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The participation of informal settlement communities in city-level policy-making processes in Johannesburg

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2. Public Participation: Theoretical Perspectives and Application in Contexts of Poverty and Inequality

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical basis for the study of the participation of the poor sectors of society, particularly informal settlement communities, in urban policy-making. First, I review various definitions of the concept of participation with the aim of establishing a working definition for this study. This will be followed by a review of two contemporary theoretical perspectives that advance the idea of participation in policy-making: the rights-based perspective and the theory of Communicative Action. I then discuss the role of civil society in promoting the participation of informal settlement communities in citywide policy-making processes. This is followed by a section that deals with questions of how to measure the levels of community participation before I conclude by highlighting the key ideas of this discussion.

2.2 Definition of participation

The notion of popular participation in decision-making is a very old one. It emerged during the time of the Greek City-States, where it was believed that every 'citizen' should be allowed to participate in decision-making. With the recent revival of public participation, there have been many shifts in understanding of the concept of participation. They have been partially reflected by 'a changing rationale for participation within the United Nations system' (Moser, 1989:81). In 1955, the United Nations identified community participation as synonymous with community development (Abbott, 1996). This understanding changed after two decades when the International Labour Organisation (ILO) emphasised that community participation should play a key role in the provision of basic needs and as a means for increasing efficiency and self-reliance. Moser (1989) argues that basic needs such as health, education, water, etc, can only be provided efficiently through public efforts, highlighting the role of non-material basic needs as means to meet material needs.

Development and political science literature offers several definitions for the notion of participation. In the late 1960s, Sherry Arnstein (1969) referred to community participation as a categorical term for citizen power. She defines participation as the redistribution of power that enables the 'have-not' citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future (*ibid*.). Thus, according to this definition, participation becomes a strategy by which the 'have-not's join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programmes are operated, and benefits such as contracts and patronage are parceled out. In short, Arnstein (1969) describes participation as the means by which disadvantaged citizens 'can induce significant social reform, which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society' (*ibid*.:216). The main idea advanced in this definition is the redistribution of decision-making power to include the disadvantaged groups in the future and to enable them to play a role in determining the shape of that future (*ibid*.).

More than two decades after Arnstein's definition, there was a shift in understanding the concept of participation towards a process involving disadvantaged communities in the implementation of policies rather than in formulating those policies. In the 1990s, the United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) followed in the footsteps of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) – *Habitat's Global Report on Human Settlements* of 1986 and broadly defined participation as peoples' involvement in certain projects or programmes that are aimed at improving their lives (UNDP, 1996). The report links the importance of participation in housing projects to efficiency, indicating that community participation directly benefits the state's agencies responsible for social welfare, planning and housing, because it broadens their resource base in terms of physical, financial and human dimensions. According to this perspective, participation means the close engagement of the hitherto disadvantaged people in the implementation of economic, social and cultural interventions that affect their lives (IDB, 1997 - cited in Imparato and Ruster, 2003). This understanding of participation limits the involvement of informal settlement communities to the implementation of projects that have been

decided without their participation. In so doing, those communities are denied the right to engage in decision-making at levels that matter.

Recently, attempts were made to combine involving disadvantaged people in both policy-making and policy implementation. Drawing on definitions by several scholars and international development agencies, Imparato and Ruster (2003:20) define participation as 'a process in which people, and especially disadvantaged people, influence resource allocation, and policy and programme formulation and implementation'. They argue in support of the involvement of people at 'different levels and degrees of intensity in the identification, timing, planning, design, implementation, evaluation and post-implementation stages of development projects' (*ibid*.). In this definition Imparato and Ruster (2003) favour a dynamic characterisation of the process of participation that emphasises the involvement of the target groups in policy-making and resource allocation but also in the implementation and post-implementation stages of projects.

A common feature in these definitions is the emphasis on involving people living in informal settlements in development interventions that affect their lives within these settlements directly. Some of the definitions reviewed in this section emphasise the involvement of communities in the implementation of projects (e.g. Abbott, 1996) while others focus on the level of individual involvement in decision-making (e.g. Arnstein, 1969). Imparato and Ruster (2003) focus their study on community participation in informal settlement upgrading, a highly localised dimension of participation. For public participation to be a true empowerment strategy involving disadvantaged communities- such as those living in informal settlements- in policy-making at city level, is critical. Participation in citywide policy processes involves taking part in defining purposive courses of action to be followed by the government in dealing with the issues that concern the society. In the following section, I look at key theoretical perspectives on participation to explore their characterisation of informal settlement communities' involvement in policy-making processes.

2.3 Theoretical perspectives on participation

Traditionally, the concept of participation has been continuously debated in the development domain and political science literature. Although the concept was considered a decision-making adjunct, all schools of contemporary thought view participation as a fundamental element of planning and decision-making (Lane, 2005). This shift in understanding was prompted by mutually reinforcing processes of change during the last two decades (*ibid*.). Despite an acknowledgment in the political science literature that democracy has spread as never before, there has also been a warning that the quality of democracy is in crisis (Cohen, 1997; Dryzek, 2000). In the developed countries of the global north, where democracy has matured, Gaventa (2007) refers to a large body of literature which focuses on the declining patterns of citizen participation in the processes of representative democracy. Citizens and leaders have noticed that participation through normal institutional channels of elections, has little impact on the substance of government policies, which led to diminishing trust in government (King, Feltey and Susel, 1998).

Since the mid 1990s, debates about the need to directly engage the public in processes of policy development and decision-making have emerged in response to the perceived crisis of democracy, which questioned the normative and functional adequacy of democratic institutions and of the rights and responsibilities of citizens (McBride, 2005). Proponents of this discourse, such as Cooper *et al.* (1995), have constantly argued that traditional representative democracy has become dysfunctional and unable to respond adequately to declining public participation in political processes.

A number of different reform approaches has emerged in response to the perceived crisis of democracy; each has substantially differing views about the role of citizens in the governance of their own affairs. Gaventa (2007) outlines three of these approaches: The first view grows out of long traditions of participatory democracy and is increasingly referred to as ‘deliberative democracy’. According to this perspective, democracy is not simply a set of rules, procedures, and institutional design, and political participation cannot be reduced to engagement in electoral processes. Rather, it is a process through

which citizens exercise ever-deepening control over decisions, which affect their lives through a number of forms and in a variety of arenas (*ibid.*). Brazil has been widely acknowledged as a country that pursued various experiments of deliberative democracy. I discuss this in further detail in chapter 4 (see, for example, Baiocchi, 2001; Avritzer, 2002).

The second perspective is the neo-liberal market-oriented approach, which supports the continued weakening of the state through a combination of decentralisation and privatisation (Gaventa, 2007). According to this formulation, 'citizens are often reduced to consumers, who express preferences through market choices and perhaps through co-provisioning of services at the local level' (*ibid.*:xii). But these citizens exercise little 'real democratic power over state policies' (*ibid.*).

The third view on how to address the crisis of democracy grows out of the liberal representative model, which puts a great deal of emphasis on getting the institutions and procedures of representative democracy right, especially as measured through competitive, multi-party electoral processes. In this view, the role of citizens remains somewhat passive. Citizens participate through elections and enjoy certain rights, but these are primarily the individual rights of freedom from interference by the state in matters of private property, expression, and political association (*ibid.*).

While the first view points to involving citizens in political processes beyond electoral processes, as a way of addressing the crisis of democracy, the second perspective emphasises the role of market choices. These two understandings seemingly offer citizens opportunities to make their views known. However, the market-oriented view does not provide citizens with real democratic power over the state (Gaventa, 2007). The third perspective insists that improving the quality of existing mechanisms of representation is enough, thus offering no further opportunities beyond electoral processes.

In subsections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, I discuss two recent, influential theoretical perspectives on public participation. On the one hand, citizenship and rights-based perspective on

participation, which establish the right of citizens to be involved in the governance of their city. On the other, communicative action elaborates on the quality of that involvement. These two perspectives set a framework for the analysis of informal settlement communities' participation in policy-making at city-level.

2.3.1 Citizenship and rights-based perspectives

The notion of citizenship has recently become an influential concept in urban development and political debates in many parts of the world (Hindess, 2000; Muetzelfeldt, 2000). A key reason for the rise of the notion of citizenship appears to be its connection to space and place. While people act as citizens of sovereign power, this power is always defined through place. Through participation as citizens, people connect to imaginary communities through space, particularly when pursuing desires for social betterment (Lepofsky and Fraser, 2003). In addition, citizenship remains a mechanism by which people make claims on space and place (*ibid.*).

However, the interpretation of the citizenship varies according to the different contexts of the globe. In the global south, citizenship has been linked to the emergence of social movements during the late 1970s and 1980s and to the efforts aiming at democratisation in countries with authoritarian regimes (Dagnino, 2003). In the global north, particularly the United States and Western European countries, the revival of the notion of citizenship has been linked to the struggle of ethnic minorities for recognition of their rights and the assertion of multiculturalism (*ibid.*).

As a result of its growing influence, the notion of citizenship has become an object of rigorous discussion and debate over its meaning(s). Since the 1990s, citizenship has been used in a variety of ways by various sectors in society and the state, resulting in a diversity of understandings. These interpretations include perspectives such as a rights-based view, a neo-liberal view, and an insurgent/radical interpretation. This section seeks to unpack how the rights-based interpretation of citizenship shaped the understanding and practice of participation, particularly by disadvantaged communities.

The rights-based interpretation of citizenship views the process of building citizenship as 'the assertion and recognition of rights and as a process of transformation of practices rooted in the society as a whole' (Dagino, 2003:214). This understanding integrates concerns with socio-economic, political and civil rights. While these rights have long been viewed as developmental concerns, the rights-based view of citizenship adds 'an element of accountability and culpability; an ethical/moral dimension' (Kabeer, 2005:18). Addressing the broader issues of urban poverty in the context of the rights-based interpretation of citizenship requires the consideration of much more than the provision of basic services, housing and infrastructure (*ibid*.). It requires that questions of governance and political engagement, as well as pertinent issues such as ownership and social capital, be considered (Dagnino, 2003). This calls for inclusivity that encompasses both political processes and objectives (Kabeer, 2005). In both cases, the main goal is to create a societal environment that enables all citizens, regardless of social status, gender, age, race or religion, to participate productively and positively in the opportunities that cities have to offer (*ibid*.). People who live in informal settlements, therefore, have the right to be part of the political processes that shape the future of their city, and to enjoy the material gains offered by the city.

An important element of the rights-based understanding of citizenship transcends a central reference in the concept of citizenship: the demand for access, inclusion, membership and belonging to a given political system (Dagnino, 2003). What is at stake in the struggles for citizenship, in Latin America for example, 'is more than the right to be included as a full member of society; it is the right to participate in the very definition of that society and its political system' (*ibid*.:215). This represents the essence of the notion of 'Right to the City', which Harvey (2003:939) describes as 'not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart's desire'. So, the struggle of people who live in informal settlements in and around our cities, should not only be viewed as a struggle for access to available services and opportunities, but more importantly, for taking part in the processes that recreate those cities.

The ‘Right to the City’ is not a new concept. It was first promoted four decades ago by the French philosopher, Henri Lefebvre, who put forward the idea of the right to the city for all urban dwellers; a concept that he developed most fully in his book titled ‘*Le Droit á la Ville*’ published in 1968. According to Lefebvre’s theory (also cited in Habitat International Coalition, 2005), the ‘Right to the City’ would restructure power relations which underlie urban space, transferring control from capital and the state to urban inhabitants. More recently, however, the concept of the ‘Right to the City’ has been popularised by activists and researchers in geography and other social sciences, such as Friedman (1987), Harvey (2003), and Purcell (2003), as a progressive response to neo-liberal threats to democracy. Without assuming that the contemporary urban setting is similar to the one Lefebvre wrote about four decades ago, the Habitat International Coalition (2005) argues that the concept of the ‘Right to the City’ can still be applied to today’s cities, taking into account recent urban trends and social transformation. An increasing urban population, new information and communication technologies, and the dynamics of globalisation represent recent complications in the urban socio-political fabric that were not necessarily as pertinent in Lefebvre’s time (*ibid*.). What is still relevant for today’s cities, though, is Lefebvre’s belief that power relations in cities should be reframed so that all urban dwellers, including those living in informal settlements, have a right to participate in urban politics and to be included in the decisions which shape their environment (Purcell, 2003).

In addition to rich theoretical and empirical scholarship on the ‘Right to the City’, the concept has been introduced in international urban forums, where global processes related to human settlements are discussed. Examples of these forums include the Civil Society Conference on Environment and Development during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro in 1992; the United Nations Global Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul in 1996; the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in 2004; and the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005 and its subsequent gatherings. There are also different declarations that sought to promote the idea of the ‘Right to the City’ such as the World Charter of the Right to City, the European Charter for Human Rights in the City (approved in Saint-Denis, May 2000),

and the European Charter for Women in the City (by the Commission of the European Union). At national level, however, very little has been done to translate the principles of 'the Right to the City' into practice. The best example in this regard is considered to be Brazil's City Statute of 2001 (Habitat International Coalition, 2005).

The various charters incorporated the core elements of the 'Right to the City', particularly that the city belongs to all its dwellers. For example, the draft World Charter on the Right to the City (2005) defines the city and citizens; establishes the principles of the right to the city and deals extensively with topics related to democratic management of the city, and civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights; and it establishes implementation and supervision measures. The city, according to the Charter, is understood as a collective space culturally rich and diversified, which 'belongs to all the inhabitants' (*ibid*.), implying that citizens are all those persons who permanently or temporarily inhabit the city. In this view, residents of informal settlements of any city are inseparable parts of its citizenry, and therefore have the right to that city (Habitat International Coalition, 2005).

Regarding democratic management of the city, the draft World Charter on the Right to the City states in Article II (Principles of the Right to the City) that:

> [a]ll citizens have the right to participate by direct representation in the control, planning and government of the cities, principally with a view to the strengthening, transparency, efficiency and autonomy of the local public administrations and the popular organisations. All citizens have the right to participate in the planning, layout, control, maintenance, rehabilitation and improvement of the urban habitat, for the purpose of achieving spaces and equipment adequate for the specific functions they execute, for their particular living conditions and their personal aspirations (*ibid*.).

Also, Article III of the draft Charter entitled 'Planning and Management of the City' states that:

> [c]ities should open institutionalised forms and spaces for broad, direct, equitable and democratic participation by male and female citizens in the processes of planning, elaboration, approval, management and evaluation of public policies and budgets. Guarantees should be in place for the operation of collegiate bodies, audiences, conferences and public consultations and debates, and to allow and

> recognise popular initiative processes in legislative proposals and urban development planning. (*ibid*.)

In essence, the principles set out in the World Charter of the Right to the City entitle all dwellers of the city, whether in the 'formal' or informal parts, to participate in any decisions that contribute to the production of the urban space.

However, there are significant critiques which portray the notion of the 'Right to the City' as raising 'more questions than it answers', and leaves open the possibility that it 'could have negative impacts on cities' (Purcell, 2002:103). Purcell acknowledges that Lefebvre's idea of the 'Right to the City' 'does offer real promise as a way of responding to the problem of urban disenfranchisement' (*ibid.*:106). However, Purcell raises three concerns associated with Lefebvre's concept of 'Right to the City': First, the concept enfranchises people with respect to all decisions that produce urban space. While many of these decisions are made within the state, many more of them are made by investment companies. To realise the ideal of giving all urban dwellers a direct voice in any decision that contributes to the production of the urban space, Purcell (2002:102) indicates that they must have 'a literal seat at the corporate table'. Second, while focusing on participation at the local level, Lefebvre's 'Right to the City' does not adequately address the fact that decisions which influence the production of urban space are inherently made at different levels, which could involve any level of the state (national, provincial, local) or corporations that operate at any level (global, national, local). Third, he warns that whereas conventional enfranchisement empowers national citizens, the 'Right to the City' empowers city inhabitants who could possibly be investors or illegal immigrants from other countries. (*ibid*.)

Nevertheless, the rights-based perspective offers a useful framework for people living in informal settlements who should be entitled not only to access services and opportunities, but also to participate in shaping the future of the city in a way that asserts their status as inhabitants of the city. Despite the concerns raised by Purcell (2002) regarding the 'multi-scalar' nature of the decisions that influence the production of the urban space, which could create limitations to the participation of the poor, the notion of the 'Right to the

City' remains relevant to enabling a meaningful participation of informal settlement communities in policy-making at city level.

Before moving on to discuss the communicative action perspective, I briefly outline two other distinct understandings of citizenship: the radical and the neo-liberal, and their implications for participation. The radical perspective of citizenship, on the one hand, focuses on the struggles between the state, the people, and the corporate sector to define the meaning of citizenship. Holston (1998) points out that modernisation has resulted in the privatisation of access to space and the increased isolation of lower-income people who are excluded from much of this privatised space. This, in turn, resulted in increasing the social polarisation that charactersed many societies in Latin America, Asia, and Africa (*ibid*.).

In contrast to the modernist top-down models of planning and policy-making, Shatkin (2002) proposes the concept of insurgent (radical) citizenship, which she defines as 'the varied ways in which urban residents attempt to define their own vision of urban life' (*ibid*.:304). Shatkin uses the concept to describe, for example, the development and protection of illegal forms of shelter in informal settlements, fortified condominiums, ganglands and a variety of other local urban development practices (*ibid*.). However, radical practices are declining because neo-liberal governments of developing countries have developed 'new models of political legitimacy founded not in the development of a modernist utopia', but in a set of 'political and economic rights enshrined in the ideals of democratisation and neo-liberalism' (*ibid*.:304). Thus, community-based movements, rather than being treated as unacceptable opposition to the modernisation project, have increasingly been 'incorporated into decentralised participatory modes of governance' (*ibid*.:302).

The neo-liberal interpretation of citizenship, on the other hand, has merely been about the integration of the individual citizens into the market. This understanding is founded on a set of basic tenets, which revive the classical liberal conception of citizenship, while addressing new elements of contemporary political and social configurations (Dagnino,

2003). Contrary to the rights-based interpretation, which emphasises collectiveness and solidarity, the neo-liberal interpretation reduces the meaning of citizenship to 'a strictly individualistic understanding' (*ibid*.:216). In addition, neo-liberalism 'establishes an attractive connection between citizenship and the market' in that being a citizen means being integrated (as an individual) into the market as a 'consumer and as a producer' (*ibid*.:217).

The influence of the neo-liberal interpretation of citizenship is evident in the formulation of social policies with regard to poverty and inequality, which are increasingly being formulated as 'strictly emergency efforts directed towards specific sectors of society whose survival is at risk' (Dagnino, 2003:217). In this context, informal settlement communities are seen not as citizens entitled to rights but as 'needy' people to be dealt with by public or private charity. The result of the neo-liberal understanding of citizenship is the displacement of the issues of poverty and inequality from the political arena to the technical or philanthropic arenas (Dagnino, 2003). This displacement means that poverty and inequality are removed from the proper domains of justice, equality and citizenship, and reduced to the problem of ensuring the minimal conditions for survival, presenting the solution to these problems as the moral duty of every member of society (Dagnino, 2003).

2.3.2 The communicative action theory

Communicative action is a theory which aims to explain human rationality as the necessary outcome of successful communication (Mitrovic, 1999). The theory can be traced to the German philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, who argues that the potential for rationality is inherent in communication and action, and represents a critical synthesis (Habermas, 1987). Habermas' general theoretical objective is to link communicative action theory, as a variant of action theory, with systems theory into a comprehensive approach to social theory (Mitrovic, 1999).

A precise definition of 'communicative rationality' is elusive because, as Watson (2001) puts it, it is 'a theory in action' that can result in different formulations, depending on the

circumstances of a planning problem. Nevertheless, Habermas (1984) defines the process of his concept of communicative rationality as a communication that is 'oriented to achieving, sustaining and renewing consensus – and, indeed, a consensus that rests on the inter-subjective recognition of criticisable validity claims' (p. 17). Habermas sees the rationality inherent in this practice in the conviction that 'a communicatively achieved agreement must be based, in the end, on reasons' (*ibid.*). With this key definition, Habermas (1984) shifts the emphasis in the concept of rationality from the conceptual to the social (Wilson, 2001). This shift is considered fundamental to the theory of communicative action, because it is based on assumptions about the implicitly shared rationality of speech (*ibid.*). In practice, however, communicative rationality has visibly distinguishing features, which entail paying attention to participation and learning, particularly through the reconciliation of different perspectives (*ibid.*).

Habermas (1984) distinguishes between two types of rationality: cognitive-instrumental and communicative. He describes cognitive-instrumental rationality as 'monological', which deals only with subject-subject relation and is directed at the successful realisation of privately defined goals (*ibid.*). In contrast to this conception of rationality, he speaks about the notion of communicative rationality, which is intrinsically 'dialogical', primarily concerned with inter-subjective relation, and aimed at reaching understanding in social action (*ibid.*). In Habermas' understanding, modernisation and rationalisation involve not only 'purposive rationality' but also 'communicative rationality', which is oriented towards consensus that can be the basis of critique and progress (Wilson, 2001).

The theory of communicative action is mainly concerned with quality of dialogue by creating a rational basis for constructing ends and means in a democratic society. This is an approach that Watson (2002) describes as integrating scientific and interpretive/social learning perspectives. Aiming at extending and protecting democracy, Habermas (1984) conceptualises what he calls the 'life-world' as separate from, and outside the system of, formal economy and government. Life-world, as reviewed by (Mantysalo, 2005:9), is 'the domain of the undominated' where mutual understanding is sought. It is possible for

rational and inherently democratic human beings to reach consensus and co-ordinate action through the process of communication (Habermas, 1984).

The theory of Communicative Action has influenced thinking about the way in which planning and policy-making should happen. The theory emphasises two key concepts to the study of public participation in these processes: argumentation and the role of culture and language. In the following paragraphs, I look first at the direction of planning practices inspired by Habermas' work, before I examine the concepts of argumentation and the role of culture and language.

Communicative rationality and planning

Habermas' work inspired a new direction in planning and policy-making processes based on intercommunicative practices through the work of a range of planning theorists during the 1980s (e.g. Patsy Healey and John Friedman). Features of this new direction in planning include: collective decision-making with the participation of all those who will be affected by the decision or their representatives, and decision-making through arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). Literature suggests the emergence of two directions of 'communicative planning': planning as consensus-seeking and planning as conflict management (see Forester, 1993; Mantysalo, 2005).

Patsy Healey (1993) put forward what she considers to be the main components of a communicative, rational approach to planning, namely:

- an interactive and interpretive process;
- discourse undertaken among diverse and fluid communities;
- a respectful interpersonal and intercultural discussion methodology;
- a focus on the arenas of struggle, where public discussions occur and where problems, strategies, tactics and values are identified, discussed and evaluated, and where conflicts are mediated;

- all dimensions of knowing, understanding, appreciating, experiencing and judging being brought into play within the argumentation of these communicative processes.
- developing a reflexive and critical capacity that allows participants to evaluate and re-evaluate;
- strategic discourses being opened up to be inclusive of all interested parties, which, in turn, generate new planning discourses;
- participants in the discourse gaining knowledge of other participants in addition to learning new relations, values and understandings;
- participants being able to collaborate for change and transformation of the existing material conditions and power relations; and
- aiming to help participants find ways of practically achieving their planning desires, and not simply agreeing and listing their objectives.

Healey's (1993) elements of communicative planning are valuable for the study of informal settlement communities' participation in policy-making in that they establish the basis for the practical application of the communicative planning approach. To translate the ideas of communicative planning into practice, decision-making must rest on locally generated processes, as there can be no imposition. In addition, Healey (1993) suggests that the process of communication or collaboration can be aided by the use of, and reflection upon, four 'guides': the process of 'getting started'; routines and discussions; making policy discourses; and maintaining consensus. In this way, communicative planning offers an ideal framework for policy-making. This means that residents of informal settlements need to be involved in the design of processes and mechanisms of public participation. However, to apply this framework to the contexts of contemporary cities, questions of power relations and diversity have to be confronted. In the following paragraphs, I deal with two critical aspects of Habermas' theory in the contexts of informality in the built environment- argumentation and the role of culture and language.

Is 'ideal speech' too idealistic for cities with informal settlements?

Habermas (1979) proposes the notion of 'ideal speech', which creates a collective self consciousness about the claims to validity offered in public discourse. His conception of argumentation within communicative processes requires three conditions: an equal and open opportunity for participation; reasonable treatment of validity claims; and production of argument - none of which can be neglected (Habermas, 1984; 1979). For Habermas, democracy prospers and becomes rational as people seek to approach 'ideal speech' for which he suggests four criteria, namely: the comprehensibility of statements; the accuracy of statements (their relationship to the objective world); the legitimacy of the speaker (in relationship to the social world); and the sincerity of the speaker (in relationship to the speaker's subjective world) (*ibid*.). These elements seem to exist in the background of all policy discourses, but considering them explicitly means making the process by which communicative action occurs more transparent (*ibid*.).

Habermas acknowledges the limit of his concept of 'ideal speech', indicating that discourse alone cannot ensure favourable conditions for democracy (Habermas, 1993). He emphasises that 'validity' and 'truth' are ensured where the participants in any given discourse respect five key requirements of discourse ethics, namely:

- generality, where no party affected by what is being discussed should be excluded from the discourse;
- autonomy, where all participants should have equal opportunity to present and criticise validity claims in the process of discourse;
- power neutrality, where existing power differences between participants must be neutralised to an extent that these differences have no effect on the creation of consensus;
- transparency, where participants must openly explain their goals and intentions and abstain from strategic actions; and
- ideal role-taking, where participants must be willing and able to empathise with one other's validity claims (Habermas, 1993, also reviewed by Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Theoretically, Habermas' normative criteria establish a convincing framework for inclusive policy-making processes, even in contexts of deep socio-economic inequality. However, this perspective raises a question about how Habermas addresses the challenges of reality, particularly issues of power relations needed for social change. Flyvbjerg (1998) contends that the fundamental political dilemma in Habermas' thinking is that he describes the 'utopia' of communicative rationality, but not how to get to that 'utopia'. Flyvbjerg (1998) criticises Habermas for talking about issues such as lack of 'crucial institutions', lack of 'crucial socialisation' and 'poverty, abuse, and degradation' as barriers to discursive decision-making without saying enough about the relations of power that create these barriers, and how power may be changed in order to begin the kinds of institutional and educational change, improvements in welfare, and enforcement of basic human rights that could help lower the barriers (*ibid*.:215). Yiftachel and Huxley (2000) argue that some aspects of Habermas' theory are problematic as a basis for planning in that 'they draw attention away from the underlying material and political processes, which shape cities and regions' (p. 907). Furthermore, using concepts from social psychology Cooke (2001) demonstrates how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are influenced by the presence – real, imagined or implied – of others. His analysis suggests that problems can arise as a consequence of the face to face interactions that represent a major characteristic of the communicative planning (*ibid*.). According to him participatory processes can lead participants to:

- taking collective decisions that are more risky than they would have taken individually;
- taking a decision that participants have 'second-guessed' is what everyone else wants, when the opposite is the case;
- particular dynamics characterised by a belief in the inherent morality of what is being done, self-censorship and the existence of 'mindguards', which can lead to wrong decisions; or
- the manipulation of group processes, which can lead to changes in ideological beliefs or consciousness.

All four problems challenge participatory planning claims for effectiveness and empowerment (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Habermas' theory of communicative action calls for policy decisions to be reached through communicative processes involving all stakeholders and according to particular rules, which ensure that participation is fair, equal and empowering. Implicit in this approach is an assumption that 'community divisions can be overcome and consensus can be reached on (policy) issues' (Harrison *et al.*, 2007:219). But this seems unlikely in cities with informal settlements, as they tend to be socio-economically, politically and spatially fragmented. While three of Habermas' requirements of discourse ethics could possibly be achieved in these cities, i.e. generality, autonomy and transparency, power neutrality and ideal role-playing cannot be realised. The imbalance of power to influence policy debates, and the socio-economic gap between residents of suburbs and informal settlers, are huge. Therefore, as Harrison *et al.* (2007) argue, the conditions for policy-making in big cities with deep socio-economic inequalities can never be perfect enough to reach the perceived level of communicative rationality.

The challenge of culture and language in cities with informal settlements

Habermas (1984) emphasises the importance of the cultural context within which communication happens. His main argument is that every process of understanding takes place against the background of a 'culturally ingrained' pre-understanding (*ibid.*). The interpretative task of any participant in a communicative process consists of incorporating the others' interpretation of the situation into his/her own (*ibid.*). However, Mantysalo (2002) points to a serious limitation of the application of communicative rationality within contexts where cultural diversity is prevalent. Planning and policy-making in their deepest forms are about the shaping of shared worlds and, accordingly, the formulation of shared rationalities (*ibid.*). Habermas' theory starts from an assumption that a shared world and a shared yardstick of rationality already exist among members of society (Habermas, 1984; 1987; 1993).

Mantysalo (2002) contends that in multicultural and multivalued contexts, finding a mutual horizon is a key problem. The possibility of communicative rationality is based on 'the assertion that a shared context of lifeworldly values and understandings is achievable

as soon as each participant withdraws from the use of power' (Mantysalo, 2005:11). However, society in the cities of today is 'too differentiated into subcultures that a shared lifeworld is no longer readily (if at all) available' (*ibid*.).

Habermas (1984) analyses the conditions of communicative rationality through an examination of speech acts. In his view, communicative rationality is understood as the processes by which different validity claims are brought to a satisfactory resolution, and the relations to the world that people take to forward validity claims for the expressions they deem important. Obviously, language has a prominent place in this context as communicative action makes full use of language functions that relate to objective, social and subjective worlds. Habermas (1984:99) states that:

> [t]he concept of communicative action presupposes the use of language as a medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested.

Language, therefore, is a key element in the exercise of communication. However, Healey (1993:242) acknowledges that communicating groups may operate within different 'systems of meaning' which means that 'we see things differently because words, phrases, expressions and objects are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference'. In socially and economically fragmented urban contexts, marginalised and disadvantaged people who live in the informal settlements, may not understand or speak the language spoken by the elite and middle class, which is often the language of public policy debate. Hence, language presents a serious limitation to the application of the theory of communicative rationality in these contexts.

Overall, the theory of communicative action offers a rational basis for constructing ends and means in democratic societies (Habermas, 1979; 1984; 1987). It has influenced planning and policy-making processes and ushered in new directions for these practices. Nevertheless, the theory has been criticized for its naivety to power relations and contextual differences. Flyvbjerg (1998) for example, argues that the main weaknesses of Habermas' project are its lack of agreement between the ideal and reality and the lack a

concrete understanding of power relations needed for political change. Mantysao (2000) criticises proponents of communicative rationality who promote dialogue and social learning for their focus on what planners should do to facilitate social learning instead of investigating what actually happens in social learning. Forester (1993) sees that the theory of communicative rationality does little to assess how the processes of social learning work and how worldview, allegiances, and identities are elaborated.

To conclude this section, the two theoretical outlooks, namely, the rights-based perspective and communicative action, agree that involving citizens more directly in processes of governance makes for 'better citizens, better decisions, and better government' (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007:4). In other words, enabling citizens to engage directly in processes to solve local problems and to make their demands directly to state bodies is believed to improve understanding and contribute to the quality and implementation of public policies (Abers, 2001; Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). While the rights-based perspective emphasises the right of communities and individual citizens to participate in decision-making, the communicative action standpoint focuses more on the quality of that participation. It establishes a framework for an 'ideal speech' where the only power allowed is the power of the better argument.

Common to the the rights-based and communicative action perspectives, is a belief that participatory fora that open up more effective channels of communication and negotiation between the state and citizens serve to enhance democracy, create new forms of citizenship and improve the effectiveness and equity of public policy. These policies, in turn, contribute to guaranteeing the access of the poorest sectors in society to social services, thus enhancing prospects for economic and political inclusion, and for development.

The two theoretical perspectives hint at an important role for civil society organisations in promoting the participation of disadvantaged groups in city-level policy-making processes. However, they leave key questions unresolved regarding the definition of civil society, the different types of organisations that belong to this realm, the role of civil

society in democratisation and its relation with the state. In the following section, I explain these aspects of civil society.

2.4 The importance of civil society in participation

The notion of 'civil society', which represents the institutional forms within society (Jenkins and Smith, 2001), has become a popular concept in both the analysis of the social bases of recent political change in the developing world, and in external support for processes of democratic political reform (Allen, 1997). The term 'civil society' can be traced to the ancient Greek philosophers, though they equated the term with the state (Carothers, 1999). The modern usage of 'civil society' which emerged in the late 18th century is generally understood as a domain parallel to but separate from the state (Neocleous, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Carothers, 1999; London School of Economics, 2004). It is a realm where citizens voluntarily associate according to their interests and wishes.

The realm of civil society is mainly made-up of a variety of associational forms such as trade unions; professional associations; organisations based on kinship, ethnicity, culture or region; formal and informal social networks based on patrimonial or clientelistic allegiances; and pressure or advocacy groups (London School of Economics, 2004). However, a widely accepted view of civil society among governments, donors, and other official supporters of civil society is that the realm of civil society consists only of 'voluntary' associations that directly foster democracy and promote democratic consolidation (UN-Habitat, 2003). These voluntary associations include associations that specifically seek interaction with the state, whether to advocate interests of the citizens, to oppose a non-democratic behaviour of the state, or to hold the state accountable to the citizens for its actions (Carothers, 1999).

2.4.1 Types of civil society organisations

From experiences with urban civil society organisations in São Paulo and in seeking to explore their differential capacities for political action, Lavalle *et al*. (2005) suggest a

typology that consists of five categories. They see the universe of civil society organiszations, particularly in slum areas and informal settlements, as extremely heterogeneous, defying the presumptive analytic unity suggested by the label. In their view, a substantial majority of these organisations are not membership-based. The links between these organisations and their beneficiaries or constituencies range from members who are individuals, to members who represent other organisations, and target populations to imagined communities that are either territorially defined, such as the neighbourhood, or defined in terms of other identities, such as homelessness.

The typology suggested by Lavalle *et al*. (2005) is built around two analytic criteria: The first criterion is the type of activities organisations undertake such as service delivery to individuals, representation of groups or organisations vis-à-vis the state, defining problems as public issues and influencing policy debates, etc. The second criterion is the nature of the organisations' relation to their stated members/beneficiaries, which may be individuals or members of other organisations; the community; target population; or other. The five categories include associations, co-ordinators, advocacy NGOs, service not-for profits, and others that do not fit within the four categories. The first three are significant for the analysis in this thesis as they tend to engage the state in matters of public policy and also have stronger connections with their members.

Associations encompass a variety of local and territorially-based actors that have either direct members or work on behalf of a territorially defined community. In most cases, associations generally involve their community in the planning and execution of their activities (Lavalle *et al*., 2005). Examples of this type in the South African context include the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee. Coordinators according to Lavalle *et al.* (2005) are social actors who bring together other collective actors or represent the interests of issue-based imagined communities at local, state or provincial, or national level. They coordinate debate and action amongst member organisations and mediate relations with the state. This type in South Africa includes organisations such as the former non-governmental organisation (NGO) People's Dialogue, and currently Slum Dwellers International.

The central task of Advocacy NGOs is the transformation of social problems into public issues and campaigning around those issues to influence public policy or private behaviour whether at the local, national or transnational level. The relation of these organisations with their beneficiaries is that of a 'target group', where there is often direct contact but no formal membership. This is a different scenario from rich countries where advocacy organisations such as Green Peace have a large membership body defined by membership payments money (*ibid.*). Examples of this type in South Africa include organisations such as PLANACT and the Built Environment Support Group (BESG), which do not have membership payment.

Writing from a European perspective Willets (2006) observes that some political activists see the organisations of civil society, particularly hierarchical ones, as conservative and part of the established order. Underpinning this view is the existence of prominent NGOs that have a long history, complex structures, technical literature and a leadership who engages more with global politics than with its members or supporters (*ibid.*). Therefore, at times these 'conservative' civil society organisations are contrasted with 'new social movements', which can be portrayed as dynamic, innovative and non-hierarchical (*ibid.*). The phrase 'new social movements' refers to a plethora of protest movements that emerged in western societies since the mid-1960s and which differ significantly from the conventional movement.

Buechler (1999) views 'new social movements' as a diverse array of collective actions that has displaced the old social movement of the proletarian revolution. These movements differ from traditional social movements centred on economic concerns that had previously dominated following the Marxist paradigm, such as the labour movement. The new social movements also differ from pressure groups that have a formal organisation and members. While new social movements consist of informal, loosely organised social networks of 'supporters' rather than members, the protest groups tend to be single-issue based and are often local in terms of the scope of change they wish to effect. In contrast, new social movements last longer than single issue campaigns and

wish to see change on an (inter)national level on various issues in relation to their set of beliefs and ideals. A 'new social movement' may, however adopt the tactic of a protest campaign as part of its strategy for achieving wider-ranging change. (*ibid*.).

In South Africa, 'new social movements' refers to the post-apartheid social formations that mostly emerged in the late 1990s. The key explanation for the proliferation of these movements in South Africa, according to Ballard *et al*. (2006a: 15), is that 'old avenues of opposition were absorbed into the post-apartheid government, thus leaving opponents of the government without a voice' with which to express or a mechanism to organise opposition to public policies that are not benefiting the poor. Ballard *et al*. (2006a) argue that in the immediate aftermath of the transition to democracy, 'the adversarial opposition that characterised apartheid politics' changed to 'a more collaborative and development oriented focus' (*ibid*.). Unlike the apartheid government, which lacked legitimacy, the post-apartheid government in South Africa is democratically elected and seen to be addressing the problem of poverty and deprivation (Desai, 2002). In addition, as pointed out by Ballard *et al*. (2006a) if communities had wanted to mobilise in the post apartheid years, the institutional environment that historically enabled this has changed.

The organisational mechanisms that were used to express opposition to government prior to transition - the United Democratic Front (UDF), the African National Congress (ANC), civic organisations- are either now part of the government or operating in close collaboration with the government. However, as key community concerns remained unaddressed, a new generation of movements, which are different from their traditional counterparts, have emerged. In Johannesburg, these include organisations such as the Homeless People's Federation (a community-based organisation), the Concerned Citizens Forum, the Anti-Eviction Campaign, and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, among others .(*ibid*.).

During the course of the field work in the area of the case study, I encountered the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), a close ally of the ruling ANC, and a multitude of ratepayer associations, especially in the areas of the high-income population

groups. There were also other, less significant, civil society organisations including branches of the new generation of social movements (see chapter 6).

2.4.2. Civil society: democratisation and relation with the state

The role of civil society in complimenting the role of the state and in promoting democratisation has recently received growing attention (see for example e.g. Glaser, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Carothers, 1999; Carle, Jenkins, and Smith, 2001; Bond, 2004b; Ballard *et. al*., 2006a; Beyers, 2007). Jenkins and Smith (2001:8) argue that in modern urban societies in particular 'the capacity of the state to represent all community interests is limited and hence needs increasingly to be balanced by direct community action'. Forming organisations of civil society is also regarded as fundamental to the realisation of citizenship and for building a strong democracy. For authors such as Flyvbjerg (1998), civil society organisations are the main players in maintaining and redefining the boundaries between civil society and the state through two interdependent and simultaneous processes: the expansion of social equality and liberty, and the restructuring and democratising of state institutions. For liberals, the associational life of civil society offers 'a stabiliser of, and counterweight to, democratic state powers' (Glaser, 1997:5), and for radicals, 'civil society is the medium in which new kinds of popular and participatory socialism might flourish' (*ibid*.). Furthermore, while the organisations of civil society are seen as the medium through which demands and ideas reach the wider political context, the work within civil society organisations leads to increased participation and improved civic skills (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Drawing on long-standing ideas of the importance of 'associationalism' in democracy, Gaventa (2007) believes that a robust civil society can serve as an additional check and balance on government behaviour through mobilising claims, advocating for special interests, playing a watchdog role, and generally exercising countervailing power against the state. Gaventa's view also supports an argument advanced by donor organisations in the development field that biases towards elitism or lack of public accountability in traditional institutional approaches can be offset by investing in a vibrant civil society (UN-Habitat, 2003). However, the growing role of civil society organisations as service

providers and intermediaries between citizenry and the state not only blurs the boundaries of the state/civil society binary, but also raises questions about the autonomy of these organisations (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007).

Nevertheless, where civil society actors are able to stimulate new social and political practices that they then carry into the participatory and public spheres, Avritzer (2002) and Cohen and Arato (1992) believe that they can make a significant contribution to inclusiveness and deliberation. Yet, it is a leap of faith to extend these positive effects to civil society at large (Avritzer, 2002). In cases where civil society organisations constitute part of ruling coalitions, or are closer to governments than to the communities they claim to be serving, they may sacrifice their contributions (*ibid.*). A key question then, is which kinds of civil society organisations enables inclusive participation of informal settlements in policy-making and what are the conditions under which they come to flourish and gain influence? I deal with this question later in the contexts of São Paulo and Region 2 of Johannesburg in chapters 4, 6 and 7 respectively.

One of the most significant debates concerning the workings of civil society organizations hinges on the relationship between these organisations and the state (Beyers, 2007; Allen, 1997). Although commonly known definitions, particularly neo-liberal ones, strongly emphasise the autonomy of civil society organisations from the state (Carothers, 1999), the reality seems different (Beyers, 2007). From a neo-liberal point of view, civil society organisations are seen as key players both in service delivery and in the processes of democratisation (*ibid.*). These two roles are not necessarily compatible, especially at community level. When organisations of civil society start to become more responsive to their funders than to the poor they serve, 'their autonomy can be compromised and the real interests of the poor people whom they supposedly support and represent can be neglected' (UN-Habitat, 2003:153).

Contrary to a widely held view of civil society as separate from the political realm, an emerging trend in Latin America shows that civil society, the state and political parties are closely linked. In Brazil, for example, the expansion of civil society has a significant

effect on the political society. Civil society leaders reached out to, and closely worked with politicians to help elect candidates and influence public policy (Wampler, 2004). Conversely, politicians sought civil society organisations to mobilise potential voters. Wampler explains that during the 1990s, civil society organization activists became directly engaged in election campaigns, monitoring public officials, and creating new public politics. A coalition of civil society organisations proposed new institutional formats and types of policies to help the officials overcome the legacies of political, social and economic exclusion faced by vast numbers of Brazil's population. Wampler (2004) suggests that proposing alternative policies often requires citizens to build close ties with politicians, especially with state/provincial legislators and local councillors, so that their proposed policies can be introduced into policy debates. Referring to the experiences of the Brazilian Worker's Party, Wampler indicates that neighbourhood leaders and reformist politicians created political alliances based on the idea that citizens should be directly incorporated into the policymaking process. The Brazilian example is particularly relevant to this study due to the wide recognition it receives internationally as being a deep participatory practice.

Lavalle *et al.* (2005:960) support Wampler's sentiment indicating that participatory examples from São Paulo during the administration of the Worker's Party of 2001 – 2004 show that 'organisations with ties to political actors, particularly political parties or state agencies, are more active representatives of the poor than those lacking such ties'. In South Africa, however, organsations that have close relations with the government such as SANCO seem to have become part of the ruling coalition and do not pose any significant challenge to its policies. Conversely, the most obvious tangible effect of the new social movements on the political landscape of South Africa is that 'they represent the interests of the poor and marginalised and apply pressure on the government to pay greater attention to the welfare of these groups' (Ballard *et al*., 2006b: 413). The new social movements have thus become an avenue for marginalised people and those concerned about their interests to claim a certain degree of influence and power over the state (*ibid*.).

I have thus far shown that civil society organisations have been widely acknowledged in the relevant literature as an important mechanism for democratisation and complimenting the role of the state. It is believed that civil society plays both an intermediary role as well as the role of an incubator for democratic practices. It is also believed that strong and robust civil society organisations can hold the state to account and can add an additional check and balance to the behaviour of government.

Literature on civil society also acknowledges that the civil society realm is populated by a variety of organisations. Disadvantaged areas in cities are often populated by webs of territorially-based associations that either have direct membership bases or work on behalf of a territorially-defined community. These associations may link up with coordinating bodies or social movements that bring together other actors in the pursuit of change regarding issues of concern to these communities. This type of organisation appears to be the most successful in representing the poor as the examples from São Paulo demonstrate (see chapter 4). Other types of civil society organisations such as advocacy NGOs, although they may seem to be less influential in representing the voices of the poor in local forums, remain useful in engaging the provincial and national state on issues that concern the poor. Service organizations and philanthropic foundations tend to stay away from playing direct political roles.

While a long-held view on the nature of civil society organisations emphasises their autonomous nature from government bodies as well as other political players such as political parties (Un-Habitat, 2004; Carothers, 1999), contemporary literature indicates that this view is fast changing, especially in underdeveloped contexts (Beyers, 2007; Lavalle *et al*., 2005; Wampler, 2004). Emerging practices in Brazil, for example, show that civil society organizations that have ties with political players played significant roles in involving the poor in public policy debates and achieving benefits for them (Lavalle *et al*, 2005). However, in the South African context, critics believe that civil society organisations that are part of, or have close relationships with the ruling coalition, are increasingly becoming supportive of government policies and not necessarily representative of the poor (Ballard *et al.,* 2006b). Instead, a new generation of social

movements is becoming more representative of the interests of the poor and marginalized (*ibid*.). In the context of Johannesburg, the new generation of social movements is not recognised by the City and the poor are generally represented in the government sponsored forums of participation by organisations that mostly have close relationships with the ruling coalition.

2.5 Measuring participation of informal settlement communities in policy-making

Gauging the level and degree of public involvement in processes of policy-making has been a topic of a prolonged debate in the field of development. During the last three decades, several authors (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Choguill, 1996; Abbott, 1996; Imaparato and Ruster, 2003) have suggested different schemes for measuring public participation depending on the context, and how the concept of participation is defined. In this section, I explain the notions of 'community' and 'community empowerment' and examine two approaches to measuring community participation in policy-making. The aim is to develop a framework for assessing participation of informal settlement communities in policy-making processes at city-level.

2.5.1 Community and community empowerment

The notion of community has become very popular since the late years of the twentieth century and is frequently used by academics, politicians, individual citizens, civil society groups and donor agencies. It is used to denote 'all kinds of groupings whether binding, temporary or permanent – to the extent that it can refer as much to bad groups (racists, criminals) as to good ones, while also being loose enough to hold varying and even opposing interpretations' (Sihlongonyane, 2001:34). The significance of the community is evident in the mass of literature that has emerged from the civil and environmental movements of the post-Second World War protests, especially in the slogans of the 1960s and 1970s such as 'self- determination', 'power to the people' and 'community empowerment' (*ibid*.).

Proponents of the concept call for the 'community' as a term that invokes ‘positive feelings of belonging – even caring, sharing, safety, loyalty, rootedness, and solidarity’ (Sihlongonyane, 2001:34) to be the focus of intervention (Kam, 1996:231), 'a key strategy for empowering low income people' (Hoatson *et al*. 1996:130). Ramphele and Thornton (1988:29) suggest that 'the community is the ideal for the future, the structure of utopia, the expectation of heaven, and the legitimate goal for a truly democratic politics'. Many multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank, World Health Organization, and the International Labour Organization stress the importance of community in development (Sihlongonyane, 2001). In many cases, these institutions ‘make project funding conditional on inclusion of the community. Never is the mandatory reference to the community omitted from project proposals, and donor agencies also sift these according to whether sufficient attention has been paid to the community’ (*ibid*.:35).

However, the popularity of the ‘community’ has stirred critical reactions. For example, the International Institute on Environment and Development (IIED) publication, *The Myth of Community* (cited in Sihlongonane, 2001:35) demonstrates that 'community hides many divisions and differences … hundreds of millions are marginalised, oppressed and made miserable by domination and exclusion'. Booth (1991:3) argues that 'the meaning of community is elusive, a word without an essence or a text without meaning', while Waite (1996:357) notes that the term community ‘is in danger of losing its meaning and becoming a catch-all phrase for any kind conversation or loose association of people'. In the 1960s, Peattie (1968) warned against treating local areas as communities of homogeneous interest, which can result in severe damage to the interest of their weakest inhabitants. Similarly, Nelson and Wright (1995) observe that the concept of community is often used by the state and other organizations rather than the people themselves.

Overall, there are three main characteristics associated with the notion of community in its traditional sense: geographical location, identity and common interest (Tuan, 2002; Sihlongonyane, 2009). This means that people living in informal settlements can by and large be seen as communities, because they share the occupation of unauthorised land and

endure deprivation from adequate access to basic urban services and amenities in addition to political vulnerability. In informal settlements, people learn certain survival strategies and practice them to maintain cohesion and identity as a strategy to confront nature and cope with human competitors and 'enemies'. This leads to developing a sense of belonging within the social relations in a particular settlement, which Stacey (1969 – cited in Sihlongonyane, 2009: 137) identifies as key in an ideal community. However, to achieve successful collective outcomes, informal settlement communities require doing more than just maintain cohesion and share values as Gibson (1998) argues. These communities need to possess institutions that 'translate their values into rules that members follow' (*ibid*.: 623).

The term empowerment is widely used in political, academic, legal and media circles. There is always a talk about empowering communities in general or disadvantaged sectors of society in particular such as women, youth and 'squatters'. Community empowerment is seen by many politicians, activists and a growing section of intelligentsia in general 'as the only effective answer to oppression, exploitation, injustice, and the other maladies with which our society is beset' (Beteilly, 1999:589).

As is the case with other popular terms discussed in this thesis, such as 'participation' and 'community', the term 'empowerment' can mean different things to different people and, at times, 'to the same person' (*ibid*.). It can be invoked in almost any context: in speaking about human rights, about gender equality, about basic needs, about capacity building, or about provision of dignified social existence. Beteilly (1999:591) points out that 'implicit in the idea of empowerment is a certain theory of social change, in particular of change from a hierarchical to an egalitarian type of society'. A significant path of this transition has been through the expansion of citizenship (see also sub-section 2.3.1), which according to Bulmer and Rees (1996) happened in many western countries, but most characteristically in Britain where it has received much attention from sociologists. There it has been shown how equality came to be gradually realised as a social value as citizenship became the main component in the status of the individual.

Allen (2003) conceptualises empowerment as a process that entails the 'disempowered' gaining control over the often centrally-located resources and institutions of the powerful. This understanding fosters a sense of community empowerment as 'involving resistance against the powerful structures of the centre and the redistribution of resources to the less powerful on the margin' (Cahill, 2008:296). Allen's conceptualisation of empowerment has informed development practice 'through the implicit assumption that for people to become empowered to pursue their own well-being they require increased access to resources such as money or positions' (*ibid.*). This assumption is implicit in participatory development programmes that support the representation of disadvantaged communities such as informal settlement communities on government mechanisms of public participation (*ibid.*). Empowerment has also been conceptualised as mobilisation (Allen, 2003), which assumes that 'if the marginalised are linked into appropriate networks of power, they can influence formal decision-making processes' (Cahill, 2008:297). As I show in Chapter 2, section 2.4, there is a growing body of literature on the variety of community organizations and social movements that aim at realization of citizenship and promotion of democracy, particularly for the disadvantaged communities.

Examining how the notion of 'community empowerment' was practiced in the cities of the west, Pecorella (1988) shows how the notion evolved from emphasis on community control over local interventions in the 1960s to emphasis on community integration with central-city government in the 1970s and 1980s. This evolution has significant implications for urban politics. On the one hand, understanding community empowerment as community control, which involves local governance over specific territorial units, was advocated in American cities by progressive intellectuals, black activists and leaders and white ethnics who 'often perceived themselves as victims of liberal social engineering programmes in the 1960s' (*ibid.*: 73). On the other hand, community integration, which promotes access to the urban political agenda by officially recognizing community organizations, is favoured by central-city elites as well as local activists 'who are more comfortable with accommodationist as opposed to confrontational tactics' (*ibid.*).

Kraus (1984 – cited in Pecorella, 1988: 73) criticises the integrative approach to community empowerment, which allows advisory roles to communities in policy-making as cooptation of community interests. Hallman (1984) however, contends that political realities have changed and what was once a cooptive reform may no longer be so. The participatory policy-making examples from São Paulo (see Chapter 4) support Hallman's contention and demonstrate that ordinary people, including the poor, can significantly influence policy decisions at city-level provided that an appropriate environment exists. These examples also show that both understandings of community empowerment (as community control and community integration into central-city policy processes) can work together.

2.5.2 Measuring participation on basis of power distribution

Perhaps the best known attempt to determine the scale of public participation in policy-making processes is Sherry Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. Her conception of the levels of public participation revolves around the distribution of power and the role of individual citizens. Arnstein (1969) understands citizen participation as a term for citizen power and puts forward a definition for participation as 'the redistribution of power that enables the 'have-not' citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future' (Arnstein, 1969:216).

Arnstein's (1969) analysis of public participation remains essential to the question of how to make citizen participation a meaningful exercise. She argues that unless citizens have a genuine opportunity to affect outcomes, participation is mainly concerned with 'therapy' and 'manipulation' of participants. Arnstein conceived of power in public participation as a ladder of eight rungs, ranging from 'degrees of non-participation' through to 'degrees of citizen power' (see Figure 2.1). The main point she makes is that there are gradations of participation in terms of the degree of control participants can exercise in seeking to shape the outcome of the participation process.

Towards the top of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation there is what she considers the degrees of citizen power in which citizens are able to exert a high degree of control and are able to bargain trade-offs with power holders (*ibid.*). Arnstein acknowledges the

facilitative role of the government in the process of participation. The rungs on her ladder point to the fact that those who invite the public to participate are able to set the terms of that participation, because they can seek to educate, inform, and consult, or they are able to delegate power through partnerships and other means (*ibid*.).

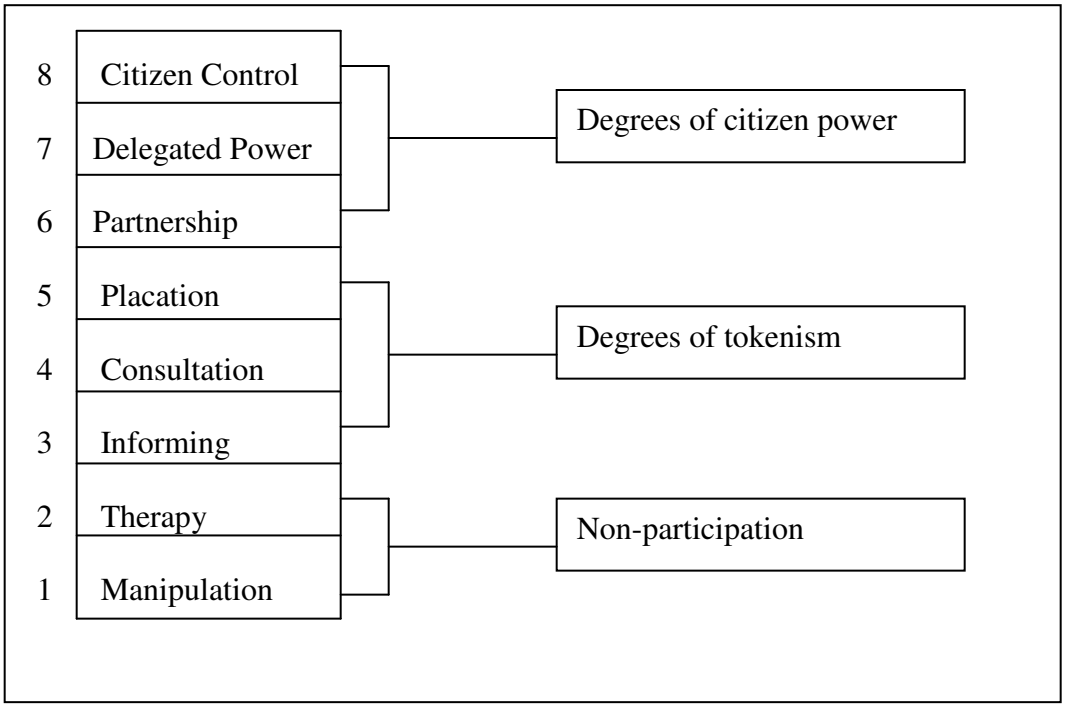

Figure 2.1: Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. Source: Arnstein (1969: 217).

Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation has been criticised for failing to comprehensively address the issue of power in the context of developing countries. Abbott (1996) argues that Arnstein's ladder describes only one dimension of power (though a very important one), which is the openness of government to the inclusion of individual citizens in decision-making processes. In his analysis, Abbott (1996) adds the 'nature of the decisions to be made' as the most complex characteristic after openness of government. These dimensions include issues such the basic type of decision (whether it is predominantly social, political or economic/financial); the number of variables that are generated by the problem to be addressed; and the degree of interaction with the different levels of decision-making. In addition, Abbott (1996) also contends that the complexity of the decision-making process may influence the achievement of a real power through participation.

In my analysis, applying Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation to the contexts of developing countries is also problematic. The criterion by which the rungs of her ladder are defined is the extent of individual citizens' power in determining the end product of public policy. This seems absolutely relevant to the context of developed societies in the global north. Within the context of developing countries, however, community action is regarded more significant than the action of individuals (Choguill, 1996). Indeed, individual citizens residing in informal settlements are vulnerable and unable to make tangible impacts on public debate aimed at developing public policies. A refinement of Arnstein's approach emerged almost three decades later, which stresses the role of community instead of individual citizens.

2.5.3 Measuring participation by levels of community involvement

Drawing on a study of several development projects in developing countries, Choguill (1996) proposed a ladder of community participation for underdeveloped countries, which incorporates the support that communities receive from outside. The overall aim of the study was to suggest a way of assessing the scale of community participation, which indicates the several levels of participation that can be achieved by a community organisation depending upon the type of support it receives from outside sources, whether from government or beyond.

Choguill (1996), similar to Arnstein, uses an eight-rung ladder beginning with the highest level of participation at the top (see Figure 2.2). The top three rungs on Choguill's ladder of community participation, are considered the degrees of government support. These are followed by three rungs: dissimulation; diplomacy; and informing, which she regards as manipulation. The seventh level in Choguill's ladder is called conspiracy, in which no participation in formal decision-making is allowed or even considered, as the government seems to reject any idea of helping the poor sectors of society. At the bottom of this ladder is self-management, which occurs when the government does nothing to solve local problems, leaving it to the members of the community to plan improvements to their neighbourhood and actually control their projects. In Choguill's view, self-management

is not always successful and in contrast to empowerment, 'self-management implies situations that result from lack of governmental interest in, or even opposition to, the poor people's demands' (*ibid*.:440).

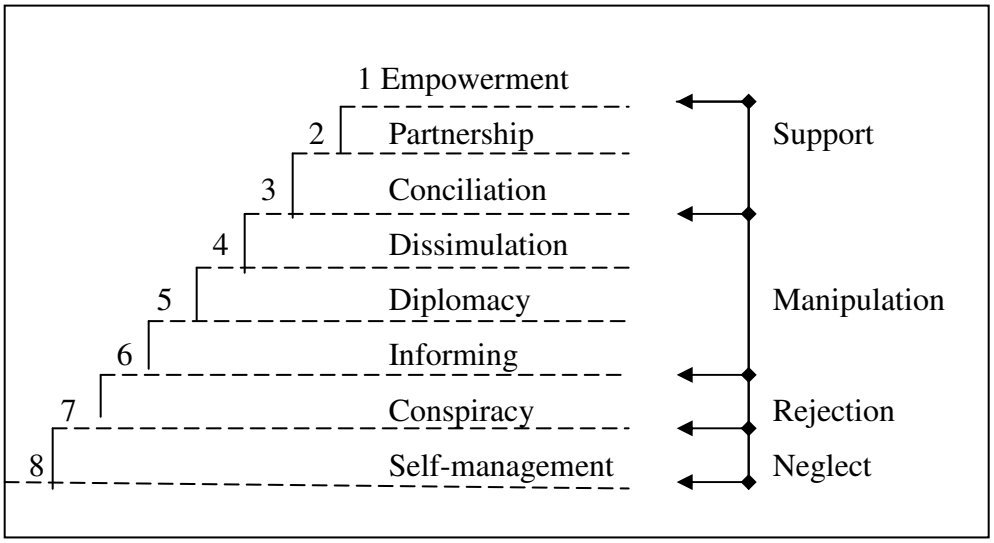

Figure 2.2: Choguill's ladder of community participation for underdeveloped countries. Source: Choguill (1996:442).

Choguill (1996) differs with Arnstein (1969) in two ways. First, contrary to Arnstein's emphasis on the role of individual citizens in public participation, Choguill emphasises the role of organized community. Choguill argues that the participation of individual citizens in decision-making would bring little benefit for the community, especially in the context of underdeveloped countries. Hence, Choguill suggests the term 'community participation' and not 'citizen participation', considering individual citizens as members and representatives of a fully organized community. Second, Choguill (1996) also highlights the strategic importance of assistance from outside in the process of community participation whether it comes from government or non-governmental sources. In her view, community participation is not only about enabling the citizenry to influence decisions in the political arena regarding issues that affect them, 'but also a means to obtain, possibly with outside help, the basic needs which would not other wise be available to them' (Choguill, 1996:435).

An important lesson that emerged from Choguill's (1996) evaluation of community participation in development projects is that there appear to be far more constraints in the underdeveloped countries as there in the developed ones. Considering the nature of services required and the time involved, these constraints are not just political and financial, but also technical and motivational. Choguill (1996) remains optimistic, however, that 'where there is no political restraint to community organization, the other constraints can, in most cases, be overcome' (*ibid*.:434). She concludes that the different levels of community participation depend on the governmental attitude towards the community (*ibid*.).

Thus, in the fortunate case of supportive government, one of the top three levels of community participation (empowerment or partnership or conciliation) could be achieved. Not-so-supportive governments normally hide their attitude towards the poor by resorting to various types of manipulation. When the poor are not neglected but seen by the government 'as inopportune and unwelcome group to be eradicated at any cost' (*ibid*.:442), the government uses clear opposition measures. This is usually manifested as destructive top-down government interventions, which stimulate violent community reaction. Finally, in extreme circumstances when the government disregards the poor, bottom-up self-management initiatives originating from the poor themselves or from NGOs emerge (*ibid*.).

The centrality of the governments' attitudes towards the inclusion of the poor in decision-making highlighted by Choguill (1996) is also a key factor in John Abbott's (1996) analysis of community participation approaches. Abbott (1996) describes the governments' support or rejection of the poor by using the terms 'open' or 'closed'. In the former situation, the government is open to the involvement of communities in decision-making process whereas in the latter it is closed to such involvement (*ibid*.). Due to the inevitable varying degrees of government openness, Abbott (1996:115) embraces the idea of a continuum 'but not the conventionally perceived continuum which sees a steady transfer of power from the state to the community'. Instead, Abbott's continuum

reflects the degree to which the state is prepared to delegate responsibility for aspects of the decision-making.

The two approaches to measuring participation in policy-making discussed in this section offer useful insights for developing a framework to assess participation of informal settlement communities in policy-making. However, each of the approaches has its own merits and limitations. Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation emphasises the distribution of power between governments and individual citizens in the processes of policy-making. Its limitation, however, is underlined by the fact that it is based on the analysis of individual citizens' involvement in policy-making in the United States; a context that differs significantly from the context of the developing world. Conversely, Choguill's (1996) and Abbott's (1996) analyses are useful mainly because they draw on experiences of community participation in developing countries, thus they both emphasise the involvement of communities, not individual citizens in decision making. Their limitation, however, pertains to the fact their analyses are based on community participation in localised development projects and not in policy-making processes.

Drawing on the two approaches, the following elements are, arguably, critical aspects in assessing the participation of communities living in informal settlements in policy-making. First, public participation is about allowing for the deliberate inclusion of those who are politically and economically excluded in the processes of resource allocation. This means that people living in informal settlements need both collective empowerment to influence policies that shape the future development of their cities and substantial empowerment in terms of accessing basic services and infrastructure.

Second, the level of participation is measured by the degree of control which participants exercise in shaping the outcome of the policy-making process. Consequently, certain practices may be considered degrees of non-participation as they do not achieve any degree of control. These non-participatory practices may include top-down information dissemination, visits to neighbourhoods, attitude surveys, or even placing community

representatives in rubber-stamp committees to educate them or 'to engineer their support', as Choguill (1996:438) puts it.

Third, the attitude of the government towards informal settlements is essential in assessing the level of involvement of these communities in defining policies. In the cases of open and supportive governments, higher levels of participation are likely to be achieved. Openness, here, could be measured by the degree to which the government is willing to delegate responsibility for aspects of decision-making to the public, as well as accepting the involvement of community and civil society organisations that are truly rooted in informal settlements.

Fourth, the nature of decisions to be made is another vital aspect that defines the level of involvement of informal settlement communities in policy-making. More complex decisions tend to limit the participation of such communities. Complexity of decisions is a function of various dimensions that include the type of decision (social, economic, political, financial, etc.), the number of variables involved, and the degree of interaction with different levels. In this case, assistance from outside (whether from government or NGO) becomes critical in assisting these communities to participate meaningfully.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed literature on different definitions of the concept of participation; two contemporary theoretical perspectives on the participation of disadvantaged communities, namely the rights-based approach and the communicative action theory; the important role of civil society; and how to evaluate levels of public participation in policy-making. I have shown in this chapter that participation was, and still is, a contentious concept. There have been several shifts in understanding the concept throughout the past six decades, during which the idea of participation has meant different things to different people at different times. While some policy-makers and scholars emphasise the instrumental value attached to the concept, others see participation as an empowerment goal in its own right.

In defining participation, Arnstein (1969) emphasises the involvement of individual citizens in policy-making, while others, particularly in underdeveloped contexts (Abbott, 1996; Choguill, 1996), underscore the significance of community involvement. This distinction gives a special significance to the role of community-based associations and new social movements in facilitating the participation of informal settlements in city-level policy-making. Also, Abbott (1996) and Choguill (1996) limit participation to the project level while Arnstein (1969) elevates it to the policy level. In contrast to the literature reviewed but building on the definitions it offers, and for the purpose of this study, I use the term participation to refer to a process of meaningfully involving individual citizens and/or organisations representing their communities, especially those who are disadvantaged, in making policies that address their needs and influence the future of their city.

The two theoretical perspectives on participation reviewed in this chapter, namely, the rights-based and communicative action (see subsections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2), support the idea of involving citizens and their organisations more directly in processes of making policies that address their needs and shape the future of their cities. While the rights-based interpretation stresses the right of people to be involved in making decisions that affect their lives, the communicative action theory focuses on the quality of the involvement. Enabling citizens to engage directly in processes of addressing urban problems and making their demands directly to state bodies, is believed to improve understanding and contribute to the quality and implementation of public policies.

In looking at participatory practices, it is important to recognise the assumption that when those living in informal settlements participate in policy-making they seek both political empowerment and access to basic services (Dagnino, 2003). The implication of this understanding is that participatory fora for informal settlement communities need to focus on issues that relate to their basic needs, such as housing, urban land, water, sanitation and infrastructure, and should yield visible results (see chapter 4). It is also critical to examine the attitude of government towards the informal settlement communities and the

nature of the decisions to be made in participatory fora, because they both impact on the level of participation of these communities. As argued by Abbott (1996), open and supportive governments and less complex decisions generally offer an environment more conducive to participation to these communities.

The literature on participation also acknowledges the critical role of civil society organisations in promoting the participation of informal settlement communities. Among the various types of civil society organisations, those with stronger grassroots connections and those seeking to engage the state regarding issues of rights and access to public goods, are more likely to play that critical role. Those organisations are regarded both as intermediaries between the poor and the state and as incubators for entrenching democratic practices in society. Contrary to a neo-liberal view that civil society organisations should remain autonomous from the government and other political players, emerging trends in Latin American countries show that organisations with strong ties to political actors are more capable of representing the poor and achieving benefits for them. However, it is equally important that these organisations represent the poor and defend their interests. In the following chapter, I focus on the participation of people living in informal settlements, in city-level policy-making processes as a key aspect of urban management.