Analysing neighbourhood public meetings: understanding community discourses in invited spaces of participation

The case of Yeoville, Johannesburg

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Abstract

People participate in public forums for a myriad of reasons, including -but not limited to- gaining visibility, accessing information and, resources and being included in decision making processes. Public forums differ from one forum to the next, and the objectives of participants also differ from person to person. Forums are engineered and tailored in order to achieve and fulfil specific objectives. Location and internal spatial arrangements are customised in order to best achieve the objectives set out by executives and leaders of each forum. Participants, who serve as guests 'invited' into these spaces, bring forth their own interpretations of these spaces through for instance personal appearance and how they fit into the fabric of public forums. These layers characterising public spaces of participation are important in understanding the objectives or the stakes of each space, and the types of dialogue or discourse facilitated by them. In this paper, three layers of analysis of invited spaces of participation are presented, around issues of spatial settings, type of audience and what is at stake in meetings. These layers bring forth a pragmatic grid of analysis of public spaces of participation. This grid is tested and illustrated in three participatory forums in Yeoville Johannesburg and help us draw distinctions between different invited spaces of parcipation.

Introduction

Public arenas of participation have been developed in order to provide a platform from which a range of stakeholders can engage and deliberate and allowing for public engagement. These spaces are often more complicated than what they are portrayed out to be in literature. These platforms are often complex and difficult to penetrate, as the stakes and rules of the game differ from one space to the next. When entering into these processes as an outsider, one tends to be engulfed in the politics and the major issues being expressed by participants. Newcomers are often blind to other discourses that manifest themselves through arrangements in the room, how people engage one another and in how they dress and express themselves. There lies an implicit yet powerful dialogues running parallel to that which is immediately articulated by the purpose of each individual forum, individuals tend to be blind sighted by the commissioned objectives set out by forums and often do not take heed of this parallel discourse that is orchestrated by participants themselves. This discourse is centred on people's actions and thrives on elements such as the locations and the internal layout of the forums, in order to convey various messages. This second discourse often has its own objectives and is shaped by participants in order to advance their own individual or group agendas.

Positioning in current debates

Cornwall (2002) distinguishes between two types of citizen engagement which come in the form of 'invited' and 'invented' spaces of participation. She regards invited spaces as being formalised initiatives managed by the government and other influential agents created in order to foster dialogue between themselves and local communities. Miraftab (2004) argues that these are spaces that house citizens, participants are invited and gatherings are organised by the authorities as an extension of the states duties. In these spaces, the body that does the

inviting is in the possession of power and therefore shapes discussions and matters according to how it feels appropriate. In contrast, invented spaces are regarded as being more proactive with a great deal of demand and expectation for delivery and change, which is usually aimed at the state. Although not the focus in this paper, 'invented spaces of citizenship' are centered on citizen power where negotiating power lies with the public, as they emerge more organically and are prompted by a common shared interest amongst participants (Cornwall, 2002). The outcomes thereof are seen as more subject to the power and influence of the participants, than 'invited spaces' of participation.

Building on Cornwall's arguments in a South African context, Benit-Gbaffou (2008), Piper & Von Lieres (2008) have argued that invited spaces of participation, such as ward committee meetings and ward public meetings, are ineffective, and static and do not lend themselves to tangible outcomes. Processes are lengthy and sometimes there is a leap from one critical issue to the next often rendering public spaces of participation purposeless. Moreover, participation aimed at empowering the poor and increasing public involvement in decision making tends to be dominated by elites and therefore undermines and suppresses the voices of the poor. In many instances, these spaces are clientelistic, empowering and benefiting some members over others. Cornwall (2002), Piper & Von Lieres (2008) regard clientelism to be a populist strategy which is used to identify citizenship and construct citizen power; there is thus a form of negotiation between leaders and citizens. Benit-Gbaffou (2010) even analyses it, under certain conditions, as forms of accountability. Patrons and clients mobilise different forms of power, and have different accesses to resources which the other may find useful during the exchange. These authors argue further that clientelist relationships in their various forms allow citizens to make demands as clients. People develop relations outside of those formally constructed which gives rise to different types of relationships between patrons and society. Patrons therefore render services and provide clients with resources in exchange for votes and other favours. In their analysis, invited spaces of participation are still important, because they provide a platform for knowledge sharing, they allow for the construction of citizenship and of new identities. They are highly political realms etched in power relations conjured up by different levels of disproportion that have been created and experienced outside of these spaces.

This paper sets out to position itself in current debates on participatory spaces in the discourse that identifies some aspects of these invited spaces as being useful. It goes further to unpack some of the nuances inherent in spaces in order to better understand them by highlighting some of the tactics and strategies extrapolated in the three Yeoville meetings. It provides an extension to the current work by highlighting the discourses that run parallel to the main discourse, but often go unnoticed and not taken into account with other issues raised in meetings. Gervais-Lambony (2011) argues that the location, orchestration and organisation of venues in which public meetings are held is important as it influences how people relate and communicate with one another. These are some of the elements which this paper aims to pursue further as well as calling attention to the different ways in which communities communicate and relate to one another. Raising such questions helps us reflect on the relations between public space and the setting of public debates. Understanding these elements is necessary in so far as it exposes who makes decisions, who are the beneficiaries, and whether these democratic spaces are in fact are as democratic as they maintain to be. These questions are central in participation, but largely ignored in the literature on participation.

Observing and analyzing meetings provides a critical opportunity to consider who really controls public spaces of participation and what roles participants assume. In this paper I

draw on my observations of three invited spaces of participation in Yeoville, a peri-central neighbourhood in the Johannesburg metro. In comparing and contrasting the meetings of the Yeoville Stakeholders Forum (YSF), a forum comprising 28 organisations within the Greater Yeoville area; Yeoville Ward meetings, a rung of the state commissioned to engage local communities on local issues; as well as the Sector Crime Forum meetings legislated by government policy in order to increase communication between the police and their local communities, I analyze three central elements in each of the three forums.

The first of which is the space of the meetings which suggests who has power in a space, as well as how people are managed in order to achieve the objectives of the power wilder. The second theme is attendance in the meetings which brings into the debate issues of those who have particular interest within the community however diverse in their nature and whether the people who attend meetings are representative of the broader community at large. Lastly, the notion of what is at stake which draws attention to how participants and leaders relate and communicate with one another. In considering the three invited participatory spaces in contrast with each other, my analysis unravels the power dynamics and the concerns of participants, thus revealing the strategies and the complexities in operation within and across each meeting context. This paper sets out to explore different ways in which spaces operate and the dynamics inherent in each.

Yeoville was selected as the location for the research, as it is one of Johannesburg's most diverse communities. The suburb lies in the heart of Johannesburg's inner city, plagued with a series of challenges such as high demand and low supply of housing, and boasts a population comprising mainly migrants from all over Africa and South Africa alike (Fleury, 2008; Harrison, 2002). The three forums were selected on the grounds that they are more recurrent than other forums within the area; they were also relatively active during the research period. Although all three forums can be regarded as invited spaces of participation, the YSF tends to have characteristics of both invited and invented space, as it often appears to be more critical of government power than the two other spaces. In different ways the three forums create platforms in which community representatives engage on a range of issues plaguing Yeoville. Each of the forums is different in its own right, as they are each driven and motivated by a different set of objectives, coded in particular discourses, and what is at stake in each form and its meetings.[1]

Through this research and analysis, I propose an analytical framework for exploring the ways in which meetings are sites in which invited participatory spaces are made specific and meaningful for different, often competing constituencies, discussed in the body of the paper. Three different aspects of meetings thus structure the body of the paper, focused on *spatial settings* within meetings, *attendance* of meetings and lastly *what is at stake* at each meeting. Like. The paper argues that these factors are key in understanding issues of social exclusion and local democracy and therefore set forth a framework for understanding public space and how public debates are situated and framed.

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[1] Having gone in to meetings as an outsider without prior knowledge or understanding of local issues and politics, I found myself in a sense excluded. It shed light onto the various positions of participants and the influences they have within the forum and on leaders and other participants alike. I was fortunate enough to have been introduced to the Yeoville community through Yeoville Studio, a community-oriented research initiative of the University of the Witwatersrand's School of Architecture and Planning (www.bit.ly/yeoville).
This made information much more accessible, and allowed me to debrief after meetings and engage in discussions with other researchers present. Such a relationship is vital and often necessary in order to help researchers/observers to gain access into public forums, but also to build a community of researchers from which one can confide and grow. Therefore networks and other mechanisms are important tools in helping to create opportunities especially for junior researchers.

The importance of space in shaping public debates

With regard to spatial settings in meetings, emphasis was placed on the physical environment in which meetings were held. Foucault (1975) indicates how the design of buildings as well as their interior layout can construct and reinforce power relations. These two notions were explored in the research which looked at both the exterior of buildings as well as the arrangement of the interior order to better understand the power dynamics inherent within the spaces. This is useful in providing details about expectations within meetings, as well as power sharing dynamics amongst participants as a result of the layout. The location itself will provide details of the vigour of the leadership or their associations. Some venues require rentals, but others are made available to the general public at no additional cost, both indicating various forms of power and leadership. Cornwall (2002) argues that the place is as important in facilitating dialogue, as the same meeting held in different venues may generate significantly dissimilar outcomes. The tables therefore provide contrasting information about the three different forums and further display the differences and similarities inherent in them.

SPATIAL SETTINGS			
Object of Observation	Ward Meetings	Yeoville Stakeholders Forum	Sector Crime Forum 1 & 2
Physical Location	Yeoville community school (temporary Venue) Yeoville Community Hall at the recreation centre permanent venue	St Aidan's Church	Sector 1: Elijah Barayi Sector 2: St Aidan's Church
Arrangement of space	Ward committee sits behind desk and addresses audience	Circular arrangement with a table for writing/members and leaders huddled around the table-power sharing	Sector 1: Square table arrangement Sector 2: Circular arrangement no tables
Enclaves	Sub- grouping of ANC members	Hard to decipher-different participants every time	Personal bonds created within
Display of Power	Invoke Party identity through dress	Invoke organisational identities through speech	Invoke power through dominating dialogue

Table 1: Spatial layout in meetings (Mkwanazi, 2010)

With regard to the physical location of both forums, no meetings are held in neutral venues. Each of the venues symbolizes the functions which they were designed for, place of worship, learning and activity, but carry other non-commissioned functions such as hosting other community groups and meetings. Venues uphold a certain level of prestige, and are often a reflection of the influence and power of leaders within the community. They represent a status, and are reflective of the leaders and their political influence. Below are images showing the seating arrangements of the three forums. In the ward meetings participants sit in rows behind one another facing the ward committee who sits in the front. The image in the bottom right was taken from the YSF and is a new arrangement employed after circular formation where chairs are lined up in a circular arrangement which displays even power sharing dynamics amongst participants and leaders. Sector two has a similar arrangement to

that of the YSF. It is also very interesting to note that in both these forums which are run by two different organisations with really dissimilar objectives experienced a change in their seating arrangements during the same time in 2010. For the YSF, the arrangement changed as a result of the YSF chairperson (also an executive member of the ANC branch and zone) running for office to become the next ward councillor, and seating arrangements were changed in order to exercise his authority. Sector one on the other hand has a rectangular (boardroom) setup which allows members the ability to see one another. These types of settings influence discussions amongst members thereby creating a forthcoming environment. The images below illustrate the different seating arrangements in the four forums.
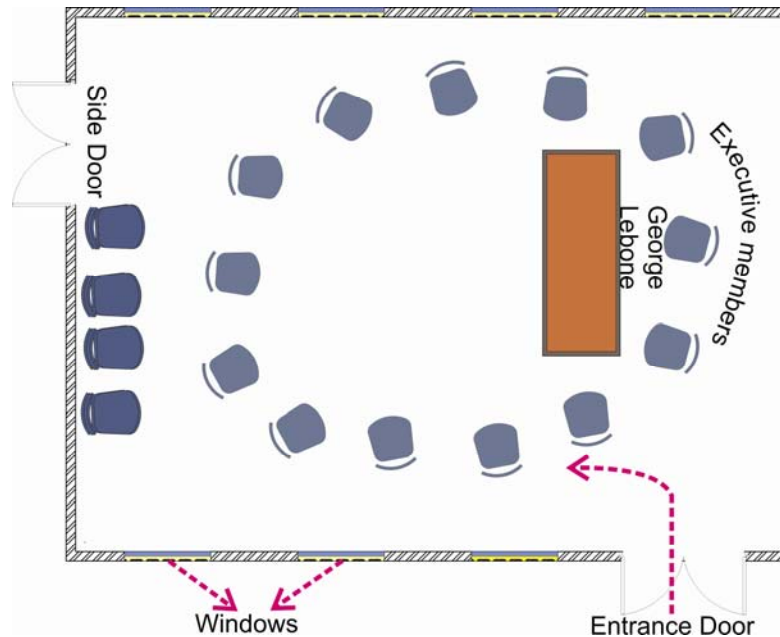
Spatial Layout

Figure 1:Spatial layout in meetings (Mkwanazi, 2010)

The images for the YSF and SCF two Meetings indicate the new spatial arrangements selected for both forums. These arrangements also create a conducive environment from which discussions can ensue. Members are huddled close to one another and close to their leaders thereby creating an engaged impression which fosters and encourages meaningful discussion.

The layout below displays a balanced environment, as it is not possible to distinguish between participants and their leaders as the space fosters an open environment where views

are easily exchanged amongst participants. Although the table poses a slight obstruction, it is often necessary for leaders to use for scribing purposes but does not hinder the power sharing dynamic. The secretary of the forum only performed the tasks mandated to her including reporting back on previous minutes as well as keeping records of the current meeting. Within circular arrangements participants are able to look one another in the face, thereby allowing greater contact amongst the participants. The layout is more open and inviting thereby fostering shared learning and close interaction amongst participants.

Figure 2: Spatial layout in YSF meeting (adapted from Mkwanazi, 2010)

Enclaves within meetings tease out a range of nuances including creating meetings within the meeting, and regarding the formation and existence of different types of relationships in meetings. Some of these emerge from relationships and interactions developed outside and independent of the space in which they occur, and are merely imported in the forum thereby transposing themselves through various means. Some of these relationships are produced internally within the space thereby allowing participants the ability to develop shared and common views. Of these relationships formed within space, some are deeply entrenched in political temperament whilst others are constructed through other social interfaces between people. These then transpose themselves in the form of enclaves within meetings where a group of individuals with common/shared beliefs cluster together as a tool of indicating their presence/dominance within the meetings. Clusters of individuals therefore develop in both spaces, but in different forms based on different logics. In the ward meetings, clustering of a group with shared interests is displayed by the ANC members who huddle together often in a corner. Views expressed within the meetings that do not coincide with their views are often shot down by the collective, thereby undermining the speaker and his/her views. Cheering for views expressed by speakers is also witnessed which therefore indicates the clout possessed by the group. In the YSF meetings however, clustering comes in a different form as the organization is a lot smaller individuals are acquainted with one another and sit rather randomly but relatively close to one another. In both SCF meetings people sit close to those whom they know and the most vocal participants tend to stand out.

In different forums, members employ different strategies and tactics to display their power. This may come in the form of group or collective power such as that generated by enclaves or individual power which takes shape in other forms. Some participants are more vocal than others, thereby building an impression of their superiority and influence within meetings. In the Ward meetings, dominance is expressed through dress code. Members who are affiliated to specific political parties dress up in their political attires, either to display dominance or opposition. ANC members attend meetings dressed in a range of ANC branded clothing, including a few members belonging to other political parties such as The Congress of The People. In the YSF, power is shaped in a different way as members often express views which they pose as belonging to the organizations in which they belong. Power in both sector meetings seems to lie with the very vocal participants, as they often sway meetings towards issues they regard as being of importance.

Patterns of Attendance: Subtle Power Politics at Play
The second element observed in meetings was the attendance of members. The time and duration typically refers to the times meetings start and finish and the duration to how long/often meetings are held. This also relates to whether the times scheduled for meetings are conducive and convenient for the majority of participants. The diversity relates too whether meetings cater for the entire community which they serve. The scale deals broadly with how far and wide a forum's boundaries stretch towards recruiting members. This looks at the physical jurisdictions laid by organizations, as well as the non-physical requirements for members to become a part of the forum. The table below provides the results generated from all the three forums.

ATTENDANCE			
Object of Observation	**Ward Meetings**	**Yeoville Stakeholders Forum**	**Sector Crime Forum 1& 2**
Frequency of attendance	Dominated by ANC members (obligation to councillor), members of organisations and individuals	Difficult to distinguish member organisations permitted to two representatives at any given time.	Poor attendance by members of the public
Time/ Duration	On average go on for about 3. 5 Hours	On average go on for about 2. 5 hours	Average on around 2.5 hours each
Diversity	Participants identifiable by accent and through being vocal	Participants identifiable through dress code and accents	People are only identifiable by accents
Scale	Open to all residents of Yeoville and Belleview. About 30-50 members participate at any one meeting	Open to all organisations. But roughly 10-15 members attend	Small scale according to streets. Open members living within a specific sector and ranges from 15-20 members
Punctuality	Meetings start and end late 20-30min. Constant flow of people throughout meeting	Meetings usually start on time. With only a few people walk in late. 10-15 min.	Meetings usually start late as participants and leaders often socialize outside.

Dress code	Member of foreign communities remain invisible in meetings through dress code- they do not wear traditional clothes	Not particularly an issue but people do often wear traditional/political attires	Patrollers of sector two come dressed in their uniforms
Language	Predominantly English with fractions of IsiZulu, Sesotho and IsiXhosa	English	Sector 1:IsiZiulu Sector 2: A range of languages

Table 2: Attendance in meetings (Mkwanazi, 2010)

Broadly, how often people attend meetings is important. This is especially important when the numbers of participants attending are few. In this particular category, it is important also to gauge the members attending and whether they belong to certain cliques. The Yeoville ward meetings are dominated by ANC members; this could be as a result of members feeling obligated to attend. A quarter of the attendees in ward meetings are openly declared ANC members. Some members attend meetings in order to get recognition and to create personal opportunities which may come in the form of a multitude of favours and benefits for their loyalty. There is also another wave of frequent attendees; these members can be classified as community leaders who attend meetings in order to stay informed about what is happening in their community. These are leaders whose aim is to keep informed about their neighbourhood, in order to inform other community members who belong to their forums.

Figure 1: Members regularly attending meetings

The diagram above is indicative of the participation within the area, as well as members that participate in forums on a regular basis. Leaders attend meetings for a myriad of reasons including visibility and in order to gain access to various resources. Often members attend meetings as a way of leveraging information which they use in other meeting spaces. It is clear from the diagram, that there are interfaces between the three forums as many members do not only attend meetings held in one forum. It is also clear that there are a few participants that attend all three forums, but also that participants are very strategic in their attendance in meetings. This kind of diagram is useful, as it helps to build a character profile of participants, and allows researchers to observe shifting identities of members from one forum

to the next. It is also useful in helping to understand the motives of individual participants and what outcomes they expect in each forum.

In the YSF, it is often difficult to categorise individuals as some organisations have a fairly regular attendance but mostly new faces from the different organizations attend. This makes it difficult to categorise the members and blurs the frequency of individual organizations' attendance. Different members may attend meetings if either or both the representatives of the organisation cannot attend, thereby making it difficult to keep track of members belonging to organisations. In the SCF meetings, members are also relatively invisible but in the SCF two meetings street patrollers often come dressed in their uniforms making it easier to identify them as a body. This also then shows distinctions between civil society and street patrollers. As a result of their visibility in meetings, it tends to show poor attendance of community members in relation to patrollers in the meeting.

With regard to the time aspect, ward meetings usually start late as the councillor opts to wait for more participants to arrive before commencing meetings. Meetings usually last about three and a half hours, and often go on beyond the scheduled time. Meetings are usually held on Sunday afternoons and are scheduled from 2pm to 5 pm. YSF meetings on the other hand usually start on time and late comers catch the meeting in procession. Meetings are scheduled for the third Thursday of each month from 6pm to 8pm, but also tend to end later than what is scheduled. Sector meetings usually last for two hours, often meetings are shorter than expected as agendas are small, particularly in the SCF two meetings. In both meetings, there is a great deal of community obligation, as meetings only begin once a large group of participants have arrived.

The diversity deals with representation of a wide variety of individuals classified under different categories, who form part of the community. In the ward meetings, there is a relatively good representation of different kinds of members belonging to the community. In the YSF, there is also strong representation, as the organization itself it representative of different faith based, community based and other organisations within the broader Yeoville Bellevue community. As the forum is a lot smaller, it is therefore easier to notice the diversity amongst participants relative to the number and types of organizations. In both sector meetings, the diversity aspect is very invisible, as participants cannot be easily identified and categorised. The scale of the ward meetings stretches along the boundary of the ward, meaning that everyone who falls under the ward is welcome in meetings. Only a few participants who are eligible to attend ward meetings in the area do. In each meeting, a rough estimate of about thirty to fifty community members attends meetings. In the YSF meetings out of the twenty eight or so organizations, only ten to fifteen representatives attend meetings on any given occasion. Members in all organizations tend to walk in late, whilst this is a bigger problem for the ward meetings than it is for the YSF and SCF meetings as the venue is larger. It does tend to focus the attention of other members away from the meeting. SCF meetings also do not meet their target in terms of population. Many residents residing in the sectors are not active in meetings even though crime is a common problem in Yeoville and other parts of the country.

The dress code adopted by some members is done in order to indicate comfort and as an expression of their freedom and belonging. In the ward meetings, people dress in different ways in order to send out a variety of messages. Members affiliated to particular political organisations dress in various attires such as dungarees, caps and t-shirts branded in their political party's logos in order to display their affiliations and their presence in meetings. In

the YSF meetings, some members belonging to political parties go dressed in their political attires as well. There are also members who dress in their ethnic and cultural attires in order to show their visibility. Some of these members also attend ward meetings, but do so in ordinary civilian clothing which helps them blend in with the crowd. These members therefore choose to camouflage their identities in ward meetings, but are comfortable enough not to in YSF meetings which raises the point of hostilities experienced by members and how they curb them. In the SCF meetings members also tend to camouflage themselves and do not wear clothing that makes them stick out from the crows except for the street patrollers. Similarly, different languages are used in meetings by leaders in order to convey messages. Yeoville particularly is a very diverse environment with residents from all over Africa and South Africa alike who speak different languages. Although ward meetings are mostly conducted in English, other vernacular languages are used as well such as IsiZulu, SeSotho and IsiXhosa by both leaders and participants thereby excluding members who do not speak or understand these languages. These languages are used without translations into a common language such as English. In the YSF, meetings are conducted in English which is a common language shared by all members, therefore no translations are required in these meetings. The SCF one mostly conducts their meetings in IsiZulu, whilst the SCF two conducts meetings in English with a mixture of other local languages.

What is at stake in meetings? A Lens on the neighbourhood politics reflective of key issues plaguing communities

The third element observed in the meetings was what is at stake in meetings. This taps into the notion of the existence of meetings and the driving logic behind each of them. Here the themes are tackled which give insight into then agenda and what topics are raised in meetings, their importance and their frequency. It focuses on different tones used and adopted by leaders and participants when addressing one another. It also looks at the tensions that arise in meetings and their various motivations. The role of the chair is important in mediating and solving disputes, but often they themselves get caught in the firing lines. It becomes important to understand the roles assumed by leaders in meetings, as they often steer meetings in a manner that best suits them. The dress code of participants acts as an important sign in the matter, as it represents people's ability and freedom to express themselves. Often members brand themselves according to their political affiliations. Languages used by participants can be exclusionary, as some participants (in a multi-cultural setting as in Yeoville) are not familiar with those particular languages which therefore exclude them in discussions.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?			
Object Of Observation	**Ward Meetings**	**Yeoville Stakeholders Forum**	**Sector Crime Forum 1& 2**
Theme	Wide variety of issues raised (Community projects, development, housing issues, xenophobia issues, soccer world cup)	Issues involving community wellbeing (Human trafficking, employment, opposing gambling license, brothels fronting as Bed and Breakfasts)	Crime and related issues (Highjackings, petty crimes, community responsibility)
Tone	Commanding	Mellifluous, and well projected	Varied according to (Question,

			Answer, Comment, Complaint)
Tension	Participants often intimidated by councillor-open display of prejudices	Tension is not explicit	Community unhappy with SCF
Role of Chair	Allows hate speech to ensue	Controls time and length of comments	Educates and informs participants

Table 3: What is at Stake in meetings (Mkwanazi, 2010)

There are a number of themes that make their way onto the agenda of meetings, some are protocol and are performed on a regular basis whilst others only appear when there is a need for it to be discussed. In the ward meetings, generally meetings begin with the opening and welcome by the councillor which is then followed by the reading of the minutes of previous meetings and then matters and issues arising thereof. The agenda then deals with an array of issues plaguing the community which are prioritized by the ward committee. Issues such as housing and local by-laws are raised on a regular basis over the year and form a part of the agenda. In the ward meetings, organizations such as the YSF as well as the Community Policing Forum (CPF) are given a platform to give report backs and inform the community. Other issues are raised by members of the audience and often small discussions are held around this during a meeting. In the YSF, meetings also begin with the opening and welcome which is done by the chair, and followed by the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting. Before the minutes are adopted, matters arising from the previous minutes as well as feedback from various members put in charge to make follow ups on matters are given. The agenda for the day is then read and members are asked if they have anything to add to it. Both Sector meetings open and close in prayer. The agenda is also relatively standard and shares similar traits with both ward and YSF meetings. The agenda then moves towards the key issues affecting individual sectors. Different tones are used throughout meetings in order to convey the agenda and participants generate a myriad of responses as a result of how they speak to one another.

Different kinds of tones are exercised during meetings by participants in order to convey certain messages and feelings. In the ward meetings, often tones used are hostile as members have a lot of expectations and demands. The councillor and other leaders therefore assume very authoritative roles as a curbing strategy. These tones are expressed both by leaders as well as participants. The venue is large and participants are forced to speak loudly in order to be heard. Some people's projections are low and people cannot hear them which poses more problems for participants. There are existing tensions which make themselves into ward meetings. Often these tensions seem derived from personal experiences that are not related to the forum, and are expressed as personal attacks towards the councillor. Some tensions brew inside of the forum and are as a result of disagreements on views. Often tensions spiral into arguments in meetings. The councillor for one holds meetings in order to fulfil her mandate, as well as to provide the community a platform in order to diffuse their anger by facilitating debate and contest amongst residents. In the YSF, tensions may exist but are not expressed explicitly. The role of the chair therefore becomes important in solving disputes and mediating amongst participants. Often the role of the chair requires neutrality even though leaders themselves may have opinions. In ward meetings, councillor assumes many different roles mostly in response to situations. However, views are often expressed that may come across as being prejudice, xenophobic or sexist which is often to the dismay of the crowd who takes it up. In the YSF meetings the role of the chair is to lead discussions and control

and manage the time allowed for opinions (see Benit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi, 2010, for a further analysis on the impact of leadership tactics and strategies in building community visions).

The guidelines and their usefulness in understanding invited and invented spaces

This paper presents a set of guidelines that adds a practical element to the way in which we interact and understand invited and invented spaces of participation. It does however indicate how what is and should be regarded as the overarching discourse emanating from public spaces is complex and often elusive, as often what people say is equally as important as their actions which are expressed through a myriad of other forms other than mere speech. It also blurs the dichotomy of invited and invented spaces, in that invited spaces can have traits of invented spaces, and members bring in a form of insurgency through how they interact with one another in these spaces.

Ethnographic research through observation and participation essentially adds value to how researchers understand the underlying issues in participatory spaces. It teases out nuances that can only be captured through a thorough engagement with spaces and the environments in which they occur, as this is essential in the shaping the form and function of individual spaces. The politics inherent in communities shed light on how we are able to understand clientelistic relationships including what drives them and the various forms in which they manifest themselves in both invented and invited spaces. These spaces not only facilitate different tensions amongst societies, and allow their participants to share their perspectives and inner most tensions subtly in the forms of their dress codes or more explicitly through speech. These bodies of literature on participation whether invented or invited therefore help us in deciphering the various politics inherent in Yeoville and other localities contested participatory spaces.

Conclusion

The three themes explored in this paper collectively have given rise to a holistic and more nuanced understanding of public spaces of participation. It brings to the forefront the close correlations of the physical, political and social elements that shape society and how they are used to shape and influence spaces. Power relations are brought into spaces and take on various forms based on how they are conveyed by the various power holders. This paper has introduced a pragmatic and operationl set of elements discussed in the tables that might be useful for future researchers studying public spaces of participation. These tables are a mere guideline and can therefore be developed and tailored to respond to different questions, but are useful in that they create a framework which can be used to understand public spaces of participation. They provide a practical element to existing bodies of literature on public spaces of participation and help us better to understand local politics and the various underlying issues that communities present in meetings that can be observed in meetings.

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