings and implement community-driven policy change. This means that even though all parts are to co-ordinate and influence decisions together in order to create true ownership of the process, ultimately true power to implement decisions and make policy resides with one party only. Extant literature suggests that people are usually quick to recognise that the bureaucrats or politicians are in control of plans, projects and programmes. The bureaucrats who are in charge of finances and other critical resources needed for the programmes or projects are therefore largely viewed as the ones who should be responsible for its success (Makube, 1996: 15). Furthermore this model does not really comply with the *Batho Pele* principle of 'putting the people first', which is at the heart of the whole discourse on community participation. As that principle demands a new relationship between the state and the civil society, which is a horizontal rather than vertical partnership, and since the ACTs lack a strong and clear foundation, it is almost impossible to build such an acephalous/egalitarian platform.

The power of the community to influence Council is inherently limited by the fact that the ACT process is purely consultative in nature. This is reflected in the documents that established ACTs as participatory structures. In a CCT Development Facilitation Unit *Status report on Area Co-ordinating Teams*, in a section entitled 'Authority and accountability', it is mentioned that an ACT is 'solely a co-ordinating body and has no decision-making powers' (CCT, 2000a: 3). A later section reiterates that an ACT is 'not a decision-making forum. It needs to co-ordinate services and provide information to

the communities' (CCT, 2000a: 3). In another CCT report by the IDP Team it is mentioned that 'ACTs merely act as a conduit for flow of information' (CCT, 2000b: 4), in the sense that they 'will also be a mechanism for…the alignment of community expectations to the City's capacity to deliver' (CCT, 2000b: 3).

It can thus can be concluded that the City appears more interested in using CBOs as a glorified rubber stamp than as genuine partners for community development. This official hesitancy by the CCT to embrace ACTs derives perhaps in part from the stipulation in chapter four of the Municipal Systems Act, which states that participatory governance is not to be interpreted as permitting interference with a municipal council's right to govern and to exercise the executive and legislative authority of the municipality. In other words, ACTs can neither interfere in the affairs of the Council nor force it to carry out its decisions. Interpreted in its narrowest possible form, community participation then only occurs for its symbolic value of inclusivity and legitimacy and even for the purposes of attracting funds and/or securing institutional survival (Bekker, 1996: 65–75). Indeed, in the case of the ACTs, community participation seems to be truncated, manipulated and structurally controlled and is intended to ratify rather than influence or change official behaviour, i.e. communities are only consulted as long as they support the official's/ politician's goals.

Thus it is important to note here that genuine community participation, as envisaged by the Constitution, is a two way process whereby interest groups interact to identify the nature of problems and needs within communities and collectively seek workable solutions so as to ensure effective and efficient service delivery and sustained, integrated development of communities. To achieve these objectives public policies have to compel municipalities to promote transformative participation. In this regard, however, Government policies lack clear indicators of what constitutes success or failure *vis-à-vis* public participation. Theoretically, community participation is a very loose, vague and complex term and it is thus crucial that policies are formulated according to measurable results and outcomes. Failure to provide criteria to measure meaningful results could thus very easily result in community participation being reduced to mere information sharing. This is not, however, to suggest that there

is a perfect model of community participation. Fortunately, though, existing government policy frameworks give space for case-to-case interaction without blueprints, and are commendable for their flexibility as each form of community participation is different and requires its own specific focus.

Nevertheless it can also have a negative impact, as community participation could easily be construed as a constitutional nuisance and thus be considered merely for its symbolic value to claim legitimacy for existing development programmes at local level. Interpreted in such restrictive terms, local authorities may, indeed, therefore, not take community participation seriously and even neglect or ignore it, especially if there are obstacles such as inadequate time, resource constraints, lack of institutional capacity and multiple sectoral divisions.

Here it has to be stressed that ideally, a community participation process needs to be managed in a responsible way, which matches needs and resources, while building trust between the local authority and its citizenry. Most importantly, perhaps, the constitutional right to participate in the definition and prioritisation of development planning programmes at grassroots level means nothing unless local communities claim this democratic right and ensure the authentic substance of meaningful participation in all spheres of governance at grassroots level.

Still there is a procedural slippage: while the Constitution claims that the people have the right to express their views, it doesn't state that anybody has to listen to their views. Also, while the Constitution requires a local authority to inform the community about its development programmes and related issues, it does not determine where, for example, the information should be put in a newspaper – and so the constitutional lacunae continue, subject to and often in the interest of the interpretation of those who wield socio-economic power, even in democratic South Africa.

Conclusions and recommendations

Theoretically, any public policy which encourages transparency, constructively engages and involves citizens in the functions of a local government, and which seeks to facilitate an ongoing dialogue

between citizens and their elected representatives, is good public policy. In this regard, ACTs constitute good public policy – on paper. As they create the institutional space and opportunities where individuals, community organisations, Council administration and elected representatives can sit and discuss issues affecting their lives – whether it concerns the improvement of infrastructure, housing, health, or any other service provided by local government – they should be encouraged and sustained.

In practice, though, ACTs are a structural failure. Not only are the issues raised at the ACTs completely non-binding – Council is not obliged to follow through on any issue raised through ACTs – but also, individual officials and Councillors who are supposed to be participating in ACTs are not obligated to attend the scheduled meetings. Thus, for ACTs to become effective instruments of fundamental social change Council must support them, both by passing appropriate by-laws to institutionalise them officially and by drawing up a code of conduct that compels officials and councillors to attend and take seriously the scheduled meetings and related development planning initiatives.

In their present format, therefore, it can be concluded that ACTs have been implemented mostly for their symbolic value rather than to empower communities and to transform the unequal relations of socio-economic power in the CCT.

Notes

1 I wish to thank Beniam Gebrezgi, my MPA supervisee, for his assistance in this research project.

2 Socio-spatial refers here to the racialised character of land use patterns in colonial-cum-apartheid South Africa (see for e.g. Lemon, 1991).

3 The particular document states: 'Following a global trend, South Africa is experiencing explosive urban growth. Approximately 26 million people, 65 per cent of a 40 million strong national population, already live in metropolitan areas, cities and towns. This urban sector accounts for some 80 per cent of South Africa's Gross Domestic Product. As economic activities and social and cultural opportunities expand in our cities and towns, urbanisation will persist and more than likely accelerate. By 2000, the urban population will be above 70 per cent of the country's total. By 2010, this proportion will likely have risen to 75%' (RSA, 1995: 1).

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