

Report on e-Dialogue 5: Governance & Participation

16 November – 08 December 2009

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ABSTRACT

The report provides an interpretative summary of the e-dialogue based on the call for participation and the verbatim comments of the participants. The report is structured around five themes: the participative city; participation and the urban divide; the politics of participatory governance; instruments of participatory governance; and a general section on governance and participation.

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21 January 2010

1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of discussions held during the e-Dialogue on Governance and Participation. The Dialogue ran for three weeks between 16th November and 8 December 2009 and attracted much interest, with a total of 202 postings from 28 countries¹ and many more viewers. The responses extended the geographical boundaries of the exchange further through references to broader territories. The debate was marked by great conviviality and the obvious desire to share, learn and advance practices of participation amongst participants.

The debate's objectives were to identify and unfold the fundamental elements of the participative city and participatory governance. The debate was also to evaluate the role of participatory governance in helping to forge inclusive and equitable urban development outcomes, in line with WUF 5's overriding framework of *The right to the City- bridging the urban divide*.

The moderators opted for a purposefully provocative approach when introducing various issues for debate; the intention was to push the e-Dialogue beyond generalised statements in support of participatory governance.² Respondents took up the challenge in good spirit and responses were often highly reflexive. In particular, and as the report will illustrate, respondents raised and discussed the critical issue of political rights as fundamental to effective, pro-poor participatory governance. They also emphasised the crucial link between participatory democracy and participatory or more inclusive economics.

The five topics that organised the Dialogue discussions were the outcome of the moderators' initial strategic overview of the topic, comforted by participants' responses in the first week of the debate.³ Accordingly, the report below summarises discussion along these main thrusts:

- The participative city
- Participation and the urban divide
- The politics of participatory governance
- Instruments of participatory governance
- Governance and Participation – general

¹ Canada, Norway, Philippines, Nepal, India, GB, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, USA, Brazil, South Africa, France, New Zealand, Jamaica, Pakistan, Bolivia, Cuba, Venezuela, Mexico, Peru, Indonesia, Netherlands, Italy

² See for instance the welcoming statement, provided in Appendix 1.

³ Technical mishaps delayed the introduction of new topics in the first week of the e-dialogue. However, this development proved salutary in that it clearly emphasized the main areas participants felt necessary to discuss. Comforted by the experience of previous e-Dialogues, the moderators also opted for a small number of topics so as to ensure some continuity in the virtual 'conversation' (inevitably, there were still some overlap between the various topics).

2. The Participative City

This first topic drew a lot of responses,⁴ in part because of early technical difficulties in opening up new topics for discussion. As a result, responses in this thread have also tended to be of a general nature, introducing issues that were later followed up under more specific topic headers.

The topic's overall objective was to seek participants' inputs on the contours of the participative city. It asked: what makes a city participative? What makes citizens participate (or desire to participate) in public life? It also asked which cities rank high on a putative participative 'ladder' and why, thus introducing the idea of a global ranking of participation. It asked what should such a ranking entail and whether it would be a useful governance tool.

The Participative City – some definitions

- There was a general agreement that *the participative city is a city where people feel heard, where people feel that their voice matters.*

Ingjerd (Norway): “a participative city is one that sees, hears and includes its citizens in decision-making. It acknowledges the needs of its citizens - and has (or generates) the resources to accommodate them. At the best, a participative city breathes tolerance, diversity and growth - on both an individual scale and a societal scale.”

Mansoor (UK) “A city in which participation is so mainstreamed that we do not need projects and donors to make this happen. Where participation is process not an event. Where participation could lead to empowerment not just an input. Finally, where all levels of societies, especially rich, powerful and educated are very keen on sharing powers with the poor, powerless and less formally educated.”

- In turn, this sense of belonging, of citizenship, breeds the motivation – indeed the responsibility – to participate in the public life of the participative city:

Johanele (Nigeria): “People tend to want to participate in public life when they are aware of the extent to which their private life is shaped by the decision reached in the public arena. Civic education is central to this behaviour.”

Ingjerd (Norway) : “the personal desire to participate is closely linked to seeing that your voice matters - that you can be heard, and influence your society, the living conditions for your family and the quality of your own life. Then the sense of citizenship is vital - the sense of belonging, that you are part of something bigger than yourself, and that this society respects and protects your basic human needs, as well as gives you the room to develop. It's a place called home...”

And again: “A society with a sense of belonging – as many of us have seen as important to build participation - can breed a desire to protect structures, and build a sense of conduct that reflect societal needs more than personal gain. What we perceive as ours, we usually want to protect. Of course; it is easier to focus on the common good in a society where your basic personal needs are met, than in places where survival is a daily battle. Still, even in a harsh reality – I would, with all due respect, believe that good governance is just as important, though the challenges might be different.”

⁴ 55 Responses and 1592 viewers.

Caroline Andrew (Canada): ‘When citizens feel that there is a collective project in which they are free to imagine how they would like to live collectively this can stimulate the desire to participate.’

... including in a material sense:

Potekaal (Tanzania): “Participation and partnership are very effective in urban development because all actors will feel that they have ownership in the projects hence will be available for both implementation and maintenance.”

- As the earlier quote from Mansoor indicates, all respondents were keen to emphasise that *cities that are particularly successful at being participative are those able to extend this ‘listening’ ability and this sense of belonging to the most vulnerable/marginalized groups in society* – indeed are able to assist marginalized groupings in organizing and articulating their needs.

Tabfer (Philippines): “I would like to add- when the disadvantaged sectors (urban poor, persons with disabilities, informal groups, homeless groups, women) organize themselves and they get listened to, or provided a space or mechanisms by which they can be constantly heard, or consulted for things (policies, plans, budgets) affecting them... that is participative city.”

Frances (Uganda) “A participative city is a city that allows the local inhabitants to participate in decision making processes. Its one that is inclusive mainly of the marginalised groups of the city, including the women, youth, people with AIDS, People with disability. It’s a city that protects the right to participate in development processes.”

Johanele (Nigeria): ‘A city is participative to the extent the vulnerable groups (women, physically challenged, the poor, youth and children etc.) are able to lay genuine claim to the ownership, development and enjoyment of the city.’

- As most participants quickly added, this is at core a *political endeavour*.

Kalpna Viswanath (India): “Participation is an important point, but we must remember that cities are political spaces. And for the participation of marginalised groups, they need to have a political voice in the city. Thus a participative city must work towards creating political space for marginalised groups. By political space, I do not only mean in the narrow sense of politics, but a space where marginalised groups have an voice that carries some power.”

Participants focused on two closely intertwined aspects of this: *enabling institutions/mechanisms and a favourable political culture*.

The Participative City – Mechanisms and Institutional set-up

Winnie Mitullah (Kenya): “For me a participative city must have a clear framework for participation and a very transparent method of recruiting representatives of whichever group is being claimed to be represented”.

Johanele (Nigeria): “Ownership is linked to the constitutional framework and or statutes that are established and are used in governing the city.”

Along with the two respondents quoted above, most participants signalled *the importance of conducive institutional mechanisms* for deeper or more meaningful participation of vulnerable groups in the participative city.

- Most agreed that these mechanisms should be *“context and community specific”* (Winnie Mitullah) and, in that sense, many participants were loathe to engage in detailed prescriptive narration – although some initial allusions were made to participatory

budgeting (Minfegue, Cameroon), housing policies (Ingjer), and gender budgeting (Frances, Uganda).⁵ As Ingjerd put it:

“Structures vary, as well as living-conditions and traditions in participation. What works in my society, partly works well here because it’s tuned into our traditions, values and views. We can learn a lot from each other and transfer approaches - but need to pay attention to the role of context, - models that are transferred might need to be adjusted to local conditions to really work well there.”

- However, two overriding, decisive elements, underlined by a number of participants, remained a) *a democratic environment and representative democracy in particular*

Johanele (Nigeria): “the absence of democracy excludes effective participation.”

Minfegue (Cameroon): “participation of municipal elections remains the most important participatory channel”.

Ingjerd gave a particularly useful account of the participatory channels that can be found in a mature, functioning democracy that is Norway.

b) *a functioning and credible process of decentralisation.*

Minfegue: “in our sub-Saharan countries, participation will be effective if the decentralization process is improved and effectively implemented. So for me [...] making cities participative in Cameroon is possible if the decentralization process is effective (with a real empowerment of municipalities, civil society and populations)”.

As Minfegue and many participants noted, however, *there are many potential pitfalls when implementing decentralisation policies*, including, the lack of coordination (Winnie Mitullah), lack of transparency or accountability. Cf, Frances’ experience in Uganda:

“The decentralisation process has been a crisis in the sense that the system is very corrupted, very inefficient, characterised by lack of transparency, lack of accountability, gender imbalances in representation and participation and above all lack of inclusiveness of communities in local decision making processes. This thus leads to non participative city where there are no consultations with the inhabitants of the city.”

- Ultimately though, all participants stressed *transparency and trust in leaders and institutions* as fundamental requisites of the participative city. As one contributor intimated: the intimate connection between enabling institutions, should “lower barriers to participation” (Winnie Mitullah) and foster a conducive political culture.

The politics of the Participative City

- *A conducive political culture is necessary for genuine participatory governance, since participatory instruments can too easily be distorted, away from their original purpose:*

Ingjerd (Norway): “Systems and structures are never stronger than the conduct of the people within. Good structures does not guarantee good conduct, just as bad conduct not necessarily means that the structures are ineffective. It’s a challenge to make both work, and one can discuss where to start - but strength is needed in both areas to achieve good governance.”

Johanele (Nigeria): ‘A dialogic approach to participation, which is characterized by inclusiveness, joint ownership, learning, empathy and long term perspective tend

⁵ More details would nonetheless follow in the topics on ‘instruments of participatory governance’ and the ‘general’ topics, which addressed the questions of enabling mechanisms and institutional set-ups respectively.

to produce better results when compared with the caricature of participation where governments arrange what looks like 'participation' with predetermined outcome, just to impress the relevant section of the international community as we see across sub-Saharan African cities”.

Namraj (Nepal): “Leaders these days have found the city a good place for [introducing participatory mechanism]. They have the feeling that this will help them expanding voting mass. So their participation is not for the sake of city but for votes only”.

Gipsy, from New Zealand, stretched the point furthest by raising the question of *what is to be done when government is actively hostile to the participation processes* or the results of participation. The point would be raised again in the topic on the Politics of Participatory Governance. One element of a response though came through in the following comments.

- A few participants were keen to emphasise that *a conducive political culture goes beyond the immediate political community of political parties and governments to include broader civil society*:

Caroline Andrew (Canada): ‘the participative city needs to support the organization of marginalized groups and also give them the space to organize themselves in the way they choose to do - this support needs to come from the city as an institution but also from the broader civil society”.

Ingjerd (Norway): “A local government has a special responsibility to facilitate for [inclusion of the ‘weakest’ groups in governance structures] - but in addition to the structures we can build, it's much about attitudes. How well do we listen? How far is the broader society willing to incorporate the needs of our financially and socially more vulnerable citizens? On a personal basis; what am I willing to give up, to let others have more...?”

Indeed, JNBona (Philippines), seconded by others in the debate (e.g. James M (USA)), argued that *strong public opinion is fundamental* to good governance and proper functioning participatory governance in particular:

“For all these matters; sustainable development, environmental governance, resilient cities, good governance, and so on...and even confronted with a harsh fully autocratic government, all these changes for good begin with STRONG PUBLIC OPINION”.

Part and parcel of this strong public opinion (or strong public expectations) are an independent press and judiciary, NGOS (including faith-based organisations (Pat Green, Jamaica and others)) and, as many emphasised, strong organizations of the poor.

- *Strong organisations of the poor*, most participants concurred, *are essential to steer political culture in favour of pro-poor or inclusive participatory governance*. They are essential so as:

a) *to ensure that participatory governance is a two-way process*: i.e. not only top-down but also bottom-up (i.e. direction of participation)

JNBona (Philippines): “For this is point the fundamental decision whether to govern top-down, or bottom-up rely on the personal attitude of the local executives.

Derrickhf (USA): “A primary cause of social conflicts throughout the developed and developing worlds has been an economic development process that failed to provide a meaningful way for people to influence policy affecting their lives. This applies to cities in the same way, making participation an imperative part of any development process.”

b) to ensure that participatory governance actually responds to the livelihood needs of the most vulnerable in society, that they can substantially achieve the “Right to the city” (i.e. content of participatory governance). In a series of critical contributions, Fadriana (UK) highlighted how such organisations of the excluded have tended to coalesce around two key areas: housing and employment.

“Organisation of excluded communities is essential to make real gains. Crudely speaking, there are two areas where this needs to happen – and is happening in some places and respects: around housing and the immediate living environment (generally concerning growing informal settlements) and to do with the major and growing problem of the lack of employment and hence income (the growing informal economy). Initially local authorities are hostile or at best display benign neglect towards these and certainly focus little attention and few resources on improving the situation for the excluded. There are now international (Shack/Slum Dwellers International) and regional (eg Asian Coalition for Housing Rights) confederations that help national and local groups to organise around their needs and demands in the area of housing but as yet little with regard to employment and local economic development (but note WIEGO) focusing on the needs of those currently scratching a living in the informal economy. First local strong organisations or coalitions around each of these areas are needed within each city to indicate the rights of the excluded and exact adequate attention and resources from local governments and other ‘formal’ actors. Once adequately organised, these need to cooperate in a single, more coherent approach to local political intervention and a kind of local development that will benefit all and not just the privileged classes.”

NB: Unfortunately, throughout the debate, little further input/ideas were given on *ways to scale up* from single issues to broader, city-wide, political demands on the part of excluded communities.

- *How such organisations of the poor should be fostered* when “most city dwellers, especially in the south are in a situation, that they first require some form of uplifting of their spirits in order to effectively participate” (Winnie Mittulah, Kenya); in contexts marked by sizeable migrant populations with little stake in the city (Gipsy, New Zealand); or, more dramatically, when “there is need to devise ways of surmounting the unwritten policy of most governments to use all resources within their reach to stop the emergence of such strong organizations in Africa and possibly other parts of the developing world” (Johanele, Nigeria) ... *was not really addressed in this topic*. But it was *widely agreed that such organisations needed support*:

a) *support to improve their ability to participate in, and strengthen, legitimate channels of participation*. For JNBona (Philippines) this area is where UN agencies can play a more active role:

“The fact that almost all governments provide collective interaction by the people (in whatever form-Political or governing parties, LGU Councils, NGOs, Public Consultations, etc.), aside from understanding and promoting the concepts of participatory governance globally, the target societies must be institutionally supported through positive education (not through radical teach-ins), in mobilizing, building-up (in absence), strengthening and accessing the frameworks of legitimate channels or participatory processes. I think this is the area of urbanization development the UNCHS should focus among cities throughout the world as far as ‘participatory cities’ are concerned”; or, potentially more radically

b) *support in the form of political education of the masses*, as suggested by Fadriana (UK), and picked up by a number of other participants

“Nobody talks these days about the ‘political education of the masses’ – being seen as either subversive and/or ‘old fashioned’. But we need to think in this direction if participation is to become more than a sop. This involves a combination of knowledge on how the political system works – and how the stakes could be changed, but at the same time knowledge of how physical systems work such that people gain knowledge and confidence of how, as excluded communities, to intervene (read: genuinely participate!).”

This radical conception of participation was seen essential to overcome the ritualisation – indeed the depoliticisation – of participatory practices, inimical to any meaningful/progressive societal transformation. Leo V (USA) recalled the real danger that “participation can often be used to simply solidify existing hierarchies and power relationships and it has been called the new form of tyranny”. This politicised conception of participation attracted sizeable interest and prompted the moderators to open a topic on ‘Participation and the urban divide’ in order to further investigate the connections made between participatory practices and attempts to address ongoing and persistent inequalities in our cities.⁶

Measuring tools/ranking the participative city

The rest of the conversation under this topic responded to the moderators’ initial call of interest with regards to *measuring tools and a putative global ranking of participation for cities*.

- A number of participants found the idea interesting, both as a way of tracking the extraordinary diversity of experiences in participatory democracy and as a tool for fast-tracking participation in cities that are marked by scarce participation in governance structures (Caroline Andrew, Johanele, Ingjerd, etc.).

- Some general comments were made regarding the measuring instrument/ the ranking ‘ladder’:

a) Many warned against the sole use of *quantitative measurements* which run the risk of missing out on “the most important factors. [e.g.:] We could measure voting in elections but can we measure the level of voting by recent immigrants or elderly women living alone.” (Caroline Andrews, Canada).

Meanwhile, Ingjerd (Norway) made an appealing contribution on the *difficulty of “providing qualitative measurements of political societal goals”* (measuring the unquantifiable).

“At some level we might need to accept that measurements are difficult, and still define goals that we work towards - acknowledging that a statistically satisfying measurement of whether we have reached the goals or not is hard to achieve. Even without an academically valid assessment of our results, we will on the terms of living conditions in most cases be able to make a certain judgement of whether we are close to a desired result or not. Difficulties in measuring results, should at least not stop us from choosing some models that we generally perceive as functional, to serve as frameworks for working towards our goals.”

b) Ingjerd remarked on the many possibilities of going about measuring participation, although she thought that definitions of the participative city could indicate a way forward:

⁶ A number of posts in this topic were later moved to the topic on ‘Participation and the urban divide’ and they are addressed under that topic header.

“We seem to share an idea of what a participative city is - and from there it is possible to build some common views on what good governance represent under different terms - and look into the possibilities of developing that to be a measurement tool for participation”

c) Instinctively, most participants agreed that Oslo, Norway would rank high on a potential participative ladder, while some participants ventured their city as featuring down the bottom of the ladder (eg. Johanele on Owiri, Nigeria).

- *More specific attempts at providing measuring criteria* included:

Mansoor (UK)'s early input into this topic which raised the potential following criteria a) participatory process ; b) the people involved; c) outcome (not just material).

a) JNBona, provided further input on ways to differentiate *participatory processes or “areas of participation”* as he called them. Avenues of participation thus should differentiate between: electoral, governance, political and development planning (more input p. 4).

b) Regarding the nature of participants, Derrickhf (USA) raised an insightful question, i.e. *whether particular forms of participation are better able to target different demographic groups:*

“virtually no one has taken time to quantitatively survey exactly WHO (in terms of demographics) participates in planning? Once we understand who participates, I believe we need to determine which forms of participation enlist different demographic groups. In ‘demographics’ I include age, ethnicity, race, gender, income, education level, etc.

The question remained largely unanswered unfortunately, although it was addressed at a later stage, and to some degree, in the topic on ‘Instruments of participation’.

c) on *Outcomes*, echoing the discussion outlined above on the political culture conducive to meaningful participation, some responses were keen to differentiate between:

1) *punctual material benefit v. broader political empowerment*. As LeoV (USA) remarked:

“Most of us will agree that it is good to achieve both the resource itself and the enduring skills developed in attaining that resource, but I think that too often we fail to recognize how we limit participatory approaches and constrain them to a utilitarian construct. And I think unless there is more transparency in these participatory approaches, they may risk losing any sort legitimacy and polarize the marginalized groups trying to access resources all the more.”

2) whether this outcome was the result of a top-down or bottom-up participatory processes.

Both aspects could usefully be incorporated as measurement criteria for the participative city.

- There was also a more general discussion on the *potential correlation between measurement tools for the participative city and good governance*. In a detailed account of the Good Governance campaign in Nigeria, Abubakar Sadiq Sani (Nigeria) drew attention to the parallel expectations between good Governance and participatory governance as expressed in this forum.⁷

Despite some raised misgivings on the ‘Good governance’ agenda – including its vagueness, or the fact that it is difficult to measure, or again, that it can take on a number

⁷ Please refer to the full text of the e-dialogue because the contribution is too rich to compress here.

of different permutation depending on contexts, Ingjerd (Norway) and JNBona (Nigeria) thought it remained a useful governance tool.

JNBona: “Good governance is a set of exploratory concepts, yet it has brought improvement in our community lives (social harmony, environmental consciousness, inclusive urban governance, and participatory political approaches). It does not warrant complete solution to the dynamics of bad politics globally, yet in our LGU it has helped our barangay formulate essentially relevant socio-political policies and programs.”

On the basis of this correlation, and especially an added connection made with democratic governance, Ingjerd proposed to integrate the following measuring criteria:

“If democracy is at the heart of good urban governance, what should we measure? I would suggest these three elements to be incorporated (not exclusive of any other - but to be taken into account in their own right): Ownership of the results and choices; Public Support for the decisions and solutions; Results, on the material side of society. In sum: That it is ours. That we take responsibility for the results. That we care about the outcomes.”

Conclusions

For participants to the e-Dialogue, the participative city is a city where people feel heard, where people feel that their voice matters. This feeling of belonging, of citizenship, engenders in turn a sense of responsibility to engage in public life. Truly participative cities are those that are able to incorporate the most vulnerable members of society into routine governance.

Crucially, though, substantial urban participatory governance requires trustworthy and transparent enabling institutional frameworks and mechanisms – themselves largely dependent on a favourable political culture. While strong, functioning representative democracies can provide the conducive backdrop, strong pro-poor public opinion can equally have a progressive influence, even in more difficult contexts. The key seems to lie in the presence of robust organizations of the excluded, often structured around livelihoods and employment issues. Supporting such organizations of the poor is a critical factor in attempts to reach more equitable urban futures – although how best to do so remains an area for further investigation.

Most participants agreed that a tool for measuring participatory processes in cities would be useful, especially as an incentive mechanism. Given the difficulty in measuring political and societal goals, this tool would be largely indicative, but could nonetheless aim to rank the quality and effectiveness of participatory experiments using the criteria of: people reached through such mechanisms; diversity of participatory mechanisms; and outcomes of participation. The latter in particular could usefully differentiate between participation for material benefits and a deeper, more empowering understanding of participatory processes. Other criteria could include ownership of participatory outcomes or support for decisions and solutions reached through participatory processes. Reflections on measuring good governance were thought to provide a useful source of inspiration.

3. Participation and the urban divide⁸

This topic sought to further investigate participants' concerns with the transformative potential of participation in practice, concerns raised in the thread on the Participative City. Under this new topic, then, moderators sought to garner debaters' conceptions on the links between participatory instruments and attempts to address persistent inequalities in our cities. This was a deliberate attempt to crystallise participants' contribution to WUF 5 as far as the role of participatory governance in bridging the urban divide, indeed in helping to take the Right to the City forward, is concerned.

The topic generated a particularly rich and reflexive exchange. Respondents were challenged by each other's inputs and, by all accounts, fully enjoyed the process.

Bridging the urban divide: a) participation v. efficiency

The moderators opened the debate with a provocative statement regarding the implicit connection made between 'participation' and 'bridging the urban divide'. They juxtaposed the common, implicit, expectation that deeper or broader participation of citizens will enable a fairer redistribution of goods and services, with an urban reality marked by persistent or increasing inequality – including in cities where participatory democratic norms and systems are in effect. Was the answer then greater or improved participation or, was it instead, greater technical efficiency? Or was that missing the point of the more political qualities of participation underlined by many respondents in the previous topic, i.e. participation enabling a sense of belonging, of citizenship?

A number of participants reiterated the value of participatory governance within the broader quest of bridging the urban divide...

Harunapam (Nigeria): "It can thus be seen that the absence of active, widespread participation is already leading to urban divide by making some residents feel marginalized and therefore alien, in their own city"

...although Fadriana drew the interesting and provocative comparison between the poor outcomes of a benign autocratic system a la Curitiba and those of the participatory model by excellence, i.e. Porto Alegre:

"The impressive achievements of Mayor Jaime Lerner (a trained urban planner) in that city - efficient public transport, a system of parks, paying citizens in squatter settlements for their recyclable garbage, etc. - were the result of enlightened authoritarianism with no effective participation. These days this is contrasted in Brazil with the 'Porto Alegre model' that introduced participatory budgeting. The lesson here is that the aim, in the end, of good local governance is to improve the life and environment of all citizens sustainably. Participation in administering your own poverty (all too often the case) is worse than enlightened authoritarianism of the Curitiba kind. This is not to condone authoritarianism: there are enough examples of 'improvements' where the citizens lacked a sense of ownership of the results and hence that these quickly deteriorated from neglect."

The comparison was not pushed further and instead, Johanele (Nigeria), argued that "participation without ongoing emphasis on greater technical ability and capacity to solve the challenges facing the city will amount to mere window dressing". The solution could not be of an 'either/or' nature; instead participation and efficiency were fundamentally complementary. Along with Ingjerd (Norway), he further drew out the virtuous

⁸ 26 responses, 991 viewers

connection between participatory processes, improved technical efficiency and the political dimension of participation in overcoming the urban divide: with tangible goods effectively delivered comes the feeling that your voice has counted, that you can make things happen, that the system is responsive to you; and this is empowering on both a material and broader political sense.

Most participants however (including those mentioned above) were keen to stress that only a radical (political) conception of participation could play a transformative role and make the Right to the City a plausible reality for all.

Bridging the urban divide: b) participation as empowerment

The tone for the discussion was largely set by Fadriana and Leo V's contributions, transplanted by the moderators from the topic on the Participative City. Leo V (USA) raised the question about the "ultimate goal" of participatory processes, highlighting the difference between participation in order to increase access to particular goods (a utilitarian conception of participation) v. participation that equips citizens with organisational skills that can be used to push for broader, transformatory, demands (participation as empowerment). Fadriana (UK) further stressed the importance of the latter form of participation as excluded communities' general ignorance and deep sense of inferiority meant that people mostly "lacked the sense that [they] deserve more". Thus poorer communities tend to participate within the avenues proposed to them (from above) and in the pursuit of material benefits, without the knowledge that they can and should participate to alter the stakes in their favour. As he noted, (and LeoV concurred), participatory processes can, ironically, entrench this feeling of inferiority, by entrenching power relations. Fadriana's statement that "participation of the excluded must include a political dimension that can effectively demand a fairer distribution of local resources" thus drew a general seal of agreement amongst the debate's participants.

Again, the sense that real empowerment (or substantive participation) required political education of the masses to help build strong organisations of the poor was reiterated: cf Patricia Chaves, quoting concrete experiences in Brazil, stated: "we do believe that in order to have a qualified participation and engagement in good governance a considerable investment should be made in providing capacity building, as more than training" – in a context marked by acute imbalance in wealth, access to education and information and organisational capacities between rich and poor.

- Fadriana drew the contours of such political education:

"This involves a combination of knowledge on how the political system works – and how the stakes could be changed, but at the same time knowledge of how physical systems work such that people gain knowledge and confidence of how, as excluded communities, to intervene (read: genuinely participate!)"

Given the increasingly complex institutional and operational context within which organisations of the poor/new social movements had to act, political education required also "real [transformative] vision". A comment which somewhat mirrored another participant's call for "strong political will" (Kiswahr Sultana).

And in a very useful contribution, Patricia Chaves emphasised the need for such political education to build on the varied and existing coping mechanisms of the excluded:

"Our experience demonstrates that if we want to address inequalities in our cities (and territories) we have to refine our perception of poor communities and look at the many dimensions of inequality – such as gender, race, sexual orientation. It is very important, as Tom Angotti assumed in his paper, to look and understand how communities organize themselves and what are the strategies applied by them to

cope with lack of opportunities. Based on their reality and social organization, most times informal, a good programme of political education can help to strengthen their organization, reinforce their role as political and social agents and to deconstruct the culture of oppression and submission. That process of deconstruction of inequalities will bridge urban divide and work towards a participative democracy but also rethink our representative system, bringing new change agents to the political arena.”

The above input (in particular the focus on building on the livelihoods strategies of the poor) hinted at a further fascinating thread in the conversation that was to emphasise yet another stretching of the concept of participation and participatory governance within the overriding framework of the Right to the City, i.e. participatory economics.

Bridging the urban divide: c) participatory economics

Fadriana most systematically articulated the idea that transformative participatory governance could no longer be dissociated from participatory economics. In a series of powerful interventions, which built on a historical and geographically encompassing account of participation as a governance tool, he set up the case that:

“participation will need increasingly to focus on local self-production and not on trying to extract resources from ill-resourced local governments or the fat off the over-resourced consumer society - that will fade away in the coming years. Indeed, at root, the issue is to take control of production (which in the future will increasingly rely on recycling of the debris of the modern world)”.

His argument was that:

a) the initial disruptive understanding of participation (i.e. participation unsettling established power relations and leading to fairer and more sustainable redistribution of resources) had been eclipsed by a tame version which made it increasingly irrelevant to many excluded urban citizens – even as it did produce some forms of material improvements in places. The current version of participatory governance (e.g. Local Agenda 21), moreover, had failed to inculcate in participants a vision of a sustainable, shared, common future.

b) meanwhile, the neo-liberal call for lesser government intervention had had the unintended consequence that people had increasingly participated and organised, in order to survive, *without* reference to ‘authority’. This was witnessed in

“the growth of ‘informality’. ‘Informal settlements’ means that people build their own houses (these days even blocks of flats) and the ‘informal economy’ is where now, in the South, the majority of the population makes a living. This is all do-it-yourself and in this sense participatory. [...]The problems here are to get enough resources to get by and to keep the authorities off their backs so they can get on with their own lives. Increasingly such settlements are becoming internally self-organised (their own – participatory – institutions; though sometimes negatively through local mafias (eg in Rio de Janeiro)) and different economically active groups are forming cooperatives, associations and so on..”

Fadriana mentioned the ‘true heroes’ as the ‘informal recyclers’, to be found in any city in the South counting into tens of millions of people; their organisational clout in Latin America had grown to such an extent that the first World Congress of informal recyclers had taken place in Bogotá in 2008.

c) the consequence of “energy starvation” in the coming years (and the ensuing “collapse of the modern world”) would render this form of self-organisation, self-production and

participatory economics increasingly relevant. Fadriana pointed to the Cuban experience following the collapse of the Soviet Union as a foretaste of our future to come:

“The country was on the verge of starvation. Experiments had already been carried out on intensive organic farming and so this was promoted and became a mass movement: ‘organoponicos’ (organic hydroponic urban and peri-urban agriculture) now produce 90% of the vegetables consumed by the population of Havana.”

Urban and peri-urban farming has also taken off in Russia – the dacha movement – so that even Moscow and St Petersburg were now relying heavily on the produce of these efforts.

Participants to the debate took up the argument enthusiastically. Many concurred that embracing the economic terrain and people’s livelihoods was the way to go...

Vladi (Peru): “The lesson [...] is that participation to bridging the urban divide or to help redistribute the resources fairer or to ‘facilitate’ sustainable access to goods and services, is not only enhancing the relationship with authorities; it, too, is enabling the poorer with the capacity to make money.”

... while others pointed to existing examples where participatory governance had evolved to embrace the local economy and local production. Leo V (USA): “taking part in the local economy and community is the trend in urban planning as a result of the economic downturn and evolution to a more ‘green’ mentality.” She cited the example of Los Angeles where the municipality had finally legalised (and regulated) informal street-vending, building on this locally-initiated strategy to address people’s needs in deprived and excluded communities.

Ingjerd (Norway), drew an interesting parallelism with the movement of ethical consumers and socially/environmentally aware business practices that were, independently of the state, participating in working towards a fairer and more sustainable urban environment (bridging the urban divide nationally and internationally). Participatory governance thus needed to be stretched to include these forms of synergies within society that were working towards a fairer redistribution of resources. Failing to do so was missing out on a fundamental meaning of citizenship. Johanele stretched the point by alluding to aid effectiveness: “Citizens in developed nations of the world need to participate more in holding their governments accountable for the use of the development aids they give to developing countries. The corrupt use and misuse of these aids make heavy contributions to the escalation of the urban divide in the cities of the developing countries.” As LeoV put it, this stretching of participatory governance was

“a means of bridging of authority as well, or delegating it, or - not necessarily redistributing it, but using it to equip others to simply succeed. People taking more responsibility. This also ties to the Right to the City - in order to people to have initiative and take part in their local community, (at the very least) governments have to be supportive of it.”

Dilemmas of implementation

The debate was also marked and usefully grounded by Patricia Chaves’ plea for concrete examples of ‘good practices’.

In a challenging and particularly insightful contribution, Abdou Malique Simone (USA) argued that engaging with this extended conception of participation in a way that effectively comes to grip with our divided, unsustainable, urban reality would require some fundamental rethink of participatory practices and participatory governance - including “reversing the direction of representation”. For, as he argued, “almost by definition, the

[current] logics, language, and procedures of municipal government [even when participatory] cannot substantially engage the practices and organization of the economies through which large numbers of residents ensure their presence in cities". The latter are simply too fluid, ephemeral and straddling unexpected geographies. Governments' development instruments are often individualised, sectorally construed, lack the flexibility and understanding to play a real supportive role towards such subaltern economies – subaltern economies on which increasing numbers of urban dwellers depend.

“Instead of demanding that individuals--individual persons, enterprises, households, associations, and so forth--be addressed and made responsible as individuals, the formal entities of governance might have to reconsider other ways to address the “governed.” In other words, instead of separate rules, regulations, authorities and budgets for schools, markets, workshops, and residences, local governance is directed towards how these domains can be linked, how they operate in tandem and how the activities of one domain can be coordinated with the others. What gets funded, how everyday life is regulated and taxed then takes into consideration the character of the networked relationships among people, economy and built environment. This is possible only if the direction of representation is reversed. Instead of just having local councils, participatory budgeting councils and so forth draw upon representatives of local associations and economic networks, those designated and/or chosen as ‘local authorities’ might ‘relocate their offices’ in terms of participating directly in these very associations and networks—and then operating as interlocutors, mediators, deal-makers, and brokers.”

abdoumalqsimone did not provide concrete examples as to how participatory governance of this kind would look like in practice. But LeoV and Fadriana did point to practical, less subversive ways of engaging on this path (eg. of local urban and peri-urban food production; incorporating recyclers and street vendors in the local channels of production and distribution). A late contribution by Ingjerd on housing policy in Norway pointed to yet another avenue for thinking more encompassing about participatory governance. The case study will be summarised in the topic on Instruments of participatory governance.

Conclusions

Under this topic, participants to the e-Dialogue were asked to reflect on the role of participatory governance in bridging the urban divide and helping to take the Right to the City forward.

In a particularly reflexive exchange debators agreed that participation remained key to these broad objectives, even as they called for simultaneous improved technical efficiency in meeting citizen's needs. However, the debate focused on the need to reinvigorate the notion of participatory governance along two vectors if the Right to the City was to be more than window-dressing:

- A conception of participation as empowerment: participatory governance needed to be reinjected with a politicized conception of participation whereby participants are given the tools and the vision to challenge unequal distribution of resources in a progressive and sustainable fashion. This would necessitate political education of marginalized groups (but not uniquely) both to raise their understanding of the mechanisms of the political system in which they operate and to raise their awareness of the ways in which the stakes can be changed. Crucially, this political education would have to be in tune with and respond to the livelihood strategies already employed by marginalized groups in their daily struggles to make do.

- A conception of economic participation: building on the above, attempts to bridge the urban divide would do well to focus on understanding/sustaining (local) economies and citizens' idiosyncratic attempts to make do and participate. Failing to do so was missing out on a fundamental meaning of citizenship; it also missed out on rich potential synergies while, most possibly, risking to render participatory governance irrelevant to the swelling masses of the excluded. Developing this stretched conception of participatory governance was likely to become increasingly urgent as cities faced impending and fundamental transitions to low-carbon local economies. This area was thus identified as an area in need of urgent democratic innovation.

4. The Politics of Participatory Governance⁹

This topic sought to offer participants a specific home in which to engage on a theme that emerged as central to the debate, raised time and again and cutting across most other threads: i.e. the politics of pro-poor participatory governance.

The moderators sought to place the discussion on a reflexive tone, inviting contributions to engage on the dilemmas involved in pushing often deep-seated structural stumbling blocks to pro-poor participatory governance and, as far as possible, to illustrate how this has been (or could be) achieved, at least partially, in different localities. Moderators called for inputs on the role of political parties, political culture, or again social movements – and how these relate to participatory processes.

Debate under this topic header, one more time, arose a lot of interest - and participants, one more time, clearly enjoyed the process. While there was some overlap with arguments raised in other topics, the account below dwells on the more innovative contributions or on refinements provided to previously addressed issues.

Local governance: a) institutions and legal frameworks

Participants reflected on each other's contrasting experiences of local governance – as democratic, enabling of participation and geared towards meeting societal goals (e.g. Norway) versus a gradation of governance contexts ranging from benign but incompetent, to the teething problems of emerging democracies, to corrupt or even hostile environments where participation is actively suppressed.

Following on from these reflexions, respondents singled out again conducive institutional and legal frameworks as a necessary condition for effective and transformative, pro-poor participatory governance, e.g.

JNBona (Philippines): “Let us recognize the fact that the primary obstacle in implementing pro-poor participatory governance is the local political institution in foremost. Yet as a paradox, when properly approached and driven, this is the best channel to implement (and institutionalise at best) the same.

The conversation did not dwell on what this framework should entail specifically (in fact, more details were provided in the Participative City topic and the General topic). However, JNBona called for a good knowledge of individual cities' (/countries') institutional set-ups as a first step in targeted actions to address inequalities. In his country, “the city council as legislative assembly, is actually the highest embodiment of participatory governance; [...] and a key arena within which the issues of urban divide as well as other urban issues can be resolved strongly, and structurally”.

⁹ 44 replies, 1202 viewers

However, most respondents were keen to emphasise that conducive institutions, while necessary preconditions for transformatory participatory governance, were far from sufficient. As Harunapam (Nigeria) detailed: “Even under democracy the extent of participation depends on: the type of democracy full or restricted; the extent of development and application of the democratic principles in governance; the commitment of the players in abiding by the principles of democracy.” And Womenincities (Canada) to add: “Participatory methodologies are incomplete without actual government commitment to the results of public participation”.

Thus attention one more time was drawn to the critical notions of political culture, political vision and political will.

Local governance: b) political culture and political will/vision

As in other avenues in the e-Dialogue, a plethora of examples were provided whereby participatory processes had failed to deliver because of usurpation or corrupted or partial application of the law. A conducive political culture and strong pro-poor political will were therefore, and once again, stressed as crucial prerequisites if participatory governance was to effectively help tackle the urban divide. Under this topic, however, a number of ‘new’ aspects of political culture and political will/vision were further debated:

a) From the vantage point of a particularly open and conducive political context (a well-groomed and responsive representational democracy), Ingjerd (Norway) provided an interesting input on the relationship between participatory democracy and direct participatory practices. Her stance was that the two are mutually reinforcing: a conducive political culture is open to the outcome of participatory processes – and these in turn help to strengthen democratic culture:

“[direct participation] is institutionalized as a right and a privilege through our freedom of speech, - and adding voices, interests, and broadening the debate, is a plus -- it increases the voices present, and in some cases, like marginalized groups, on vulnerable issues, or issues with a lot of conflict built into it - it helps the whole society to ventilate all the pros and the cons in an open debate. That is good, in my mindset. And it is part of the whole 'wiring' of democracy.”

The one caveat seemed to lay in identifying the most conducive equilibrium between direct participatory and representative practices:

“At the end of the day the real challenge is to balance the decisions; how far do we go in listening to the voices raised through direct participation - or if the elected ones overrule them; on what grounds and for what purpose do they do so? And will the decisions 'stick'? The total of this is how a democracy should work - and direct participation matters. The token of success, for the single decisions, and for the democracy itself, is that the decisions are perceived as functional, in sync with our values, and work well for the society at large. The broad public mind must perceive it as tuned into our way of living and sharing -- and decisions that are not, will sooner or later come up for a new debate. That's how the quality of the representative democracy is maintained.”

b) Another interesting reflection on the theme of political culture and political will came in the form of a productive discussion between Alex Fadriani (Brazil), JNBona (Philippines) and Fadriana (UK) on vision versus process in participatory processes. Alex Fadriani wondered whether the effects of participatory governance had been diluted because of an over-emphasis on process and, as antidote, called for a re-injection of (political) vision at the heart of participatory governance.

“When we talk about the politics of participatory governance, the underlying assumption is that by focusing on the ‘process’ of policy formation and implementation, social justice would be able to be achieved. In other words, by creating and safeguarding the spaces for participation, transformation would take place. [...]The question I would like to raise is: have we now become too concerned with the process of policy formulation, leaving aside a discussion on how the city should be? It is true that these discussions in the past led to top-down, technocratic solutions to urban issues. More recently the city ideals connected to competitiveness and productivity has been generating market-oriented policies which intensifies inequalities and exclusion. However, by reacting to the content of those ideals, we might be making a mistake of avoiding a crucial discussion on the nature of the ideals of the city. Therefore, I would argue that participation without an explicit discussion on the ideals of the city might end up reproducing inequalities and exclusion.”

Interestingly, his call for participatory processes to be reinvigorated through greater focus on political vision found a pragmatic context in the elaboration of ‘master-plans’ or city-development strategies: “I would argue that what we need in the first place is an inclusive discussion on the visions of the city, a masterplan which is based not on projects, but shared ethics and values that will guide the development process”. How this ethical ‘discussion’ on the contours of the city-to-be could avoid bias in favour of the most educated or powerful or eloquent or indeed, could avoid being crowded by gatekeepers was not addressed specifically in the debate – although the conversation on organisations of the poor below would, indirectly, address it to some extent. Instead, participants used the forum to reassert the primacy of political will and political vision (ideology?) at the heart of participatory processes; technical means ought to remain intimately connected to underlying conceptions of the good – or moral – society (Fadriana, Lauramdram (Venezuela).

c) On that note, JNBona raised an interesting and particularly thorny governance dilemma. Talking about the UNCHS SCP Demonstration cities [participatory] project in the Philippines, he noted how:

“The development process we have been confronting at present as I observed is generally based on the responses or perspectives of the urban clients, stakeholders, experts, scholars, etc. (what). However, political or governmental processes and infrastructure (how to) must also be formulated, and recognized to address these issues and concerns on a permanent basis (established, integrated, and institutionalized politically).”

That is, he raised the difficulty of translating political visions and aspirations (garnered through participatory processes) into workable programmes that tally with governmental procedures and budgetary processes – a governance conundrum which Banashree (India) was also to raise in the topic on the Instruments of Participatory Governance. In the thread on Participation and the Urban Divide, Abdoumalisimone had been rather despondent about finding solutions unless participatory processes were radically rethought. This discussion, however, left the question largely unanswered.

Instead, participants focused on the role of organisations of the excluded as key actors in cultivating the conducive political will/visions described above.

Organisations of the excluded

As in other threads, participants made the connection between, on the one hand, real commitment to engage in transformatory participatory processes and, on the other, the

existence of autonomous, effective and focused organizations of civil society or social movements:

JNBona “in a democratic system, though the final recourse or decision over certain issues or actions basically remain on the hands of the chief executives, they are in foremost influenced by people around them, their secretaries, technical staff, consultants, advisors, alter-egos, wives, children, relatives, friends, peers, etc. Likewise, being elective officials no matter how autocratic they are, they are still sensitive to the responses of the populace (some authoritarians listen only to people they preferred). In fact many of corrupt political practices are basically connected to populist compromises – subscribing to the 'popular demands'. This is why I strongly believe on the political power of popular opinion”.

Cyril (Ghana): “a strong civil society obliges political parties to compete for the public’s support, and to offer social progress, rather than co-option. In Ghana, political leadership, independent media, and a strong network of civil society organizations have helped build up a politics of interest groups, including urban youth, native authority elites, professional and business elites, and unionized workers.”

In this topic, three inter-related topics added to the conversation even though they were initiated in other threads:

a) The most appropriate domain and form of civil society action: i.e. whether civil society pressure is most effective when working within legal frameworks or outside of them. Some argued that the latter risks hardening authorities while others in the debate argued that a potentially more conflictual stance could be necessary in order for real gains to be achieved.

JNBona: “As long as the stakeholders operate within the dynamics of the legal frameworks, the issue of ‘political will’ can be treated as an opportunity rather than an obstacle in achieving urban development goals. Otherwise, taking alternative (like militancy) non-structured democratic recourses would only build up resistance among authorities, making political will a principal hindrance. On this basis, developing strategies for change must not be viewed solely on the basis of traditional formulation of action modalities or recourses, but also include strategic communication with all sectors.” [This is because, at a basic level,] “issues that are perceived to be directly equated to votes are the first things political leaders see. In brief, make all those advocacy issues strongly politically relevant, and then concretely electoral - and the rest is history...”

Versus;

Gurritno (Italy) “Participation is very important to a good local government, but it is limited if it does not recognize the importance of not preordained solutions and choices advanced also by social and political conflict.”

Johanele (Nigeria) “While there is the need for political leaders to show political will and leadership to enhance participation, there is also a great need for the citizens to agitate peacefully and exert adequate pressure on the city leadership for the leadership to understand that they are not comfortable with the status quo. Good things do not just happen, they are made to happen and at times peacefully forced to happen” [...] Participation is at the heart of the realization of civil, political, sociocultural and economic rights, which are all fundamental. My understanding is that rights are not to be given, they are to be taken. Let us go out there and take, protect and promote the right to participation”.

b) Closely related was a sub-discussion on social movements’ relationship with political parties. In particular, respondents reflected on the most effective avenues for retaining

political leverage vis-à-vis formal political formations and the state. Building on the above debate, Alex Fadriani gave the example of MSTB (Movimento dos Sem Teto da Bahia [homeless movement of Bahia] in Salvador, Brazil) for whom political action must increasingly involve navigating between a collaborative and oppositional stance with the PT in government:

“The legislative changes needed for “transformative” policies might be in place, but if there is no means of acquiring and realizing rights than the result is conformity and business as usual. Within such a context, MSTB argues that deliberative democratic processes and grass-roots mobilization is the means to access those rights. From the perspective of MSTB leaders, some times these processes may involve the state, and others it might not. The argument here would be that by increasing the bargaining power of social movements in relation to the state, the politics of participation can be reshaped.”

The theme was picked up by Caroline Andrew (Canada), who drew attention to the tension inherent in most forms of political engagement and the delicate equilibrium to be found between cooperation and cooptation; a constitutive tension or energy in participatory democracy.

To strengthen social movements’ stance or bargaining power vis-à-vis ruling parties (and within the political landscape more generally), participants, as in other threads, drew attention to *capacity building* and *political education*. Some emphasised the role of improved literacy, Ddungadrian (Uganda) specifying literacy in financial management, planning and budgeting “so that they can sensibly participate in deciding over local plans, budgets and investments”. Others zoomed in on improved access to information as factors contributing to more robust and autonomous civil society organisations (Cyril, Johanele, Ingjerd, Ddunguadrian (Uganda)).

On that note, Alex Fadriani brought attention to “the importance of the ownership of information [...] – collecting and owning information about themselves.” He quoted the example of SPARC’s enumeration campaign in Daharavi, an experience of grassroots data collection and ownership that has been replicated around the world. He also made reference to two recently accepted laws in Brazil that could enable such processes to support the struggle for housing rights in Brazilian cities.

“In brief, such laws outline that: 1) regularization process can be initiated with the provision of basic information on the population settled in the land and the land ownership legal status; 2) in theory, the National Government has made available funds for local governments to hire technical assistance to support the work of social movements. The combination of these two institutional opportunities with the appropriation of enumeration methodology by organized social movements can become powerful instruments on the process of reshaping the power relations in the urban scenario in Brazil!

c) Finally, Alex Fadriani raised a fascinating dilemma faced by many maturing social movements – that is their difficulty in developing sophisticated, broad-based transformative visions while retaining their mobilising capacity as organisations able to deliver on idiosyncratic demands for change. Referring to the example of the MSTB in Bahia (Brazil):

“The movement wants to be involved in the process of re-thinking urban development, one that will respond to the multiple needs of the poor and secure their rights to the city. “The poor” are recognised as not homogeneous, and influenced by identities and power relations. The argument has moved on from one merely focused on the redistribution of resources, to another one that focuses

on opportunities to access rights. It is not only about changing legislations, but actually supporting the mechanisms for different individuals and groups to realize rights. Within such context, my view is that the discourse of unequal distribution of resources as the root of all injustices is not enough to explain the current movements' position. But if this is not the discourse, which one should it be? The beauty of that traditional left position is its mobilization capacity and its ability to quickly inform many in simple terminology. It unifies causes and generates collective intent. But if we move to an understanding based on multiple and complex sources of inequalities, how can social movements still pass on the message of transformation effectively?

There is a need for a conceptualization of the nature of injustice that can unify while also recognising different needs. There is a need for a conceptualization of injustice that fortifies collective action, but is also open to different interpretations and reflexive thinking. Therefore, an ideology that is truly liberatory. [...] Discourses that are both inclusive and accessible are indispensable for transformative change to take place."

The dilemma raised above is of course valid for the majority of organisations of the poor wanting to scale up from area-based or single issue organisations of the excluded (i.e. organisations build around motivating for specific and circumscribed socio-economic change) to broader social movements, able to engage on city-wide issues/visions – including of course the ideal of the just city. A number of participants expressed the need for organisations of the excluded to scale up from livelihoods and employment related demands to broader redistributive visions – although debaters failed to give explicit examples of where this has taken place successfully.

d) Finally, a post by Kishwar Sultana (Pakistan) sounded a sobering reminder about the difficulties of organising impoverished or marginalised communities: "Given the much difficult life in urbanized localities where time has become a commodity, and given all such issues of earning and feeding 6 children/family members average, sometimes it is much difficult to mobilize the community to get together around their common issues and talk to the authorities that are highly insensitive. Most of the best practices we see are best practices mainly because of a few active leaders/key champions or external pressures. When these leaders left or transferred by government, the best practice collapses. Real challenge is to how we these communities can be motivated in a true spirit and how these best practices can be sustained?"

Conclusion

Invited to dwell on the politics of participatory governance, which had emerged as such a central theme to many respondents' inputs, participants to the debate elaborated on two interrelated aspects: the concepts of political will or vision; and organizations of the excluded.

1) Participants used this forum to reiterate the saliency of political will in giving real bite to participatory frameworks and practices. A couple of points were added:

- direct participation and representational democracy are mutually reinforcing: while a conducive political culture (political will) in favour of participatory practices is key for the latter to make a substantive mark, direct participation has a democracy-enhancing role to play.
- political vision – and especially political visions of the just city – should remain the core driver of participatory processes. Technical means (the 'process' part of participatory governance), while obviously important, should remain firmly aligned to

the overall long-term objectives of progressive, participatory, urban transformation. However, progress needs to be done in translating political vision into governmental procedures and processes to ensure it does not get diluted in the process.

2) Key in sharpening political will/vision are robust and autonomous organizations of civil society (and of excluded communities in particular). In this topic, participants debated whether civil society pressure was most effective when working within legal frameworks or outside of them – a key tactical question for social movements keen to retain their political leverage from formal political formations and the state. The jury was out but a number of debaters put forward a number of mechanisms to increase social movements' bargaining power, including capacity building, political education, literacy campaigns (including literacy in planning and budgeting). Access to information – especially when it is collected and owned by grassroots organizations – was also singled out. Meanwhile, a sub-thread highlighted the difficulty faced by many maturing organisations of the poor wanting to scale up to mobilise around city-wide issues: i.e. how to develop sophisticated, broad-based transformative visions while retaining their mobilising capacity as organisations able to deliver on idiosyncratic demands for change. This is clearly another area for further democratic innovation.

5. Instruments of Participatory Governance¹⁰

Under this thread, participants were invited to report and reflect on the more pragmatic issues of 'instruments' of participatory governance, that is participatory mechanisms such as strategic planning or City Development Strategies (CDS) or participatory budgeting. They were asked how effective such processes were at opening up governance to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society? How far were they able to articulate local or sectoral grievances to broader, city-wide concerns and the attempt to bridge the urban divide?

Moderators also sought specific inputs on aspects of participatory governance such as:

- If middle- and wealthy classes are better organised and resourced than poorer classes, should participatory forums give greater weight – through specific instruments – to the preferences of the urban poor? If not, will participatory governance systems not simply become a vehicle for the advancement and consolidation of the interest of the powerful classes in the city?
- If we are to be more creative about addressing persistent poverty, what mechanisms of participatory processes will best enable reaching real insights into the (often fluid) survival mechanisms, strategies and support networks of the poor? Can one avoid the rhetoric of gatekeepers who often dominate participatory forums?
- More specifically, related to participatory budgeting: how transformative is participatory budgeting when only a fragment of the budget is under participatory consideration?

The responses were many, rich, and straddled the concrete and more reflexive spectrum. In their diversity, they nonetheless focused on the arenas and instruments of participatory governance, as well as its key players (including facilitators and organisations of the poor).

¹⁰ 33 responses, 885 viewers

Sectoral arenas of participation

Respondents were keen to emphasise the multiple avenues in which participatory processes ought to be introduced or were already in place. Cyril (Ghana) proposed an important framing observation. He underscored the importance of thinking about participatory institutions in relation to the stage of urbanization. If urbanization is in its early stages, the over-riding concern must be to foster density. “As urbanization advances, the policy imperatives must change, with the instruments spanning the spectrum from spatially blind to spatially targeted. While the policy debates overemphasize the most spatially explicit of government actions, such as slum-upgrading programs, successful urbanization aimed at integrating every nation’s portfolio of places requires the use of the full range of instruments such as institutions, infrastructure, and incentives.” In other words, institutions may and must evolve along with the dynamic process of urbanization. However and, as to be expected given the tenure of the debate so far, two particular sectors were more specifically highlighted:

a) The economy: Fadriana (UK) pushed the argument furthest by reiterating/extending his call for the need to engage in participatory economics and new forms of local economic development: “participation in this context means participating in local economic planning and perhaps forming cooperatives to produce things needed locally”.

b) Housing. Surprisingly little was said about the slum/shack-dwellers movement. Instead, the most explicit and detailed account of participatory housing processes came from Ingjerd (Norway). Beyond the fascinating details of a housing policy based on individual home ownership, Ingjerd gave an account of the motivation behind putting housing at the centre of participatory governance:

“The basic thought underlying it is that housing is vital for being able to contribute as a citizen, and that housing also is important in achieving other major political goals within healthcare, gender-equality and other areas of equality, climate, energy and environmental goals. Your home is a place of protection, and an element in your ability to fully participate in society – beside being a financial resource that can help building your resources for the future. [...] An added value with this type of housing-market is that it contributes to a fairly even distribution of means. That again has a positive impact on motivation to participate on all levels of society.”

Debaters also brought attention to the need for targeted interventions to address particular sections of the population, including children and the youth (Ycwu (Uganda), Ddunadrian (Uganda), Pat Green (UK) and women. A number of posts provided inputs on existing participatory mechanisms that sought specifically to bring women into the governance process, including: gender budgeting (WomenInCitiesIntl, Canada) and gender-sensitive safety audits (Caroline Andrew, Canada). Frances (Uganda) mentioned the ‘Local to Local Dialogues’ initiative, supported by the Huairou Commission, whereby

“grassroots women groups organize themselves, map their communities, their needs and prioritize these community needs. Then they strategically engage their local leaders in a local to local dialogue session where they inform them of their priority needs and recommendations and this influences local planning, decision making and resource allocation to programmes that are responsive to the priority needs of the women. Very strong follow up is done to ensure this.”

Meanwhile, Caroline Andrew drew attention to an initiative between the City of Ottawa and the City for All Women Initiative (bringing together women from community-based women’s groups) that explicitly sought grass-roots women’s engagement in helping to identify marginalised groups’ needs in municipal services”.

Beyond these sectoral examples, the debate focused on the participatory processes involved in participatory strategic planning and participatory budgeting.

Strategic planning

Participants provided examples of City Development Strategies (CDS) and other forms of strategic planning in their own locales. Thus Guritno (Indonesia) gave a detailed account of CDSs in Indonesia, introduced in 2001-03 across 9 cities. The narrative highlighted a relatively successful process in that stakeholders by and large seemed to be responsive and innovative techniques for information dissemination were utilised. A major drawback lay in the lack of coordination between the CDS process and other planning instruments mandated by national government (echoing the problem of institutional fragmentation that would be picked up in the 'general' topic). Guritno's recommendations included more focus on the implementation phase (and stakeholders should be made aware of their responsibility in that process) and ensuring the city authority's genuine buy-in. They also included the recommendation that "developing the vision should be limited to a particular issue and not issues on urban development in general term but more specific term, otherwise the substance of the project becomes too loose (not focus)." This last point echoed with other participants (see section 'facilitators' below).

Meanwhile, Minfegue presented the 'Contract of cities', a newly introduced participatory instrument in Cameroon, with the aim of bringing together authorities, civil society, communities, local government, experts, business, etc. and commonly plan urban management, clarify responsibilities and coordinate actions. While the Contract was too new a mechanism to evaluate appropriately, Minfegue did raise concern "in terms of the clear delimitation of the extent of public sector involvement in this contract; in other words, there is a risk that the State, through the government, will impose certain aspects because of its powers".

Other participants, echoed the sentiment while emphasising that many participatory strategic planning exercises were vulnerable to dominance by well-resourced and educated parties. Fadriana (UK) and Leo V (USA) stretched the concern by placing strategic planning within broader, city-wide structural concerns around the size of the local economy, the distribution of resources within, and its vulnerability to global economic processes. Thus LeoV remarked rather despondently:

"I do not want to discredit other small and maybe more ad-hoc participatory instruments that truly have impacted people's lives (e.g., Caroline Andrew's examples). However, I do think that while these exercises hold value, they will ultimately not be able to deliver on some of the larger promises of the "Right to the City" agenda that many are hopeful for".

Participatory budgeting

Debaters also provided examples of participatory budgeting in practice. Unsurprisingly, examples came from Brazil, but also from Cameroon (Minfegue), Nigeria (or rather attempts to mobilise around participatory budgeting), Canada (with the specific example of gender budgeting (WomenInCitiesIntl)).

While the participant from Brazil (Rene Caetano) emphasised the empowering effect of participatory budgeting ("enabling a unique experience [..with people] engaging in a wider concept of citizenship"), other debaters focused on the difficulty of moving the state – i.e. ensuring that local authorities actually come to accept and implement the outcomes of citizen participation in the budgetary process (WomenInCitiesIntl, Minfegue, Johanele).

Talking from the vantage point of the Cameroon, Minfegue mentioned the danger of budgets' unfunded mandates which could easily lead to participation fatigue. He also raised the spectre of competition between municipal and traditional authorities.

Beyond the ubiquitous reference to political will (addressed throughout the debate and more specifically in the topic on 'The politics of participatory governance') as a means of addressing these stumbling blocks, a number of participants pointed to the critical – technical and political – role of facilitators.

Facilitators

There was a productive discussion on the role of facilitators in ensuring successful, transformatory and empowering outcomes to participatory processes. In a nutshell the feeling was that participatory exercises are ironically 'made or broken' by facilitators ("the conscience and professionalism of facilitators critically determines the substance and success of the process" (JNBona (Philippines))– and yet such facilitators are very difficult to locate, train and retain. That is because facilitators must be able to navigate across highly diverse cultural and ethnic groupings (CedricBaecher (France); and especially be able to engage in the arduous task of translating the technical imperatives of planning, budgeting, etc. into people-centred approaches (Banashree) (a point raised also in the topic on 'Politics of participation'). JNBona provided some examples of training for such pivotal positions in the Philippines – mainly via the UN funded development initiatives; and called for UN-sponsored "institutionalised mobile training centers for good local governance at municipal level".

One off-shoot of this discussion was a reflection on the most conducive context for participatory experiments: open-ended versus focused participation, restricted to a specific and clear objective. A couple of participants favoured the latter option because it was likely to produce better results (Banashree, Guritno, JNBona). Banashree (India) gave the example Andhra Pradesh and Kerala provinces where "participatory municipal planning is based on a well-articulated and feasible framework of approaches, objectives, measures and alternatives. These are like threads running through the planning-implementation-monitoring-feedback cycle and are understood and known to everyone." What remained unclear in this debate is how this recommendation for carefully engineered participatory processes tallied with the broader conception of participation as empowerment; i.e. who should hold the reigns of such participatory processes?

The debate, clearly, had resonance with the discussion whether civil society pressure was most effective when working within legal frameworks or outside of them (see in the topic on the Politics of Participatory Governance). As in that earlier topic, it led in this thread into a discussion on the role of organisations of the excluded poor.

Organisations of the poor

The thread saw again a focus on organisations of the poor as crucial elements in participatory processes. Again, a number of participants iterated the difficulty of organising (and becoming pressure groups) when many communities are a) either too preoccupied with daily survival; b) are not conscious of their disempowerment; and c) lack of political power in the larger polity. Beyond the previously mentioned calls for political education, increased support and capacity building (in a host of different settings) to increase their manoeuvring ability in the political terrain, the thread developed to provide useful examples of successful social mobilisation and grassroots campaigns.

There was the example of waste collection campaign in India (KPandey), and again in Brazil (Sonia Dias); the example of a successful campaign to avert the displacement of low-

income families in downtown Oakland, US (LeoV) and the ongoing relatively successful resistance by shackdwellers to evictions from the centre of Mumbai (Fadriana).

In all of these cases, the critical success factor had been the concerted, persistent and strategic response of cohesive and mobilised organisations of the poor. Many respondents emphasised the key facilitating role of NGOs in the process (SPARC (India), the Waste and Citizenship Forum (Brazil) or other external technical input in the case of the US example). And, of course, a receptive local authority on the other side, able to show flexibility in administrative procedures in order to engage with often marginalised community 'partners'.

Conclusion

In this thread, participants engaged in the more pragmatic issue of instruments of participatory governance. Posts provided concrete examples of participatory processes and practices, as well as reflexive inputs into their success factors and limitations.

Participants underlined the sheer diversity of sectoral avenues open to participatory processes, opting to highlight one more time housing and the economy – core livelihoods concerns. They also brought attention to instruments geared at specific, vulnerable or (relatively) disempowered groups such as children, the youth, women. Looking at cross-cutting or comprehensive participatory instruments like participatory budgeting or strategic planning, participants were quick to raise concerns regarding the transformative power of these instruments in practice given broader structural constraints, i.e. unequal power relations and the often ambivalent political support.

Interestingly, participants drew attention to the critical mediating role of facilitators in ensuring success (that is over and beyond the oft repeated emphasis on political will, vision, etc.). Finally, organizations of the poor were again debated, this time as key proponents in successful campaigns for change.

6. Participation and the Urban Divide – General

Under this topic, participants were invited to submit posts of a general nature or posts that did not have an obvious home in other threads. The inputs were reviewed regularly and brought into the discussion under other topics. Below is a synthesis of posts that added new elements to the overall debate.

Institutional fragmentation and participatory practices

The most significant debate within this general section picked up on institutional frameworks and in particular, following a detailed post from Jereon Klink (Brazil), the question of fragmentation in municipal administration.

Building on the Brazilian case, Jereon Klink provided a detailed and informative account of how inter-municipal fragmentation and weak institutional frameworks on regional and metropolitan governance can represent an important bottleneck in moving towards more inclusive and sustainable cities and city-regions. "Metropolitan fragmentation in general, and the substantial lack of control over metropolitan and city regional land markets in particular" had an important role in explaining the slow pace of change in Brazilian cities, despite "a progressive urban legislation, the strengthening of the structures for participatory governance and a higher volume of financial resources being channelled to cities. He gave two useful examples: the case of participatory local master plans and the participatory system for housing and urban development. In both cases, the lack of

coordination, or lack of linkages between various planning components; the lack of overall framework within which to integrate these various components (and in the guidance of land markets in particular); and the lack of mobilisation on the part of certain national departments – have meant that much is still pretty much ‘business as usual’ despite the introduction of participatory processes. The danger, in the long run, is that the lack of structural improvements in the living conditions of the poorest of the poor, might ultimately provoke an increasing participatory “fatigue” on behalf of social movements.

The post raised a lot of interest and tallied with many debaters’ experiences – including the effects of such fragmentation on participation fatigue. Abubaka Sadiq Sani (Nigeria) equally raised the spectre of fragmented urban administration as a formidable stumbling block in achieving effective (participatory) transformation. He called for a “restructur[ing of] the country’s local government system, in a way as to give city-based local governments a special status.” This should include the introduction of metropolitan governance so as to develop a city-wide outlook. JNBona went further, arguing that city governance should be considered within a regional outlook in order to deal with ongoing rural migration to cities: “participatory planning should not be limited to individual entities or urban sectors alone, but applicable up to the regional level-among local government units as well.”

LeoV (USA), meanwhile, brought up the positive example of California who recently introduced a new statute, SB 375, in order to deal with fragmentation. The statute has a number of components:

“1) the regional distribution process for housing (in which cities are told by their region how many housing units for each income level they must adequately zone for), and 2) the regional transportation planning framework, in which a preferred Regional Transportation Plan is created [...] Thus, two formerly separate and distinct planning processes are now integrated and meant to relate to one another, leading to regional coordination on the allocation of housing and transit planning. [3]]it adds a new requirement to the transit planning process: the state now allocates regional greenhouse gas reduction targets that must be distributed between all cities and achieved through the regional planning process. 4), it also provides a series of incentives that effectively allow developers to bypass onerous environmental review requirements and provide housing and development that is dense, in line with regional plans, and affordable.”

Cities are not required to comply with this plan, but are only eligible for state and federal transit funds if they do. “It has been described as the United States’ first piece of legislation that explicitly links land use planning, transportation, and global warming – while linking affordable housing and issues of access as well. In short, it is working to fight the process of fragmentation [...] and has done so through simplification, new regulations that are supported by a clear directive process, and incentives to encourage and spur implementation.” LeoV’s last point vividly illustrates the value of clear political vision (or political will) driving participatory and other transformative governance instruments, picked up in the discussion on the Politics of Participatory governance.

On a related track, Namraj (Nepal) provided a useful inventory of concrete policies and actions that facilitate citizen participation:

1. City plan, policy, service, tax all should be *transparent*. This will encourage people to participate in the development;
2. People should be encouraged for self service as possible. This will encourage people to participate in social activity;
3. Private property should be converted to public through taxing for equitable service;

4. People should be discouraged to pollute the environment through environmental taxing. This will encourage participation for cleaning environment;
5. There should be compensation for the disabled [...] This will help participate disabled in the city activity.
6. There should be clear vision for the city. This will encourage people to participate with motives.”

The cost of participation

Talking about the Good Governance Campaign in Nigeria, Abubaka Sadiq Sani (Nigeria) mentioned that one major challenge in implementing the campaign was funding:

“The financial implication of the activities of the various organs as presented in the Framework is substantial. For this reason, the funding system that recommends itself is resource pooling. This means pooling resources in this particular case from the international organizations, national agencies and local governments/city authorities. This is one reason why marketing the Good Urban Governance policy, planning and management should not be using the negative but in the positive approach. If this is marketed in a way to convince the city authorities that city inhabitants are to be beneficiaries at the end of the healthy ‘competition’, such authorities are not likely to complain about funding the programme.”

The point had broader relevance of course and pertains to the ‘cost’ of participatory governance more generally. The moderators then asked whether it is wise to have elaborate participatory systems if local governments are relatively weak, with a limited tax base? Should campaigns for decentralisation of local government with requisite fiscal powers then be a priority?

To this governance dilemma, JNBona (Philippines) argued that although participatory democracy is expensive (and time-consuming), curbing participatory practices in situations of limited tax base was not the answer since, ultimately, participatory governance is best able to garner citizens’ interest and ability to contribute in support of weak institutions:

“Limited tax base is an indication the government is at the edge of crisis – fiscal, economic, or political. Definitely, the more the government fall closer to the ‘precipice’ the more participatory systems is needed – for these are the crucial moments that provide the people the opportunity, no matter how lowly they are, to share their humble resources to help save their government. In many cases of participatory processes people showed their willingness by organizing and doing voluntarily local community projects through collective efforts (civic action). [...] It has been commonly experienced that as long as the people are openly aware and the government are in constant dialogue with the people (or conversely), good results are always attained despite of the limited fiscal resources. These circumstances are always encountered in the far flung villages or barangays in our country whose fiscal capacity is much less than those of the cities.”

Moreover, cost-cutting could operate through efficient and targeted use of participatory practices:

“In normal circumstances participatory decision-making with the facilitation of experienced experts requires only once without compromising effectiveness and relevance, the rest are adjustment follow-ups. With excellent planning and facilitation skills (the bottomline here is sincerity), and established planning plan, participatory planning would be needed at most once in a year. Consultative

assemblies for policy making would likewise be needed at most once for every new ordinance (local governments) being proposed and formulated.”

Global dimension of participatory governance

Dr. R. Shashi Kumar (India) picked up on the global dimension of participatory governance, especially through the lens of international development finance:

“Attempts to change the governance of the financial standard-setting bodies, based on the pure ethical principles of democratic representation, have typically run into great resistance. At the rhetorical level, indeed, it seems the Monterrey Consensus has won that battle by calling for standard-setting bodies to revise their memberships. It has done so in unequivocal terms. Yet, the absolute lack of implementation of this mandate is very telling. Moreover, there are no guarantees that, should any movement take place, it will be sufficient. Efforts at the reform of the governance of the Bretton Woods Institutions have shown how minimal changes in governance can be used to justify the continuation of statu-quo unacceptable situations.”

The conversation was not picked up any further unfortunately, although other (cursory) reference to international developments was made to international organisations of the excluded such as Shack/Slum dwellers Association.

Not entirely related, was a call for international support to cities (countries) in post-conflict situations in their effort to build up their “indigenous, self-governing capability” (Ddunguadrian (Uganda), JNBona (Philippines)). This should involve at least the following: “(i) helping to support a process for constituting a legitimate government; (ii) enhancing the government’s capacities; and (iii) helping to ensure broad participation in the government and the reconstruction process” (Ddunguadrian (Uganda)).

Participation, the economy and the environment

There were a few more posts of a general nature on participatory governance, the economy and the environment, echoing some of the discussion in Participation and the Urban Divide. These were brought in through an identification of participatory governance with the objectives of sustainable development. One interesting sub-question within that was whether or not we should limit economic development, or at least introduce more taxing carbon emission quotas. Again, the concept of social responsibility was introduced.

E-governance

Abdulrazak (India) introduced a post on e-governance. Referring to Chennai (India)’s experience with e-governance he suggested that:

“Lack of infrastructure, mindset of the staff, leaders motivation etc play an important role. So e-readiness plays an important role in the success of e-governance. Proper awareness and motivation is essential from the local government staff and the local public towards participation in municipal service delivery and infrastructure development.”

The youth

A couple of posters drew specific attention to the youth as a target group for participatory processes. For these contributors, this was particularly important given their potential future role in entrenching participatory and progressive governance structures.

Pat Green (Jamaica): “giving marginalised youth an avenue for expression and participation in their environment should be essential for good governance. [...] shaping the minds of youth with the mechanisms of good governance should develop and enhance sustainable development”.

Ingjerd’s conclusion: “keep up the good work - and keep on dreaming too...”

7. Conclusion

Participatory democracy is clearly a complicated and challenging endeavour. It is noteworthy how relatively easy it has been to conduct a ‘global’ dialogue on the dimensions, relevance and impacts of participatory urban governance. It demonstrates that some of the basic principles and tenets that underpin good urban governance as promoted by UN-Habitat in its global campaign over the past decade is now widely disseminated and experimented with. However, it is also clear that the adoption of participatory governance tenets (and rhetoric) in itself does not guarantee much by way of improving urban management and addressing the desperate conditions of the urban poor. More is needed.

Through the insights of the participants of this Dialogue it is clear that redistributive outcomes must be brought more explicitly into the evaluative frame of participatory democracy. Furthermore, democratic mechanisms must also extend into the economic domain because the over-riding driver of urban exclusion and marginalisation can be traced back to the functioning of the global economic system; this insight reminds us that scales of action are always inter-related: the local is shaped by the global and the global level can be adjusted through local action and strategic networks of action and solidarity.

Another dimension is the centrality of sound institutions. Yes, the relative power of the urban poor and their organisations need to be strengthened in the complex political ecologies of cities and towns, but if the local authority and other institutions are dysfunctional or corrupt, it makes very little difference. This is not simply a matter of capacity building, but rather developing organisational models and approaches that match the local context (politically and culturally) and is underpinned with sufficient resources to act purposively.

Finally, it is also clear from the rich exchanges in this dialogue that the ultimate test of participatory governance as a route to realising the right to the city, it must be refined to respond to the needs of youth and children and of course the environment that they will inherit in a generations’ time. So, if we are to think in radically fresh ways about how to invigorate and embed participatory governance, we can do a lot worse than investing in democratic forums and mechanisms that raise the voice and influence of our urban youth and children; the real futures of our cities.

Annexure: Welcoming statement for e-Debate 5 on Governance and Participation

Welcome to e-Debate 5 on Governance and Participation!

This debate is part of a series of six e-debates aimed at enriching and guiding the key discussions or 'Dialogues' on which the fifth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF5) will focus. E-debates provide an invaluable opportunity for opening the Forum to as many people as possible, especially those who will not be able to attend WUF5 in Rio de Janeiro (22-26 March 2010): the reports compiled at the end of the six e-Debates will be presented at the 'live' public Dialogue sessions in Rio. Your views will contribute directly to the Forum's recommendations on Governance and Participation. We are therefore delighted to have you on board this critical discussion forum and hope that you will help us inject the debate with new ideas and new ways of thinking and acting!

1. Premises

The theme for WUF5 is The right to the City– bridging the urban divide. Within this framework, the main objectives of this e-Debate are to identify and unfold the fundamental elements of the participative city and participatory governance; and to evaluate its implications in terms of helping to forge inclusive and equitable urban development outcomes.

A couple of assumptions underscore this debate:

- Participatory local governance is presently a widely accepted norm and it is not the purpose of this e-Forum to revisit what is effectively a relatively recent global political advance. Participation in local democratic decision-making is one of the fundamental elements of the 'right to the city'.
- However it is also clear that the numerous benefits generally assumed to flow from participatory governance – such as bridging a perceived democratic deficit or delivering on pro-poor development outcomes – rest too often on rather shaky terrain. Urban development indicators in many parts of the world remain troubling or are getting worse – including in cities where participatory democratic norms and systems are in effect. The extent and the manner in which participatory governance can help bridge the urban divide requires further scrutiny.
- There is huge variability across cities and regions in terms of the depth and breadth of participatory governance experiments. There is much to be learned from innovative and successful examples in different parts of the world, as the flourishing field of 'best practices' attests. Yet, it is also evident that the transformative promise of these experiments depends to a large extent on opportunities for broader and systemic change within localities.

In short, we approach the debate with a critical – albeit thoroughly optimistic – stance. What we hope to uncover with your help are: the main stumbling blocks to effective, inclusive, pro-poor participatory urban governance; and, especially, some practical solutions that will go some way towards addressing them.

2. Key themes / dilemmas to be discussed

Key themes to be discussed over the course of the next three weeks include: participative democracy; participatory urban management; participatory budgeting; public participation and citizenship responsibility; social justice; livelihood benefits that derive from democratic decision-making; (pro-poor) prioritisation between competing urban development imperatives; urban politics; accountability; inclusion/exclusion, structural barriers to participation; grassroots organizations; institutional readiness; vision; transparency/corruption; repression/ violence; special needs; cultural pluralism.

To keep the debate on a reflexive note, we have identified a number of dilemmas or questions pertaining to participatory urban governance which we would like to address with you along the way (the list is not exhaustive):

- If the context within which participatory experiments occur is unfavourable to a progressive tackling of the urban divide, is participatory governance the most effective way of challenging the status quo? Should greater effort be channeled into more formal processes of participation such as electoral representation and making the bureaucracy more responsive?
- If middle- and wealthy classes are better organised and resourced than poorer classes, should participatory forums give greater weight – through specific instruments – to the preferences of the urban poor? If not, will participatory governance systems not simply become a vehicle for the advancement and consolidation of the interest of the powerful classes in the city?
- If local governments are relatively weak, with a limited tax base, is it wise to have elaborate participatory systems? Should campaigns for decentralisation of local government with requisite fiscal powers then be a priority?
- If we are to be more creative about addressing persistent poverty, what mechanisms of participatory processes will best enable reaching real insights into the (often fluid) survival mechanisms, strategies and support networks of the poor? Can one avoid the rhetoric of gatekeepers who often dominate participatory forums?
- What kind of participation can be expected in violent or gang-ridden communities? Who should participate and how can that be facilitated?
- How are ethnic, religious, racial and cultural conflicts and diversities managed in a participative city?
- How can we avoid ‘participation fatigue’ (both on the part of governments/officials and communities) or the ritualisation of participation when it becomes merely a box-ticking exercise?
- What is the effect of ‘new’ technologies (radio, internet debates/campaigns) on participatory governance?
- Is there such a thing as too much participation?

These dilemmas or questions will be addressed under a number of ‘topics’ headers in the e-forum. We have selected a few including: the participative city; participation and the urban divide; stumbling blocks to participation; the politics of participatory governance;

modalities of pro-poor participatory governance. Others will no doubt emerge as the e-dialogue proceeds.

3. Rules of Participation

This debate is open to all committed to advancing and deepening the institutional and practical manifestations of participatory governance. We are keen to hear from practitioners, as well as social movements, political parties, academics, policy advisors, etc. We are also particularly keen to hear from as many different settings as possible.

Here are a few pointers aimed at facilitating the smooth running of the debate:

- Participants will be able to post in three UN working languages (English, French and Spanish) and the language of the WUF 5 host country (Portuguese). The moderators' comments will be posted in English. Whenever possible, and if necessary, the moderators will also post brief English summaries of contributions made in languages other than English.
- Please ensure that your input is as concise and clear as possible and engages as directly as can be with the questions being addressed under the different sub-headings ('forum topics'). We will provide an ongoing 'miscellaneous' topic for those ideas and thoughts that do not fit the discussions under way. These will be monitored and used to generate new topics as appropriate over the coming weeks. Suggestions and contributions for other topics are also welcome.
- We encourage contributors to illustrate their points with specific examples and with enough detail for people not familiar with a particular city or experience to grasp its significance.
- Inappropriate, abusive or libellous contributions will be screened out.

So, again, welcome! Let's make this a lively, informed and engaged discussion that will really help push the boundaries of current thinking on participatory governance and/or the inclusive city!