Introductory Report Workshop 4:
Let's work together - The involvement of inhabitants and users in process and project development

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"Working together" forms the very basis of the urban trialogues process, and is one of the key elements that can make urban projects truly strategic as well as effective. The traditional application of the concept of participation seldom moved beyond the securing of 'no objection' from those who were affected by urban plans and projects, even though Arnstein provided a whole range of options in the 'ladder of participation' as early as 1969. City consultations, promoted by UN-HABITAT in the 1980s, were a significant step forward towards meaningful participation and partnerships between major stakeholders. Subsequently, Healey's propositions on collaborative planning also brought to the fore these issues in planning theory.

The instrumentalist conception of participation advocates participation in order to increase efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of development decisions to citizens' needs, as well as improve and enhance implementation. The empowerment perspective views participation as a fundamental right of the citizen and an essential ingredient of democracy. Many argue that the two are intertwined and mutually reinforcing.

There are, of course, some major challenges in establishing meaningful and effective collaboration between the major actors and stakeholders in a rapidly-expanding urban arena. The first set of challenges relates to unmanageable city sizes and growing diversity. Involving citizens in planning for even parts of million-plus megacities is no mean task. It is in these situations that participatory urban projects at a manageable, local scale play a truly strategic role – both in terms of impact (instrumentalist dimension) but also in terms of achieving real and effective stakeholder involvement (empowerment perspective on participation). Another issue linked with size is diversity, including, first and foremost, the extreme income diversity and gaps between different socio-economic strata found in all developing countries.[1] Furthermore, cities are today a multicoloured mosaic of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural groups. Bringing them together in a common participatory process, allowing equal access to men and women, rich and poor, ethnic and religious minorities and other vulnerable groups, is not merely a significant challenge, but often an unsurmountable obstacle, in urban planning and development projects. Selecting who to involve and why, as well as who not to involve, are important aspects here. Who represents the community, and how can it be confirmed whether they are truly the voice of the constituency they claim to represent, are important questions.

The next set of challenges pertains to identifying the most suitable modes of "working together". What do the concepts of 'participation', 'involvement', partnership and co-production mean in different contexts? Are city consultations an adequate platform for

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[1] Today, about one third of the world's urban population – nearly one billion people – lives in slums. Asia has about 60 percent of the world's slum dwellers, Africa some 20 percent, and Latin America around 14 percent (UN-HABITAT 2003b).

securing participation and building partnerships, or are more specific instruments required, such as urban pacts, policy agreements and institutionalized partnership arrangements? What are the obstacles to developing and implementing such arrangements, and how can these be overcome? How can we deal with issues of power? How can the values and interests of different stakeholders be reconciled? At which stages of planning and/or project development can stakeholders be involved? What is the role of planners in this regard?

The cases presented in this workshop try and address the questions listed above and bring to the table a wide spectrum of perspectives. They represent developed and developing countries, metropolises and small towns, neighbourhood and city-level interventions, governmental and non-governmental viewpoints. They also offer differing (sometimes clashing) points of view on the feasibility of achieving meaningful participation of the community in planning and projects. For instance, Sanja Simeunčević argues in her case study of Novi Sad that while citizens' groups can influence some projects, the dominance of powerful elites and bureaucrats in the broader planning processes is difficult to change, and that 'real' participation is only a chimera. Carlos Furtado also examines the celebrated participatory budgeting approach adopted in Porto Alegre with a critical eye, and concludes that in fact the local demands formulated through the participatory budgeting process were not included in the strategic plan(s), and where local-level housing interventions were undertaken, they actually served to exacerbate exclusion through processes of gentrification.

Luxin Huan, on the other hand, describes how public participation is increasingly taking root in planning processes in China, and uses a case of neighbourhood planning and regeneration in Yining city as an illustration. Similarly, Arif Yasin Chohan argues that Citizen Community Boards, established recently at the local level in Pakistan, are emerging as an effective mechanism to mobilize and engage with communities at the grassroots level. Antarin Chakraborty discusses the changed structure of local democracy and decentralized governance in India, suggesting that it presents enormous opportunities for community participation and grassroots planning and policy development in Indian cities. Karolien Dezeure et al, however, argue that an important facilitation role is to be played by planners in any such process, and that planners are often unwilling, or unprepared, to take on this challenge.

Strategic planning and strategic projects are too often seen as contradictory – planning takes too long, so it is replaced by projects. However, cities are increasingly coming to the realization that planning is required in order to provide an overall framework for urban projects. Without planning, what would make these projects strategic? Are they not simply knee-jerk reactions or flights of fancy? At the same time, planning without any projects, any brick-and-mortar interventions can be seen as too vague – it is important to demonstrate impact, both to address immediate needs but also to keep public opinion on-side. Thus strategic planning and strategic projects need to be viewed as complementary to one another, and both must involve the community through innovative mechanisms and arrangements in order to be effective. How this can be done will be discussed over the course of two days in this workshop "Let's Work Together".