

## Public participation in lower and higher socio-economic areas in South Africa

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### **Abstract**

A prominent feature of public life in South Africa the last decade has been an increasing demand for more participation in the formulation and making of decisions affecting the public's quality of life. This demand has also become a focus of political activism. Public participation in plan formulation and in decision making has to be seen as a reality, and not as an optional extra. It can be argued that unless plan formulation and decision making take cognisance of different political traditions and cultures and are inclusive and participatory it has little chance of producing long lasting solutions.

The aim of this research is to compare the public participation process in a lower socio economic area with that in a higher socio economic area to determine if the process and focus of the public participation process differ in accordance with the socio economic status of an area.

The study compares the public participation process in two case studies: the Mabopane and Muckleneuk areas in Pretoria, with specific reference to the Mabopane Inter modal Facility Redevelopment Project and the Gautrain Rapid Rail Project going through the Muckleneuk neighbourhood, respectively. Findings indicate that the driving force for participation in the higher socio economic areas is based on the effect that the proposed development planning would have on the area as a whole, whereas the focus of public participation process in the area with a lower socio economic status tends to be on the influence on job creation and the impact it has on the affected individual.

**Keywords:** Planning, public participation process, socio economic areas, stakeholders

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### **Abstrak**

'n Uitstaande kenmerk van openbare lewe in Suid Afrika gedurende die af gelope dekade was 'n toenemende aandrag vir groter deelname aan die formulering en neem van besluite wat die lewenskwaliiteit van die publiek raak. Hierdie aandrag het ook 'n fokuspunt van politieke aktivisme geword. Openbare deelname in planformulering en besluitneming moet as 'n realiteit gesien word en nie as 'n opsionele ekstra nie. Daar kan geredeneer word dat indien planformulering en besluitneming nie kennis neem van die onderskeie politieke tradisies en kulture en ook inklusief en deelnemend is nie, dit weinig kans sal hê om blywende oplossings te skep.

Die doel van hierdie navorsing is om die openbare deelnemingsproses in 'n laer sosio ekonomiese gebied te vergelyk met diê in 'n hoër sosio ekonomiese gebied, om te bepaal of die proses en die fokus van die publieke deelnemingsproses verskil volgens die sosio ekonomiese status van 'n gebied.

Die studie vergelyk die openbare deelnemingsproses in twee gevallestudies: die Mabopanegebied en Muckleneukgebied in Pretoria, met spesifieke verwysing na die Mabopane Inter modale Fasiliteitsherontwikkelingprojek en die Gautrain Snelrelinprojek wat deur die Muckleneuk woonbuurt gaan, onderskeidelik. Bevindings toon aan dat die dryfveer vir deelname in die hoër sosio ekonomiese gebied gebaseer is op die effek wat die voorgestelde ontwikkelingsbeplanning sal hê op die gebied as 'n geheel. Openbare deelname in die gebied met 'n laer sosio ekonomiese status, daarteenoor, is gefokus op die effek op werkskepping asook die impak wat dit op 'n individu het.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Beplanning, openbare deelname, sosio ekonomiese areas, aan-deelhouers

## 1. Introduction

Participatory planning raises special problems and challenges in South African cities (Theron, 2005). The task of urban political restructuring encounters daunting obstacles such as the geographically fragmented nature of our cities, the divided political and institutional heritage of white and black towns and the resultant difference in political cultures prevalent in white and black areas. In South African cities, pressures for participation in planning and administration have taken on a distorted form, because of the overriding importance of destroying apartheid local government (Atkinson, 1992). A further problem with public participation in local government administration is that different sectors of South African cities have different conceptions of appropriate participation.

A prominent feature of public and corporate life in South Africa the last decade has been an increasing demand by the public for more participation in the formulation and making of decisions affecting their quality of lives. In South Africa this demand has also become a focus of political activism. Participation by the public in plan formulation and in decision-making has to be seen as a reality that city and regional planners will have to prepare for and provide and not treat it as an optional extra. If the necessity and importance of public participation are underestimated, it can cause unnecessary delays on the implementation of a project. Notwithstanding the complexity of the public participation processes, it can be argued that unless the processes take cognisance of different political traditions and cultures and are inclusive and participatory it has no chance of producing long lasting solutions.

Guidelines for public participation in developments are provided by, among others, Loveday (1972), Fagence (1977), Kaufman (1981), Boaden *et al.* (1982), Atkinson (1992), Botes (1999) and Botes & Van Rensburg (2000). It should be noted, however, that public participation processes are also subject to criticism: Cooke & Kothari (2001), for example, address the discrepancy between the advantages claimed for participation and what actually happens in practice – see also Botes & Van Rensburg (2000), Chinsinga (2003) and Mansuri & Rao (2004). Also worth noting is that the concept of community participation is being replaced by that of community engagement (Brisbane, 2005).

Van Zyl (1991) found that the higher the socio-economic status of the inhabitants of a study area, the greater levels of involvement in participatory planning programs. This might have been true during 1991, as the phenomenon of public participation in South Africa only started gathering momentum at that stage. The phenomenon at that time also did not receive too much local attention as a positive and constructive instrument in the planning process. However, due to the political changes in South Africa, the public now places greater emphasis on participation – a right guaranteed by Constitution of South Africa.

In contrast to Van Zyl's 1991 findings, Marais & Botes (2002) found that the level and intensity of public participation increase with lower income communities. Residents, especially the poor, had become disillusioned by the local authorities' failure to organise the city to the benefit of all groups and want this to change. This is therefore resulting in greater participation of the public especially in the lower socio-economic areas. The role of the newly established ward coordinators as part of the Unicity concept affords the community a chance to play a more significant role in participation.

The degree and nature of public participation in different socio-economic areas should be a guiding factor to the planner in designing a participation process that ensures stakeholder buy-in. In the light of the above, the aim of this paper is to compare public participation in two different socio-economic areas to determine if the process and reason for participation differ in accordance with the socio-economic status of an area.

## **2. Case studies**

### **2.1 Mabopane case study**

The project at Mabopane Station arose from the need to bring this facility up to an acceptable standard as well as to provide adequate facilities for the increased number of informal traders. The implementation of this project was considerably delayed due to factors such as the cumbersome public participation process, the limited space to relocate traders and the phasing of the project due to its complex nature.

The precinct is congested with 1 400 informal traders, who have set up their business all over and the area is completely chaotic. The

Lindeque & Cloete • Public participation in lower and higher socio-economic areas in South Africa station, which is regarded as an inter-modal facility, accommodates different modes of transport, for example, taxi, bus and rail. On average 50 000 commuters use the facility per day. Due to non-governance, the absence of proper management and the inappropriate institutional arrangements from a local authority perspective, mistrust exists amongst the traders and the general community, which has to be overcome as part of the public participation process.

The public participation process began with a workshop held between all the funding agencies and the purpose of the workshop was to

- identify, categorise and prioritise problems at Mabopane Station;
- determine the causes of the problems;
- highlight and agree on possible solutions; and
- formalise an organisational framework for taking the issues further.

The first management committee meeting focused on the establishment of a management structure to jointly manage the project; the path that the public participation process should take and communication linkages with ward councillors in the wards affected.

A public meeting was held and the purpose of the meeting was to set up the foundation for a development forum to follow at a later stage. A trader needs analysis survey was also conducted to quantify the needs of traders as well as determine the various stakeholders within the trade sector.

Task teams for taxis, buses, formal and informal traders had been established to assist with the formation of a development forum for the broader community, so that their input is heard in the upgrading of the station. A series of workshops were run for each Task team and assisted in understanding the issues facing each sector at the station and develop recommendations to address the issues.

Several interviews by the local community radio station were held with the ward councillor and officials of City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality to inform the community of the proposed project.

Information flyers were distributed which briefly explained the project, the phases and progress of the project to counteract any misinformation spread by the traders at the station as it was realised

that misinformation is one of the biggest factors contributing to riots at the station. Three monthly newsletters containing updated information on planning and construction have also been distributed.

The Development Forum was established and the representatives of all stakeholders attended the meetings – taxi and trader task teams, bus companies and members of the SA National Civic Organisation, ward councillors, and ward committees from the Mabopane, Soshanguve and Winterveld areas. The aim of the Forum was to facilitate the buy-in of the design plans and acceptance by all stakeholders. It furthermore also dealt with day-to-day operational issues, for example safety and security, cleaning, etc. A burning issue at these meetings was the creation of employment opportunities for the local community (Intersite, 2004a).

To ensure that the community benefited from the project, the labour desk task team was established to make recommendations to the Forum on issues pertaining to labour. About 4 000 people registered on the database as both sub-contractors and general workers and 70% of all labour used in each contract had to be obtained from this data base. A community liaison officer was appointed to provide assistance to the public on any public matter that relates to the project.

The public participation process in the Mabopane case study was complex and had to deal with issues not only pertaining to planning but also of operational nature. The participation focused on employment opportunities and how the community could benefit. Other issues that featured strongly were safety and security matters.

## **2.2 Muckleneuk case study**

In the Muckleneuk case study the Muckleneuk Lukasrand Property Owners and Resident Association consists of over 300 active members. Inputs from a sample group was used to compile the data. In February 2000 the Premier of Gauteng Province announced the Gautrain Rapid Rail Link Project, connecting Pretoria, Johannesburg and Johannesburg International Airport (JIA). The proposed project entails the construction of a modern, state-of-the-art rail network.

The area concerned in this case study was focused on the alignment of the rail route through the Muckleneuk area and the public participation specifically in that area. The alignment would impact significantly on the quiet suburb of Muckleneuk, a community falling

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Gautrans undertook environmental studies, in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations (Bohlweki Environmental, 2002). The focus of the EIA was the development of route alignment alternatives and the inclusion of new affected parties. The public participation process for the EIA was considered to be a crucial mechanism to inform the public and affected parties about the need for, purpose and aims of the project and also served to elicit the issues, concerns, needs and requirements of affected parties as inputs into the EIA.

An EIA website for the project was developed and provided background information on the EIA process and allowed affected parties to register their interest in the project and the EIA, ask questions and provide comments. Media such as TV stations, community radio stations, advertising in public by means of posters and national and regional newspapers were utilised to communicate information regarding the EIA process to the public.

A Background Information Document (BID) was compiled and contained information regarding the EIA process, the proposed project and the consultants involved. Five open days were held with the purpose to provide affected parties with information regarding the project, to identify issues and concerns, and to answer any initial questions regarding the project and the EIA process.

Formal meetings were conducted with specific group of key stakeholders who were grouped according to formal associations or their specific interest in the project. These meetings allowed stakeholders to join forces (if they wished), to raise specific issues and concerns, and/or obtain more information regarding the project and the process (Intersite, 2003; 2004b). A series of public meetings was held to provide the public with more detailed information about the project and to provide feedback on issues raised. Possible route alignment alternatives that could be considered in the EIA were also discussed.

Issues and concerns raised by affected parties were captured in a draft Issues Report. A second series of public meetings was held to inform affected parties of the feasible alternative route alignments that had arisen out of the public participation process and which were to be included in the EIA. Feedback public meetings were

held and the main objective of these meetings was to provide the broader public with feedback on the main findings of the EIA and proposed mitigation measures.

The participation process in the Muckleneuk case study can be considered as a conventional process as it had a low level of impact on the decisions taken. The participation process, compared to the Mabopane case study, was not very complex (although the project was technically very complex). Only a few meetings took place and the issues raised referred directly to the proposed project and did not focus on any operational issues. The process could be considered to be more an information session than public participation to obtain recommendations.

### **3. Public participation in first and third world context**

Although the concept of public participation (termed 'citizen participation' in North American literature) evolved in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960, full and official sanction for this term was not provided for in the British legislation until 1968 when the Town and Country Planning Act was passed.

In the United States participatory exercises initially focused predominantly on the urban poor minority groups, whilst in Great Britain attempts were made to cater for all sections of the community. However, planners in Britain and United States went through the same learning curve and realisation that planning cannot escape the dilemma and fact that planning decisions are inevitably political choices (Loveday, 1972: 130).

South Africa's intermediate status as a semi-developed first and third world mixed economy, inevitably gives rise to sometimes irreconcilable contradictions like dual standards and concerns. These concerns or needs, when translated into planning goals, invariably relate to a quest for a better quality of life (Atkinson, 1992).

City planning essentially tries to provide a framework within which people can live happy and useful lives. 'Quality of life' is a multi-faceted concept encompassing the economic, social, environmental and physical dimensions of the city. In a society as heterogeneous as that of South Africa, there obviously are greatly varying perceptions about what constitutes a better quality of life.



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To the under-developed third world sector of the population an improved quality of life most likely relates to the two basic factors of adequate and affordable housing and the availability of sufficient employment opportunities. To the first world sector of the South African society a better quality of life probably relates to matters such as the creation and development of recreation and amenity infrastructure and high cost of urban services.

This varying nature of the subject matter about which planning decisions have to be taken has a tremendous impact on the level of public participation processes in planning decision-making. One has to determine from the earliest stage what the actual needs of the community are and what they perceive to be the most urgent ones. A development project in Malaysia, for example, was originally intended to provide basic health care; however after consultation with the community it became clear that the residents regarded piped water, electricity, education and recreation as being more important than clinics. It was thus necessary to modify the project plans to ensure acceptance by the community (Lim, 1988: 133).

The interdependent nature of problems faced by these poor communities implies that one issue (such as infrastructure services) cannot be addressed without considering other issues (such as job creation). It must be ensured that community members understand the implications of such initiatives (Atkinson, 1992).

People will only participate if they feel that they will gain directly out of the participation or that they can exert influence on the outcome. Participation can be based on a geographic locality as with residents' associations or community groups; it may be in terms of some shared interest or activity or the basis for participation may be functional or service orientated as with groups and individuals concerned with housing and welfare services (Boaden *et al.*, 1982: 14).

Community action affects the techniques for mobilising public participation. In first world cities public participation is pursued by special interest and sectional organisations. In third world cities, however, organisations attempt to represent the full community through ward committees and steering committees

One of the many dimensions of participatory development is community solidarity. However, community solidarity is not always easy to achieve. In some poor communities people are reluctant to

participate and in others the poor are the most likely to participate (Fagence, 1977). It depends on the community at large whether full participation will be achieved.

Community solidarity is not so vigorously pursued in first world cities. There is a higher degree of political pluralisms and individualism in public participation. In first world cities there is a higher level of apathy than in the third world cities. Fagence (1977: 347-349) notes that a measure of apathy can be interpreted as beneficial, since it could indicate a stable and contented society, and since the apathetic segment of the public constitutes a potential effective conservative counterweight to the radical elements of society.

Participation is essential to have but very difficult to generate. However, participation is an investment and people will only make the investment when it is rational to do so. If it were possible to obtain the same goals without costly participation, then you would choose to do so. For example, an illegal squatter can obtain security of tenure through bribing an official, then that route may be taken, as it is more certain than organising neighbours to obtain some sort of public assurance of their tenure rights. The residents will participate in collective action where gains from doing so are greater than the costs. This implies that, to gain effective participation in a pressure group, participation must be seen as worth the effort it would require.

In first world cities, there seems to be a greater degree of individualism in public participation. This can be attributed to a more liberal political heritage. Certain Western theorists of democracy have raised non-participation to the level of political virtue, and argue that an individual has the right to use or not opportunities for political involvement. This argument indicates a more individualistic conception of public participation processes in first world cities than the collectivist style of participation propagated by development theorist in third world cities.

There are several distinct approaches to the public participation processes based on the level of participation required. Not only will the nature of the project impact on the process followed but also the skills level and economic status of a community. The process of participation might not be completely different, but it has to be sensitive to the socio-economic conditions of a community.

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One of the key lessons from the literature on public participation in third world and first world societies is that there is no single 'best' way to design and manage a participation programme. Furthermore, different socio-economic areas do not all have the same needs when it comes to development, and communities participate based on the probability of satisfying their current socio-economic needs.

#### **4. Analysis and interpretation of the case studies**

An opinion survey was undertaken among the participants in the two case studies to compare the reasons for participation in both cases, in order to determine if the reasons for participation in a lower socio-economic area differ from those offered by respondents in a higher socio-economic area.

The Mabopane population was regarded as being represented by the members of the Development Forum. The Development Forum consisted of 42 members including, among others, 12 local ward committee members, 14 leaders of the seven different traders associations, leaders of the four taxi associations, a member of the SA National Civic Association representing the business community, a community liaison officer and four government officials who were to implement and manage the project.

The Mucleneuk population was regarded as being represented by 17 participants who were nominated by the Muckleneuk/Lukasrand Property Owners and Residents Association, the latter body itself consisting of about 300 active members.

##### **4.1 Occupation, income and education in the two areas**

The analysis of the levels of occupation, income and education gives an indication of the socio-economic profile of the respondents.

Nearly half (48%) of the Mabopane respondents indicated that they had no income and only one respondent stated an income of more than R2 000 per month. The majority (76%) of the respondents in the survey in the Muckleneuk area earned more than R15 000 per month with no one earning less than R5000 per month. This clearly indicates the disparity in income levels in the two areas.

Respondents in the Muckleneuk survey all had tertiary education whereas 86% of the respondents in the Mabopane survey had an education level of Grade 10 or lower.

The survey undertaken to determine the levels of occupation showed that the majority of participants in the Mabopane case study were unskilled. This might have led to the high unemployment rate among them (79%), resulting in their low monthly income levels. Respondents in the Muckleneuk survey indicated their level of occupation to be predominantly (88%) administrative/managerial, technical and professional.

## **4.2 Analysis of the public participation process in the case studies**

All the participants in both case studies were aware of Government's initiatives to inform the public of the proposed projects. The respondents were asked if they felt that they were being listened to in the meetings and whether they had an impact on the decision-making process.

In the Muckleneuk case 82% of the respondents felt that they had no impact on the decisions made. It can be mentioned that after the survey was done it was confirmed that the Muckleneuk Lukasrand Property and Resident Association took legal action against the provincial government. In the Mabopane case study the respondents perceived the public participation process in a more positive light than in the Muckleneuk case study, with 52% indicating that they do have an impact on the decision-making process.

The above can be contributed to the fact that the participation process in the Mabopane project was more intense and on a more personal level compared to the process followed in Muckleneuk as the participants had the opportunity to participate in compiling the development plan.

In the Mabopane case, the three most important reasons for participation were because of the perceived impact of the proposed development on job creation, the influx of people to the area and concerns about the physical layout of the proposed development. Although job creation and the use of local labour were a key issue in the Mabopane case study; it resulted in a prolonged construction period, as the labour was not always skilled enough. The

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planners and the developers had no option but to address and accommodate certain demands of the community, as the community would not have allowed any construction without the creation of employment opportunities.

In Muckleneuk, the most important concern was the influence of the proposed development on the entire area (noise and visual impact, town planning and land use impact, impact on the historical and architectural heritage of the area, the possible change in the character of the whole area, and the possible impact on property values).

With reference to the question of community solidarity mentioned above (Fagence, 1977), it was observed that in the case of Mabopane people were eager to participate but did not exhibit a great degree of solidarity. Different groups had different agendas, complicating the process. For example, the traders and community leaders had different opinions on what the most important issues were that had to be addressed first.

There was a distinct difference in the tenure of the respondents in the two areas. In the Muckleneuk area virtually all the respondents were owners of the properties concerned, whereas in the case of Mamelodi all the respondents were tenants.

In summary, the typical socio-economic profile of the Muckleneuk participant reflects a property owner employed in the professional, technical, managerial or administrative sectors of the economy, with a tertiary education and earning more than R10 000 per month. The typical socio-economic profile of a participant in the Mabopane project is a user of the public facility, unemployed, with an education level not higher than Grade 12, unskilled and earning less than R2 000 per month.

The Muckleneuk respondents' general perception of the participation process (82%) was that he/she did not have an impact on the decisions taken. The most important motivation to participate in the process was concern about the impact of the project on the area and their property. In the Mabopane survey 48% of the respondents was of the opinion that that they did influence the decision-making process. Furthermore the main reason for the participation was employment opportunities and the impact of the layout of the development.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

A number of conclusions and recommendations with regard to the nature of the process followed and the reasons for participation in the public participation process in the two socio-economic areas can be made.

### **5.1 Nature of the public participation process**

The public participation process followed in the two case studies was different in terms of the approach, intensity, level and length. The process followed in Muckleneuk was based on the fact that the project was already designed in terms of the route and the process therefore focused more on finding mitigating factors to soften the environmental impact of the proposed project on the community. The process was designed and approached around the EIA and not so much around the design and actual layout of the project. In the case of Mabopane, the approach was to draw up the development plan with the participants and the designs were subsequently done according to the development plan. Most of the designs were workshopped with the affected parties to ensure their buy-in.

The process followed by the consultants in the case of Muckleneuk was a conventional method of inviting stakeholders, affected and interested parties to a limited number of technical public meetings. Various technical experts explained the project and community members were allowed to ask questions. The minutes of these meetings were published and could be obtained either on the web site or at the next public meeting. It had a low level of impact on the decisions taken. The process was therefore not very complex and was more an information session than public participation to obtain recommendations.

The Mabopane public participation process was more complex and had to deal with planning as well as operational issues. The process focused on employment opportunities and community benefits. Other issues that featured strongly were safety and security matters. In addition, more effort had to be put into communication clearly during the process, to ensure that the participants understood the issues involved.

The process followed was based on conventional methods such as public meetings, lecture/discussion sessions, information brochures,

Lindeque & Cloete • Public participation in lower and higher socio-economic areas in South Africa and media reports, but innovative methods were also used. Intensive meetings (workshops) were one of such methods applied. The process also made professional assistance available to the community, providing inputs from the design phase, especially data on the traders market and taxi ranks.

It can be concluded that the extent to which the public participates in the planning process may determine the degree of success of any proposal. Increased participation is costly in the short term, both in terms of time and money spent. It should, however, result in more effective planning and should in the long term prove to be more cost effective. The degree and/or type of participation will vary according to the type of planning involved. There is no one best way to design and manage the public participation process – the local situation must be taken into account. It may be necessary to use several approaches simultaneously. News releases and public meetings will not by themselves resolve social, economic, cultural and political issues. A systematic process, appropriate for a specific situation, needs to be designed as skills, education and communication levels can have a major impact on the success of the process. It is therefore important that the design of the process takes into consideration the socio-economic fabric of the community.

## **5.2 Reasons for participation**

It was clear that involvement in the public participation process in the two areas were prompted by different considerations. In Muckleneuk, which in terms of the analysis of the socio-economic factors is regarded as a higher socio-economic area, emphasis was put on factors that could influence the area and the properties. In the case of Mabopane (a lower socio-economic area) the focus was on employment opportunities. If the same process followed in Muckleneuk was followed in Mabopane, the public participation process would not have yielded the same results as there would have been no perceived benefits for community participation. In Mabopane, a labour desk task team was constituted as part of the public participation process to ensure that the community benefits in terms of employment, which was the main concern expressed by respondents. Respondents in Mamelodi did not indicate any concern for the issues regarded as being important in Muckleneuk.

The conclusion can be drawn that in a higher socio-economic area participants are more concerned with the impact of the project on the area and on their properties than other factors, while in areas where the basic needs are not yet fulfilled, the most important concern is the creation of employment opportunities satisfying their basic needs.

It is therefore important that before public participation process commences, a scoping report of the socio-economic character of a community has to be undertaken. This will lead the planner to design the process to achieve the maximum results from the process. The socio-economic characteristics of an area will determine the extent and depth of the public participation process. Understanding the needs of the community will contribute to obtaining support from the community for a proposed project.

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