7. Participation of Informal Settlement Communities in City-level Policy-making: the Case of Region 2, Johannesburg

7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the discussion on the statutory mechanisms of public participation in city-level policy-making processes in Johannesburg, which started in Chapter Five, section 5.6. The chapter analyses the actual involvement of communities living in 10 informal settlements in the study area (see Chapter Six) in city-level policy-making processes, through statutory and non-statutory mechanisms. The statutory mechanisms analysed in this chapter include the ward committee system, ward public meetings, and the regional public meetings associated with the Mayoral Road Shows. It also analyses the non-statutory initiatives by ward councillors to supplement the statutory mechanisms. The informal settlements covered in this study include Chris Hani and Sisonke in Ward 77, Steve Biko and Sakile in Ward 78, Mafelandawonye 1, Mafelandawonye 3 and Ivory Park Stadium in Ward 79, K60 and Ekurhuleni in Ward 80, and Meriting in Ward 93 (see Figure 6.2).

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the studied communities unevenly participated through the statutory and non-statutory mechanisms in the processes of city-level policy-making in Johannesburg during the period 2003 to 2006. The findings also suggest that Johannesburg’s mechanisms of public participation are evolving and that ward councillors are instrumental in this evolution, especially insofar as their initiatives that are aimed at achieving inclusive and deeper participatory practices in their constituencies.

The chapter is structured in seven sections. This introduction is followed by three sections that analyse the involvement of the informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making through the ward committee system, ward public meetings and
the regional public meetings associated with the Mayoral Road Show. These are followed by section 7.5, which looks at the involvement of these communities through non-statutory initiatives of the ward councillor, and section 7.6, which synthesises the critical role ward councillors play in shaping the actual practice of participation and, therefore, enabling (or disabling) the involvement of informal settlement communities in these processes.

7.2 Involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making through the ward committee system

Ward committees play a significant role in city-level policy-making processes through their involvement in the preparation and review of IDPs and budgets, as I explained in Chapter Five, subsection 5.6.1. The central responsibility of ward committees, according to guidelines by the national department of provincial and local government, involves ‘the facilitation of local community participation in decisions, which affect the local community, the articulation of local community interests and the representation of these interests within the government system’ (DPLG, 2005:5). During the period covered by this study (June 2003 to December 2005), the study area (Region 2 of the City of Johannesburg) had five established ward committees: four committees in the Ivory Park township (Wards 77-80) and one committee in Midrand and its surroundings (Ward 93). There was no committee in Ward 94 (Kyalami and its surroundings) as the ward councillor was of the view that the ward committee system was not suitable to the communities of the ward, which I discuss in detail in subsection 7.5.2 of this chapter.

The involvement of any community sector in decision-making through a ward committee depends on the extent of that community’s involvement in three aspects of the ward committee system: the formation (election) process of that ward committee, its composition, and its activities. This section explores how the communities living
in the informal settlements of the study area were involved in the three aspects of ward committees. By and large, the totality of the involvement of informal settlement communities in these three aspects will shed light on the extent of their involvement through this mechanism.

### 7.2.1 Formation of ward committees: exclusion of informal settlement communities

The formation of a ward committee in Johannesburg follows the city’s guidelines on the establishment of ward committees, which specify eligibility criteria for the membership of ward committees and election processes that should be followed. In terms of eligibility criteria, the guidelines require that for a person to be elected as a member of a ward committee, he/she must be of sound mind and a registered voter in the ward (City of Johannesburg, 2001c). Voter registration is regulated by national legislation, which stipulates that a registered voter must be a citizen of South Africa, 18 years old or older, and in possession of an identity document (Republic of South Africa, 1998c). These conditions appear unproblematic for residents of informal settlements. However, there are many impediments that prevent informal settlement residents from being registered voters. According to the Parliament’s standing committee on home affairs, the process of voter registration in these settlements is often met with challenges such as the lack of proper addresses and ongoing movement of people (Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs, 2005). Prior to the 2006 municipal elections, a national survey by the Human Sciences Research Council found that 14% of eligible voters in urban informal settlements were not registered in districts where they were residing or not registered at all (HSRC, 2006).

With regard to the election processes of ward committee members, the city’s guidelines set out two stages: nomination of sector representative candidates, and election by the ward community in a public meeting (City of Johannesburg, 2001c). At the nomination stage, ward councillors often advertise the functions of the ward committee in local media outlets (local newspapers, local radio stations, pamphlets)
and call on community organisations to nominate candidates for membership of the ward committee (*ibid.*). After receiving nominations, ward councillors are required to call for community public meetings to elect the members from the nominations received (*ibid.*).

In the 2003 ward committee elections in the study area, the prescribed criteria and procedures were largely adhered to except for some differences in the election processes. In the elections of the four ward committees of Ivory Park area (Wards - 80), all candidates were nominated by their respective sectors and confirmed at public meetings in their respective wards without objection (Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006; Zitha, pers. com., 2006). This suggests the existence of organisations that cut across the ward community. In the socio-economically divided and politically contested Ward 93, the election process of the ward committee members unfolded differently. At the nomination stage, candidates for the membership of the ward committee were not nominated by sectors, as was the case of the Ivory Park wards. Instead, three competing groups from the black communities of Kaalfontein (SANCO affiliates), Ebony Park (anti-SANCO) and the Meriting informal settlement (supporters of a local residents association) put forward three lists of candidates. This demonstrates the absence of community organisations that cut across all the diverse communities of this ward (see Chapter Six, subsection 6.4.2 and section 6.5). On the election day, voters from the three contesting communities participated in large numbers. The white residents from the affluent suburbs did not participate in the voting, claiming that the process was very slow and unorganised. Eventually, the group from Ebony Park won all seats of the committee.

Regardless of the differences in the election processes between the wards of Ivory Park and Ward 93, they both yielded the same result for the residents of the informal settlements in the area. In the Ivory Park area, despite 25% of the population living in informal settlements (Statistics South Africa, 2003), only one woman from the K60 informal settlement was elected to the committee of Ward 80, as a representative of
the women’s sector (Mogotse, pers. com., 2006). In the Midrand area (Ward 93), the

group from the Meriting informal settlement, which competed for the full

membership of the ward committee against the other two groups from Ebony Park

and Kaalfontein, lost the election. The results of the 2003 ward committees’ election

in the study area showed an almost complete exclusion of the informal settlement

communities from the area’s ward committees.

The reasons for the exclusion from the membership of the ward committees appear to

be a combination of councillor attitude and the system of sector representation. Some

community leaders from the surveyed informal settlements blamed the ward
councillor for not doing enough to ensure they had a voice in the ward committee.

Commenting on why his community did not have a member in the ward committee, a

community leader from the Sakhile informal settlement in Ward 78 simply said, "we

wanted to be there [the sector fora that nominate members of ward committees], but

the ward councillor was not interested," (anonymous, pers. com., 2006). Other

community leaders believed that the sector-based system of representation in the

ward committees was responsible for the exclusion of their communities. A

community leader from the Chris Hani informal settlement in Ward.77 said:

Nominations for this thing [the ward committee] are discussed in meetings

[sector constituencies] that we do not attend. We have our sectional

committee, which looks after our needs. Sometimes, our chairperson speaks to

the [ward] councillor about our issues (anonymous, pers. com., 2006).

Another community leader from the Mafelandawonye.3 informal settlement in Ward

79 echoed the sentiment by saying, “this matter [the election of the ward committee

members] is the job of organisations like MYC (Midrand Youth Council)”

(anonymous, pers., com., 2006). Indeed, the sector-based system of representation is

critical to the involvement of informal settlement communities in the ward committee

system, which I explore in the next subsection.
7.2.2 Composition of ward committees: uneven inclusion of informal settlement communities

As discussed in Chapter Five, subsection 5.5.3, ward committees are created to enhance community involvement in local governance and to function as mechanisms for inclusion by deliberately enabling local communities, particularly the disadvantaged sectors, to take part in making policy decisions. The national guidelines on the composition of ward committees require ward committees to be formed in a way that represents communities, community organisations and citizens of the ward, in dealing with municipal-level matters (DPLG and DTZ South Africa, 2005). The City of Johannesburg’s municipal guidelines on ward committees identifies 10 sectors for representation in its ward committees: women issues; NGO and CBO; education; business; health and welfare; religious groupings; youth; sports and culture; civic and ratepayers’ organisation; and labour (City of Johannesburg, 2001c). Clearly, the underpinning assumption in this choice is that most of these sectors cut across class boundaries and the formal-informal divide in the city. However, the City acknowledges that wards in the city differ and that it will not always be possible to represent the identified sectors (ibid.).

The five active ward committees in the study area were formed in accordance with the City’s guidelines regarding representation in ward committees, except for some minor changes. As Table 7.1 shows, these minor changes included leaving out the labour and culture sectors, combining ‘youth’ and ‘sports’ into one sector, and adding a representative for safety and security (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006). The addition of the safety and security sector to the membership of ward committees was necessitated by the increasing concerns about crime in the region (ibid.).
### Table 7.1: Sectors represented in the ward committees of Region 2 (2003-2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Representation in ward committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ward 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO and CBO</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and welfare</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groupings</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and sports</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civics and Ratepayers</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports and culture</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and security (added by the region)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No ward committee existed in this ward at the time of the study.

Source: The table is compiled by the author based on information gathered through interviews in the region.

Considering the socio-economic conditions of informal settlements in general (see Chapter One, section 1.2) and the conditions of those in the study area in particular (see Chapter Six, section 6.3), all sectors represented in the studied ward committees appear to be relevant, particularly the women, business, and safety and security sectors. However, Johannesburg’s sector-based composition of ward committees only achieved partial inclusion of informal settlement community structures in Region 2 in the system. The guidelines did not recognise informal settlement communities as a disadvantaged group in the city that require special arrangements for representation, nor did they include the issues that present the top priorities for the informal settlement communities as thematic areas for sectoral representation. Responding to a question in the community leaders’ survey about the top five issues that they would like to discuss at the public participation fora, the majority of the respondents identified housing, electricity, sanitation, roads and water (see Figure 7.1). None of
these issues was included in the composition of the ward committees. This is quite significant as I have concluded in Chapter Two that for participatory fora to successfully engage informal settlement communities, they need to create opportunities for these communities to discuss issues that concern them. Creating participatory mechanisms that do not facilitate public discussion on the key issues that informal settlement communities consider to be their top priorities is indeed a hindrance to a meaningful involvement of these communities.

Figure 7.1: Priority needs for informal settlements in Region 2 - City of Johannesburg. Source: the author based on data from the community leaders’ survey.

Furthermore, the majority and the most active sectors included in the composition of the ward committees, did not have direct connections with the active community structures in the informal settlements of the study area. As Table 7.2 shows, only two sectors- civics and youth and sports - had active constituencies in the informal settlements, represented by branches of SANCO and the MYC, respectively. The absence of connection of the rest of the sectors with community structures in the informal settlements, was also confirmed by the findings of the community leaders’ survey. More than 80% of the respondents in the survey cited those two organisations as the only active organisations in their settlements.

8 In 2006, the City of Johannesburg changed the sectors represented in its ward committees. The new
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Constituency</th>
<th>Relevance to the informal settlement communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Include women clubs, women branches of political parties, women empowerment structures such as women societies and event associations, and women in small businesses.</td>
<td>Women issues are very relevant but none of the organised women groups of this sector was active in the informal settlements surveyed for this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO and CBO</td>
<td>Include NGOs from various sectors operating in the area, as well as Community Development Fora (CDFs)</td>
<td>NGOs, particularly those involved in fighting HIV/AIDS and providing home-based support, were active in the entire area of Ivory Park including the informal settlements. No CDFs were active in the informal settlements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Mainly involves representatives of school governing bodies in the area.</td>
<td>Schools are located in formal areas but do include children from informal settlements. Schools governing bodies are not ward-based and they sent representatives to all ward committees in their areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Mainly involves organised business groups such as owners of small construction companies, taxi associations, local business people, hawkers, owners of spaza shops, liquor stores, SMMEs, etc.</td>
<td>Although the informal settlements studied have some business activities, there were no organised business groups in the informal settlement surveyed in this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>This sector involves health officers, clinic managers, and environmental health officers in the area</td>
<td>This sector serves the informal settlements too, but those involved in the sector were not part of the studied informal settlements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious groupings</td>
<td>Mainly involve representatives of the Ivory Park Church Association.</td>
<td>The association has activities in all informal settlements of the area, but it is not a ward-based structure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth and Sports</td>
<td>This sector involves youth clubs, NGOs, religious groups, choirs, youth in conflict with the law and youth branches of political parties.</td>
<td>Considering the high percentage of youth in the informal settlements, this sector is very relevant. The Midrand Youth Council is also active in the surveyed informal settlements, especially those in Wards 78 and 79.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic and Ratepayer</td>
<td>Mainly involves SANCO and the ratepayer associations.</td>
<td>SANCO has active branches in all the surveyed informal settlements except Meriting in Ward 93, which has a non-affiliated resident association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety and Security</td>
<td>Mainly involves representatives of community policing fora in the area</td>
<td>Community policing fora were not active in informal settlements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the author based on information gathered through interviews with ward committee members in the area of Ivory Park.

List of sectors included housing sector and infrastructure and services sector.
NGOs have an active presence within the informal settlements of the region through their HIV/AIDS programmes and projects, but they are not community-based structures. NGOs are permitted to speak about issues that concern the informal settlement communities in the participatory fora they attend (Friedman, 2006). Nevertheless, these NGOs cannot represent the informal settlement communities in these fora.

This section has so far demonstrated that Johannesburg’s sector-based ward committee system has achieved an uneven inclusion of the informal settlement communities of the study area, in the composition of ward committees. In the following subsection, I discuss the participation of the informal settlement communities in the consultative activities of the ward committees of the study area. This represents the third aspect pertaining to the involvement of these communities in city-level policy-making in the study area.

7.2.3. The involvement of informal settlement communities in the activities of ward committees

The City of Johannesburg’s policy guidelines on the functioning of ward committees prescribe monthly meetings and engagement in regional IDP fora as mandatory activities for ward committees (City of Johannesburg, 2001c). The monthly meetings, which are called and chaired by the ward councillor, discuss agendas set by the ward councillor and/or proposed by the members of the ward committee. While the law stipulates that ward committees play advisory roles to the ward councillors, they can also make recommendations on city-level policy issues to the city council through the ward councillor and/or the regional director (ibid.). The extent to which the recommendations from ward committees influence city-level policy decisions depends on the roles individual councillors and the city council play in making those decisions, which I discuss in section 7.6 of this chapter.
According to the officials in the regional administration, almost all the five active ward committees in the study area met once or more each month during the period covered by this study (Mogotse, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

To understand the extent to which informal settlement communities influence the recommendations made by ward committees, one needs to explore the ways in which the ward committees of the study area engage their sectoral constituencies and broader communities. The city’s policy does not specify how a ward committee or individual members of a ward committee should consult their constituencies on matters raised for discussion. However, the ward councillors of the study area and their respective ward committees have developed local approaches to carry out primary consultations.

The various ward committees adopted different approaches to these primary consultations. In Wards 78 and 79, sector fora that involved leaders of the different organisations which belong to the sector, were created to function as mechanisms for primary consultation (Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006, Ward 78; Zitha, pers. com., 2006, Ward 79). These sector fora used to meet at least once every three months and were attended by between 75 and 120 participants in each forum (ibid.). In Wards 77 and 80, the mechanism for primary consultations was different. In these two wards, sub-committees of a smaller size comprising five to eight people were formed to assist ward committee members (Mbiza, pers. com., 2006, Ward 77; Gaompotse, pers. com., 2006, Ward 80). These sub-committees met more frequently than the sector fora - at least once every four to six weeks (ibid.). A ward committee support officer attributed the main reason for the difference in mechanisms used for primary consultations, to availability of resources and the preferences of the ward councillors (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

The main aim of the ward committee primary consultations, whether through sectoral fora or sub-committees, was to provide the opportunity for ward committee members
to engage their constituencies and solicit their views on the matters, before the ward committee meetings. For example, a ward committee member in Ward 80 said:

‘As the representative of the civic sector [in the ward committee of Ward 80], I hold meetings with my sector which is considered a subcommittee of the ward committee. I get their views about what is happening and what they would want to see the government to be doing in terms of service delivery. I take these views to the ward committee meetings where these views will be deliberated together with the views of other sectors. The councillor will then take these views to the [city] council’ (Gaompotse, pers. com., 2006).

However, the generally weak inclusion of the informal settlement communities in the formation and the composition of ward committees of the study area (see subsections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2) is an impediment to the involvement of these communities in these primary consultations. Considering the fact that only the civic and youth sectors had constituencies within the studied informal settlements, it was likely that communities living in these settlements could only engage in ward committee primary consultations through the youth and civic sectoral fora or sub-committees. This inference was also confirmed by the community leaders in the 10 informal settlements who participated in the community leaders’ survey, who felt that SANCO and the MYC were the only two organisations that defended the rights of people living in the informal settlements during the public participation meetings. Responding to a question in this survey about which organisation in the ward was supporting the demands of the informal settlement communities in the public participation processes, 91% of the respondents identified SANCO; 7% identified the MYC and only 2% identified church groups. However, the civics and youth sectors were the least active sectors in the region because they did not have enough resources (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

The fact that eight of the 10 sectors represented in ward committees of Region 2 did not involve community structures from the studied informal settlements indicates that communities living in these settlements were largely excluded from this level of public consultation. This is particularly critical because the most active sectors in the
region in terms of their regular meetings and regular inputs in the consultation processes were among these eight sectors. The active sectors included the health sector, the education sector, the business sector, and the safety and security sector. Ward councillors in the region believed that the reason for the high activity of these sectors was because they dealt with ‘topical issues’, which gave them access to resources that were not available to other sectors (Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006, Ward 77; Zitha, pers. com., 2006, Ward 79).

Overall, this section of my thesis sought to provide insights into the formation, composition and functioning dynamics of the ward committees of Region 2. It has established that ward committees play a considerable role in city-level policy-making processes, especially in the preparation and annual reviews of the city’s IDP and budget. However, this chapter has made it clear that the involvement of the informal settlement communities of the study area in the city-level policy processes through the ward committee system, was very limited. This was further exacerbated by an inherent inability of ward committees to adequately function in contexts of poverty and socio-spatial exclusion. As I argued elsewhere (see Mohamed, 2006), in the impoverished settings of informal settlements that lack logistical resources, members of ward committees find it extremely difficult to engage their own constituencies and the organs of the local state in an effective manner. In the next section, I look at the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making through another mechanism of public participation in the City of Johannesburg: ward public meetings.

7.3 Involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes through ward public meetings

A ward public meeting is an open mass meeting officially organised at ward level and functions as a platform for informing the residents of the ward and/or soliciting their views on matters of public concern in the ward, the region or the city as a whole (City
of Johannesburg, 2002b). According to officials in charge of development planning and public participation in the City of Johannesburg, ward public meetings are part of the annual IDP/Budget Community Outreach Programme (see section 5.6.2), which involves engaging local communities through these public meetings at three key stages (Nhlapo, pers. com., 2005; Seedat, pers. com., 2005).

In the first phase of the IDP/Budget process, which takes place in October of every year and focuses on strategic evaluation of the previous year’s achievements and challenges, ward public meetings are held to review service delivery progress and weaknesses in the ward (ibid.). In the second phase, which takes place in March and April, the city presents to the ward public meetings, its responses to the most common concerns and needs raised during the first phase (ibid.). In the third and last phase, the city gives feedback to ward communities on the final planning and service delivery decisions reflected in the IDP and budget for the next year (ibid.). In addition to their consultative role in the preparation of the city’s IDP and budget, ward public meetings are used as mechanisms for soliciting views of the ward residents on matters of general concern that the ward councillor and/or the ward committee see necessary (City of Johannesburg, 2002b).

Unlike the outcomes of meetings during IDP/budget consultations, which are taken through the designated institutional mechanisms in the city thereby ensuring that the outcome of the other type of ward public meetings are considered at city level, policy processes depend on ward councillors, which I discuss in section 7.6 of this chapter. In the remainder of this section, I look at the extent of active participation of people living in the studied informal settlements in ward public meetings and examine the factors that enabled their involvement.
7.3.1 Attendance of informal settlement residents in ward public meetings

Ward public meetings held in the four wards of Ivory Park (Ward 77 - 80) appeared to be attracting large numbers of participants from informal settlements. While available records (i.e. public meeting registers) do not provide detailed information to attest to the exact number of informal settlement residents who attended those meetings, there are indications that at least their community leaders (leaders of SANCO and members of the non-affiliated sectional committees) regularly attended those meetings. During the financial year 2004/05, five ward public meetings were held in each of the Ivory Park ward (Wards 77 - 80) (Mogotse, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006) and only one public meeting was held in Ward 93 (Mogotse, pers. com., 2006).

On average, all informal settlement community leaders who participated in the community leaders’ survey, attended about four public meetings during the financial year 2004/05. As Figure 7.7 shows, all informal settlement community leaders of Wards 77 and 80 had attended five public meetings on average during 2004/05. However, only some of the respondents from the Meriting informal settlement attended the sole ward public meeting in Ward 93. The reason appears to be the inaccessibility of the meeting venue as explained later in this section.

![Average number of times community leaders from informal settlements attended ward public meetings](image)

Figure 7.2. Source: created by the author based on information obtained through the main survey.
Participants from the informal settlements in ward public meetings held in the study area, particularly community leaders, were able to take part in the discussions at these meetings. When asked whether they were able to give input during the meetings they attended, more than three-quarters of the respondents (77%) in the community leaders’ survey responded positively, while a 20% indicated that they wanted to speak but could not do so due to time constraints.

The respondents cited factors that, according to them, led to the seemingly strong presence of people from informal settlement communities at ward public meetings. These include knowledge of these communities about the meetings, the suitability of venues and timing of the meetings to the informal settlement communities as well as relevance of issues discussed in the public meetings to the informal settlement communities. I address these aspects in the following paragraphs.

**Inclusive means of publicising ward public meetings**

In preparation for ward public meetings in the four wards of Ivory Park, ward councillors and their respective ward committees used a variety of ways to inform the public about the details of these meetings. These means of publicising ward public meetings include:

- Informing the sectional committees either in meetings (as in Ward 79) or by contacting the chairpersons of sectional committees (as in Wards 77 and 78) about the arrangements of a public meeting in the ward. Sectional committees were then required to inform the general public in their respective areas about the details of the meeting: agenda, time, venue, etc. (Maluleke, pers. com., 2006; Zitha, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006, Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006).

- Using local media such as community radio stations and pamphlets, which use locally spoken languages in the area, such as Xhosa, Sotho, and Zulu
beside English, and local newspapers that used English only (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006; Mbiza, pers. com., 2006).

- Putting notices in different communal places in the area, such as community halls/centres, spaza shops, schools etc (Zitha, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

Overall, publicising ward public meetings in these ways appears to include informal settlement communities in the study area and suggests that these communities were adequately informed about the meetings. This finding was confirmed by the responses of the informal settlement community leaders to the community leaders’ survey, where 98% of the respondents acknowledged that they were aware of all the public meetings held in their wards during the financial year 2004/05.

**Suitability of venues and timing of ward public meetings**

Deciding on the venues where ward public meetings were held and the timing of these meetings are important factors for informal settlement communities to participate in. In the four wards of Ivory Park, ward public meetings are held on Sunday mornings at community halls and a primary school in the area (see Table 7.3 and also Figure 6.3). As Table 7.3 shows, most of the studied informal settlements are within a distance of one kilometre or less from the venues of ward public meetings in their respective wards, except for the Steve Biko informal settlement in Ward 78 and, to a lesser degree, the Ekurhuleni informal settlement in Ward 80 when the ward meeting is held at the Rabie Ridge Community Hall. In Ward 93, Meriting, the only informal settlement in the ward, is more than 10km and 5km away, respectively, from the two venues used for public meetings in the ward: the People’s Centre and the Rabie Ridge Community Hall. This means that in most of the cases, accessibility to meeting venues was not a problem for the residents of the studied informal settlements. Responding to a question about the suitability of the venues for public meetings, an overall majority -87% - of the respondents in the community leaders’
survey agreed that the venues were very suitable and easily accessible to their communities, while only 11% of them saw the venues as not suitable at all.

Table 7.3: Distances of the studied informal settlements from the venues of ward public meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Settlement</th>
<th>Venue of ward public meetings</th>
<th>Distance to be travelled (in metres)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris Hani (Ward,77)</td>
<td>Local Primary School</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisonke (Ward,77)</td>
<td>Local Primary School</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Biko (Ward,78)</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakhile (Ward,78)</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Park Stadium (Ward,79)</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mafelandawonye,1 (Ward,79)</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mafelandawonye,3 (Ward 79)</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekurhuleni (Ward,80)</td>
<td>Rabie Ridge Community Hall</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekurhuleni (Ward,80)</td>
<td>Freedom Square Community Hall</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K60 (Ward,80)</td>
<td>Rabie Ridge Community Hall</td>
<td>900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K60 (Ward,80)</td>
<td>Freedom Square Community Hall</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meriting (Ward 93)</td>
<td>People’s Centre</td>
<td>10 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meriting (Ward 93)</td>
<td>Rabie Ridge Community Hall</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the author. Distances are obtained from Google Earth.

However, looking at individual wards, the overwhelming majority of respondents from the Meriting informal settlement in Ward 93 (81%) and Steve Biko informal settlement in Ward 78 (90%) are of the view that the venues are difficult to reach. Their views seem to reflect the reality on the ground as they have to walk long distances because no buses are offered to transfer people to community meetings (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

The timing of ward public meetings (Sunday mornings) was also seen appropriate for the communities of the studied informal settlements. Ninety-three percent of respondents to the community leaders’ survey believed that the timing of public meetings was very suitable to their communities.
Relevance of issues discussed at ward public meetings

As pointed out earlier in this section, the participants in ward public meetings provide the bulk of the input into the city’s key policies: the IDP and annual budget, which are relevant to the need of the informal settlement communities. These policies deal with key issues for these communities, such as access to basic services such as water, sanitation, waste removal and electricity supply, provision of public transport, promoting local economic development, addressing poverty and HIV/AIDS, catering for community safety and the environment (City of Johannesburg, 2003b; 2004b; 2006). However, provision of adequate housing is a top priority for the informal settlement communities (see Figure 7.1.), but is not a municipal (city) competency in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Nevertheless, municipalities are involved in the implementation of housing policies made by the national and provincial governments. In Johannesburg, this implementation role of national/provincial housing policies is reflected in the city’s IDP as part of a sector plan that aims to create sustainable human settlements (City of Johannesburg, 2006).

Issues related to addressing the challenge of informal settlements in the city feature strongly in the ward public meetings of the areas which include informal settlements. However, this does not involve engaging local communities on policy intervention alternatives, but rather informing these communities about actions planned by provincial authorities. For example, in a ward public meeting in Ward 79 (held on Sunday 13 November 2005) the ward councillor briefed the meeting on the provincial efforts to address the housing backlog, and the role expected from individuals and communities. The councillor also received questions from the participants to which he responded (see Appendix C for a summary of the meeting’s minutes). In addition, I have argued elsewhere (see Mohamed, 2006) that the final IDP documents of the large cities in South Africa, including Johannesburg, demonstrate the absence of active involvement of informal settlement communities, as they tend to focus on the needs of those living in the ‘formal’ parts of the city. However, this trend began to change in Johannesburg as more recent policy documents explicitly speak about
interventions intended to address the plight of those living in informal settlements (see City of Johannesburg, 2006, pp. 35-37 & 145).

In conclusion of this subsection, it is clear that ward public meetings as a mechanism for public participation, created opportunities for communities living in the studied informal settlements, to become involved in processes of formulating major city level policies. The involvement of these communities was made possible by adequately informing them about the meetings, which were held often at accessible venues and suitable times for them. Although housing, the first priority need for these communities, is not a municipal (city) competence and therefore housing policies are not made at city level, other needs such as water, electricity, sanitation, and roads are among the issues that city-level policies are concerned with.

However, open public meetings, by their very nature, allow only for information sharing, as participants can hardly exercise control over the final outcome of the policy-making processes in which they participate. Nevertheless, to deepen community involvement in making the recommendations that result from ward public meetings, some of the studied wards developed mechanisms for consultations prior to the ward public meetings. I discuss these mechanisms in the following subsection.

7.3.2 Deepening the involvement of informal settlement communities through pre-public meeting consultations

The depth of the informal settlement communities’ involvement in the ward public meetings in the study area varied considerably, due to the various ways in which these meetings were understood, prepared for and organised. In Ward 78, ward public meetings were largely conceived and carried out as information-sharing platforms. The ward councillor adopted an approach to public meetings based on his view that the purpose of such meetings was to ‘inform the public about what is happening in the city’ and ‘to inform [himself as a councillor] about what is happening on the ground in the ward’ (Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006). To realise this understanding, the
councillor called the residents of his ward to mass meetings, where he briefed them on matters discussed in the city council in the last three months. His focus was mainly on issues that related to the ward, but also included issues related to the region, and those of general interest in the city, which he ‘thought the community might be interested to know about such as housing delivery, the Gautrain project and the preparations for the 2010 Soccer World Cup tournament’ \( (ibid.) \).

After the councillor’s address, those in attendance were given an opportunity to raise questions and/or make comments if there was sufficient time to do so (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006). If these attending the meeting made comments on a local issue the Councillor would act on but not if they commented on something such as the Gautrain or the 2010 Soccer tournament. Minutes of the public meetings were later summarised and submitted to the city’s Public Participation and Petitions Unit at the office of the Speaker \( (ibid.) \). A similar process was also followed during the IDP public consultations in Ward 78 except the councillor’s briefing was replaced with the IDP proposals presented by officials from the IDP team. The team also captured the inputs by the public \( (ibid.) \). The role of the ward committee in this ward, according the councillor, was limited to discussing and carrying out logistical preparations for the ward public meeting (Mahlanga, pers. com., 2006).

In Ward 77, however, ward public meetings were organised in a way that achieved more intense and higher levels of public engagement. The councillor of this ward had a different understanding of the purpose of the ward public meetings, and developed a structured process of engagement that was aimed at achieving deeper and more intense community involvement, in particular linking ward public meetings directly to the activities of the ward committee and its sub-committees (Mbiza, pers. com., 2006). The process involved the following phases:

- The ward councillor instructed the sectors of the ward committee and the sectional committees in his ward to engage their constituencies and identify what they considered as priority challenges needed to be addressed by the city
• The issues identified by the sectors and sectional committees were then presented at ward committee meetings, where ‘they were discussed, consolidated and prioritised’

• The consolidated and prioritised set of issues was presented to the ward public meeting for comments and approval by all residents of the ward.

• The ward councillor or the ward committee would then take the final set of community needs approved by the ward public to the city council or to the regional forum if the public meeting was part of the IDP consultation process (Mbiza, pers. com., 2006; Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

In Wards 79 and 80, the councillors involved their sectional committees and sector fora in the processes of public consultation although in less structured ways compared to Ward 77. Nevertheless, some sort of preparatory consultations preceded public meetings in these two wards and the outcomes were presented at the ward public meetings, where they were adopted. For example, pre-ward public meeting consultation on the city’s IDP in Ward 79 resulted in two sets of recommended interventions for the ward and the city as a whole, which the ward councillor presented at a ward public meeting held on 13 November 2005 and adopted by the participants (see appendix c).

The participation of sectional committees in the consultations that preceded public meetings in Wards 77, 79 and 80 enabled the informal settlement communities of these wards to take part in these processes. In addition, the involvement of sectoral fora - especially the youth and civics which have strong connections to the informal settlement communities of the area (see subsection 7.2.2) in the primary consultations, provided another opportunity for these communities to contribute to the preparations. However, despite the similar socio-economic and political contexts of the four wards of Ivory Park, a strikingly different way of organising ward public meetings was followed in Ward 78. The result of the approach to ward public meetings adopted by the councillor of Ward 78 was denying the broader community,
including those living in informal settlements, an opportunity of a deeper engagement on policy matters.

Overall, this section has highlighted the opportunities that were created to enable informal settlement communities to take part in city-level policy debates - the mechanism of ward public meetings. In addition to the influence of favourable logistical arrangements of public meetings (accessible venues, suitable timing and relevant agenda), this section has also demonstrated the critical role ward councillors play in promoting or hindering the active involvement of informal settlement communities in policy processes through ward public meetings. In the next section, I discuss the involvement of these communities through a similar mechanism at a regional level: the Mayoral Road Show, which has a public meeting component.

7.4 Involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy making through Mayoral Road Shows

In Chapter Five, subsection 5.6.4, I explained the origin and format of the Mayoral Road Show as a mechanism for public participation in Johannesburg. It comprises annual two-day visits by the executive mayor of the city accompanied by members of the mayoral committee, councillors, and the top management in the city, to each of the city’s 11 administrative regions. During the first day of the visit, the executive mayor and his team meet the regional administration of the visited region, inspecting existing development projects and launch new ones, and visit selected communities in the region. On the second day of the visit, the executive mayor and his team meet the residents of the visited region, where the visitors listen and respond to the concerns of the residents.

The practice of the Mayoral Road Show, particularly its public meeting component, has evolved over the years to allow for a structured engagement between the city’s political and administrative leadership and the visited communities. Since its
introduction in 2002, the Mayoral Road Show has become an annual public event through all the regions of Johannesburg. During the period covered in this study, the study area saw three Mayoral Road Shows, which were organised jointly for Region 2 and the neighbouring Region 1 (Diepsloot). On average, each of the three public meetings was attended by more than a thousand people (see Table 7.4). The regional administrations provided buses to transfer people from the different parts of the two regions to the meeting venues (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006).

However, as reflected in Table 7.4, the closer the venue was to Ivory Park, where the informal settlements of Region 2 are concentrated, the higher the turnout was. The number of participants at the 2004 meeting held at the Lord Khanyile Precinct, was more than double that of the 2005 meeting at the Diepsloot Youth Centre. This confirms the point I made in the previous section regarding the importance of accessible venues for ward public meetings, for the participation of informal settlement communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Number of attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Rabie Ridge Community Hall (Ward 80) Ivory Park</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Lord Khanyile Community Hall (Ward 77) Ivory Park</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Diepsloot Youth Centre (Region 1)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled by the author based on information obtained from the records of the administration of Region 2.

Informal settlement communities of the study area appeared to have been fully aware of the annual meetings with the city leadership. They were strongly involved in the meetings and were satisfied with the outcomes.

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9 Since their creation in 2002, the two regions were administered by one regional administration until their amalgamation into Region A in 2006.
Ninety-three percent (93%) of the respondents to the community leaders’ survey indicated that, on average, they had attended two of the three Mayoral Road Shows that took place in their area during 2003-05. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the leaders who attended the meetings with the mayor found them very useful because they were able to ‘speak to all the top people in the city’, as a community leader from Mafelandawonye 1 informal settlement in Ward.79 put it.

It is worth noting that the public meetings associated with the Mayoral Road Shows may look similar to the ward public meetings (see section 7.3) and may appear less participatory due to the large number of people who attend these meetings. However, the influence of the engagement on city-level policies between the city’s leadership and the general public that take place at these meetings, is arguably far more significant. These meetings provide platforms for annual engagement between the top decision-makers in the city, and residents of each region. The discussions that take place at these meetings are carefully captured and followed up. In Region 2, participants in the meetings with the executive mayor are given cards and pens to register their contact details with the questions/points they raise, to facilitate accurate capturing (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006). As pointed out in Chapter Five, subsection 5.6.4, the executive mayor reports back to the community in his subsequent visit on the measures taken and progress made regarding each concern raised in previous visits. Indeed, if a matter does not fall within the ambit of an existing policy intervention, the city will have to develop a new policy response.

This section concludes the discussion on the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes, through the statutory mechanisms of public participation in the City of Johannesburg. In the next section, I turn to their involvement through non-statutory initiatives adopted by ward councillors in the study area.
7.5 Involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making through non-statutory initiatives

Having explored the involvement of the informal settlement communities of the study area in the various mechanisms of public participation as prescribed by the city’s policy on public participation, I now turn to non-statutory initiatives by ward councillors to enhance public participation in their constituencies. While these initiatives are not part of the official mechanisms as prescribed by the City of Johannesburg’s policy on public participation (City of Johannesburg, 2002b), they remain legal as the national legislation encourages the creation of innovative ways to deepen the culture of participation in local governance (Republic of South Africa, 2000). In this section, I describe two examples of local initiatives to enhance participation in the study area: structured involvement of sectional committees and the use of information technology (IT) in public participation. These initiatives are underpinned by the socio-economic characteristics and the prevailing patterns of civil society organisations in two sections of the study area: Ivory Park (subsection 6.4.1) and Kyalami and its surroundings (subsection 6.4.2).

7.5.1 Structured involvement of the sectional committees

In Chapter Six, subsection 6.5.2, I described the popularity of the non-affiliated civic structure known as sectional committees, in the area of Ivory Park, and argued that these committees have the potential to enable the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes. The strength of sectional committees in this regard emanates from their nature as democratically elected, non-partisan community structures, as opposed to the issue-driven interest groups represented as sectors in the ward committees. Two ward councillors from Ivory Park recognised the sectional committees as legitimate representatives of the broader communities in their wards and opted to involve them in participation activities.

In Ward 79, the ward councillor introduced an informal forum for public participation in the ward that involved the sectional committees in the ward. The ward councillor
set up a body called ‘the general council’, which consisted of all members of the 10 sectional committees in the ward (see Chapter Six, subsection 6.5.2 and Figure 6.9). As described in Figure 7.3, the councillor was the chairperson of both ‘the general council’ and the ward committee. While the ward committee facilitated the councillor’s engagement with the organised interest groups as defined by the city’s guidelines, ‘the general council’ complemented that engagement by linking the councillor with the broader community of Ward 79 on an area-based basis (Shongwe, pers. com., 2006; Zitha, pers. com., 2006).

In a case where the residents of an informal settlement (e.g. Mafelandawony,1) felt that their concerns were not properly addressed by the sectional committee of their area, the ward councillor encouraged them to form a special committee of five members from the residents of the settlement, to discus their concerns and represent them in the general council (ibid.). This demonstrates the willingness of the ward councillor to explore every possible way to get the entire sectors of the ward community, including those living in informal settlements, involved in public debate.

The setting up of the general council alongside the ward committee enabled the ward councillor to attend to the concerns of the broader ward community, together with

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Figure 7.3: Mechanisms of Public Engagement in Ward 79. Created by the author based on information gathered through interviews in Ward 79
those of the organised interest groups. The councillor believed the general council was, by far, more active and effective in reflecting the views of the people on the ground, and in promoting public participation in the ward than the ward committee (Zitha, pers. com., 2006). The general council, which functioned as another committee, but with more members representing all corners of Ward 79, was also helpful in communicating information about what was happening in the city and the region to the residents of the ward, including the four informal settlements, and in mobilising them to take part in public meetings of the ward (Zitha, pers. com., 2006).

In Ward 77, sectional committees were used to strengthen public participation in a different way from that of Ward 79. The councillor of this ward did not set up a ward-wide body, such as the general council. Rather, he adopted a two-pronged approach to engage the sectional committees of his ward. First, the councillor often invited the chairpersons of the 10 sectional committees in his ward to attend ward committee meetings as ex-officio members, especially during the IDP consultations (Mbiza, pers. com., 2006). This enabled better representation of the community and facilitated interactions between community and sector representatives. Second, the councillor assigned each member of the ward committee the task of liaising with one of the sectional committees, including attending the meetings of that committee and liaising with its chairperson on regular basis. This approach demonstrates, once again, that the attitude of the ward councillor can be a critical factor in promoting the involvement of informal settlement communities in participation mechanisms and, therefore, in policy-making processes.

In Ward 78, however, sectional committees were not involved in any similar roles to those of their counterparts in Wards 79 and 77. In ward 78, the councillor was of the view that the role of the nine sectional committees in his ward was to act as information channels, but not representative bodies (Mahlangu, pers. com., 2006). In his own words: ‘They [the members of sectional committees] mainly take the notices for public meetings to the communities in their respective sections’ (ibid.). Indeed,
the position of this ward councillor towards the sectional committee limited the involvement of informal settlement communities through the ward committee system (see also subsection 7.2.2). Furthermore, the councillor of Ward 78 was of the view that residents of informal settlements should be seen as part and parcel of the ward, and the communities living in these settlements should always raise their issues as the others did in ward public meetings (ibid.). There was no need, according to the councillor, for the informal settlement communities to have special structures or meetings to discuss any matter that concerned them separately (ibid.). The councillor of this ward made his intentions very clear even before he was elected to the city council in 2000:

Before I became a councillor, informal settlement communities in this area [Ward,78] used to have meetings on Sunday mornings about issues of housing and service delivery. When I was nominated by the ANC [the ruling party] to run for the City Council, I cancelled all those meetings because it did not make sense to me to have meetings for informal settlements and other meetings for the formal ones (ibid.).

As a result of this attitude towards the informal settlement communities, there were no special sectional committees or any other special arrangements to ensure adequate involvement of the informal settlement communities in this ward, in the public participation processes. These examples show that in some parts of Ivory Park, where almost all informal settlements of the study area are located, the sector-based ward committees had been supplemented by arrangements that involved area-based community structures. These examples signify the potential of the flexible approach to public participation, as practised in Wards 79 and 77, in ensuring improved involvement of informal settlement communities. To the contrary, the attitude of the councillor of Ward 78 towards sectional committees and the communities living in the informal settlements of his ward, had impeded the involvement of these communities.

Seeking innovative ways to enhance public participation in the city’s processes of policy making was not limited to the Ivory Park section of the study area. There was
another example of a non-statutory initiative from the affluent area of Kyalami and surroundings (Ward 94), which I discuss in the next subsection.

7.5.2 The use of information technology in public participation

In Chapter Six, subsection 6.4.2, I have shown that Ward 94 (Kyalami and its surroundings) was different from Ivory Park (Wards 77-80) in almost every aspect. The area of Ward 94, which has no informal settlement, is dominated by affluent white residents who are richer and have access to far better levels of basic services than their counterparts in Ivory Park. The realm of civil society in this part of the study area is dominated by very active ratepayer associations, which are also different from the community structures of the Ivory Park area, especially in terms of the issues they address and the means they use to engage the local authorities. During the first term of ward committees in the City of Johannesburg (from October 2001 to February 2003), Ward 94 had a ward committee, which was regarded as one of the most active ward committees in the City (City of Johannesburg, 2003).

However, the ward councillor, who was from the DA - the official opposition party in the city council, believed that the mechanisms of public participation in the city, particularly the ward committee system and ward public meetings, were not suitable for his constituency. He argued that the City of Johannesburg’s ward committee system was designed to suit communities with a different set of socio-economic conditions to those of Ward 94 (Mendelsohn, pers. com., 2006). He claimed that the majority of people in his ward were not interested in gaining status by being members of a ward committee and that very few people in Ward.94 would be interested in joining ward committees (ibid.). The councillor further argued that:

Ward committees are useless means for public participation because most of the issues discussed at the meetings of these committees such as crime, education, health, etc. are national and/provincial competencies and the city council cannot do anything about them. The city imposed the representation of interest groups such as women, sports, youth, labour, etc. that are not necessarily important in this ward. People here might be more interested in representing environmental groups for instance (ibid.).
The councillor’s strong views against the ward committee system and ward public meetings as mechanisms for public involvement in policy-making processes, were translated into developing an alternative mechanism for participation, which the councillor believed was more suited to the residents of Ward 94. During the second term of ward committees in the study area (February 2003 to December 2005), the councillor decided to ignore the requirement of forming a ward committee for his ward. Instead, he set up an email-based serve list to communicate with residents and the various ratepayer associations in the ward. At the time of conducting the fieldwork for this study, the councillor had about 500 email addresses on his database (Mendelsohn, pers. com., 2006). He sent regular communiqués to inform the residents of the ward and their ratepayer associations about what was happening in the city council and sought their comments (ibid.). On average, the rate of written responses to his emails varied between 5% and 15% (ibid.). During the IDP consultation processes, the response rate was even higher, especially from the ratepayer/resident associations (Mendelsohn, pers. com., 2006; Mogotsi, pers. com., 2006).

In the councillor’s view, working with the ratepayers’ associations and using information technology (IT) to communicate with the residents of Ward 94 was very useful and effectively fulfilled the requirements of the city’s public participation policy. Ultimately, the councillor was able to collate the responses he received from individuals and associations and submit them to the city. (Mendelsohn, pers. com., 2006)

This case of Ward 94 is significant for this study in three ways. First, it presents an attempt to adapt to local conditions in the pursuit of achieving active participation of local communities in city-level policy-making processes. As discussed in Chapter Six, subsection 6.4.2, this area has a very high concentration of affluent, white residents. The danger of this approach, however, is that while it offered an
opportunity to those who are well off and have access to the Internet or are organised in ratepayer associations, it may have excluded the less fortunate people of the ward. In 2001, 33% of the households in this ward were earning R38,400 or less per annum. Second, the approach also reduced public participation to a mere exchange of ideas between the councillor and the individuals or groups who responded to his emails. It denied the residents of Ward 94 many opportunities, including being represented at regional fora by a ward committee, engaging city officials who normally take part in ward public meetings, and engaging with each others’ ideas. Third, the approach underlines the critical role councillors played in shaping the actual practice of public participation in the study area, which I discuss in the next section.

Overall, this section has shown the flexibility of Johannesburg’s mechanisms of public participation and their potential to evolve into mechanisms more relevant to the socio-economic and political realities on the ground. This is very significant in the context of this study. It means that despite the top-down developed policy on public participation in the city, the system allows for innovations that can achieve more inclusive and meaningful involvement of all sectors of society, including those living in informal settlements. However, the fact that these initiatives were driven by councillors re-emphasises the critical role they play in shaping the actual practice of public participation on the ground. In the following subsection, I synthesise the role of ward councillors from the information that emerged from the experiences of public participation in the study area.

7.6 The critical role of ward councillors in facilitating the involvement of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes

South Africa’s policy and legislation on local government and subsequent provincial and municipal regulations and guidelines, assign ward councillors a leading role in driving public participation processes at local level. This role includes ward chairing,
ward committees, and ward public meetings; overseeing the election/selection processes of ward committee members; ensuring the proper functioning of the ward committee; and communicating the outcomes of public participation activities in the ward to the city council (RSA, 2000; DPLG, 2001; City of Johannesburg, 2001). In discharging these responsibilities, councillors adopt different approaches which are informed by relevant policies and legislations and party values, but also influenced by their personal experiences and views on public participation. During the period covered by this study, ward councillors of the study area adopted strikingly different approaches and positions on matters relating to public participation which influenced, in one way or another, the involvement of informal settlement communities in public participation mechanisms.

The leadership role assigned to ward councillors gave them the power to interpret the legislative and policy requirements regarding public participation mechanisms in different ways. For example, the councillor of Ward 78 understood the role of ward public meetings as a platform for information sharing, while his counterparts in the neighbouring Wards 77, 79 and 80 saw that differently (see subsection 7.3.5). This happened despite the fact that the four councillors belonged to the same party and their wards share similar socio-economic conditions. The different interpretations of the role of ward public meetings as a mechanism of public participation resulted in dissimilar ways of arranging for ward public meetings, and the role the community can play in shaping the outcomes of these meetings.

A critical aspect, where the views of the ward councillors of the study area varied significantly, was the place of the informal settlement communities in public participation mechanisms. While some councillors acknowledged the special needs of these communities and provided them with a special arrangement to express themselves, others saw no need to treat them differently from the rest of the community. In Wards 77 and 79, informal settlement communities were able to make their voices heard through their representatives in the sectional committees of the
ward. In Ward 79, for example, the councillor even encouraged the small pockets of informal settlements, which formed parts of the ‘formal’ sections of the ward, to set up small committees of five members to represent them. In Ward 77, the situation was similar to that of Ward 79, as its sectional committees were intensively involved in the ward’s public consultation processes, and the chairpersons of those sectional committees participated in the ward committee meetings as ex-officio members. Contrary to these examples was the case of Ward 78, where the councillor had strong views against affording any special status to the informal settlement communities in his ward.

Part of the critical role that ward councillors play in public participation is about their responsibility to communicate the outcomes of participation activities in their wards to the city council. This responsibility depends on the actual involvement of ward councillors in policy decision-making in the city. Although most of the ward councillors of the study area adopted reasonably successful initiatives that improved participatory processes, their ability to effectively communicate the outcomes of these processes remains in doubt. Benit-Gbaffou (2008) points to a very weak influence of ward councillors, if any, in policy-making and a lack of accountability between ward councillors and their voters in the City of Johannesburg. However, this limitation does not affect the outcome of public consultations on the city’s IDP and budget, and the Mayoral Road Show. Public participation fora for IDP and budget are attended by representatives of the IDP/Budget team, who directly capture and process the inputs from the public at these meetings. There is also a special mechanism for taking forward the inputs made at the public meetings of the Mayoral Road Shows (see section 7.4 of this chapter).

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter, which concludes Part Two of the thesis, painted a picture of how public participation was practised in one of Johannesburg’s administrative regions and how
the informal settlement communities of that administrative region were involved alongside their counterparts from the ‘formal’ parts, in policy-making processes. The chapter also revealed critical factors that promoted or hindered the involvement of the informal settlement communities in the policy-making processes. The specific findings are self-explanatory and are further discussed in Chapter Eight. In this concluding section, I highlight three salient findings.

First, the studied mechanisms of public participation (the ward committee system, ward public meetings, and the Mayoral Road Shows) have direct or indirect influences on city-level policy-making processes in Johannesburg. Direct influences are observed during the annual IDP/Budget Outreach Programme, where the inputs by the residents of the City of Johannesburg at ward public meetings and at the regional stakeholder fora, which are attended by the ward committees in the region, are captured and processed by the IDP/budget team. In the regional public meetings associated with the Mayoral Road Shows, the inputs made are not directly linked to city-level policy process. However, the regular involvement of the top policy-makers in the City in these meetings, and the system of follow-up associated with this mechanism, suggest that policy issues raised at these meetings are adequately addressed by the City.

Second, the studied mechanisms of public participation in city-level policy-making processes appear to be evolving towards becoming more inclusive of the various sectors of the local communities and/or achieving more intense involvement of the participants in these processes. Initiatives by ward councillors to enhance participation through the ward committee system included adding structures for sectoral consultation beyond the ward committee, creating area-based platforms to involve the broader community, and the use of information technology. With regards to ward public meetings, some ward councillors of the study area introduced structured arrangements for primary community consultations, which helped in developing proposals in a participatory way, for the residents to approve at their
public meetings. The regional public meetings, which are associated with the Mayoral Road Show, also evolved in terms of increasing the time allocated for meeting residents of the region, as well as introducing a capturing and follow-up system of discussions at these meetings. Overall, these developments arose in response to contextual factors, and as a direct result of interactions between city officials, especially the executive mayor, members of the Mayoral committee and ward councillors, and the local communities and community organisations over the years of practice.

Third, the findings discussed in this chapter suggest that the informal settlement communities of the study area had been involved, to varying degrees of intensity, in the mechanism of public participation that have influences on city-level policy-making. Their involvement, however, differed significantly across the different mechanisms and wards. These communities were seemingly better involved in public meetings at regional and ward levels, than in the participation activities of the ward committee system. The choices made by the ward councillors, who are informed by their understanding of the policy and legislative requirement, and their attitude towards informal settlement communities, had enabled or disabled that involvement.