The Issues of Public Participation in Garden Design Process: An Analytical Discourse

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This paper will try to reveal issues and problem in garden design process. The research applies content analysis to review some problems of public participation in garden design expressly to discourse specific issues and problems surrounding the design and space of garden design in urban fabric. The section discuss general picture concerning importance of public participation id garden design process to achieve a consensus for a better quality garden for public and community. It is anticipated that through this paper we can comprehend issues and problems of public participation in garden design process and reference frameworks in reconstructing its space for the present and the future.

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1.0 Introduction on the Overview Concept of Public Participation:

This paper aims to present an overview of public participation in the garden design especially within landscape development and outlines the current issues and perspectives in this field. The paper begins by exploring and discussing the varying definitions of public participation. The role of public participation in garden design is examined. The paper then discusses and analyses the issues and problems surrounding the incorporation of public participation into the garden planning process

Various practitioners, involved in development over the past three decades have expressed their ideas about public participation, and advocate the incorporation of public participation into the development process for a variety of reasons [6]. The notion of public participation in the garden design is not new. Arnstein [2], an urban redevelopment specialist, argued that public participation was particularly significant for the social imperatives. She designed a public participation typology in the form of a ladder [6]. For 38 years Arnstein's ladder has been a touchtone for many professionals, practitioners and policy-makers promoting public participation in development processes.

Sherry Arnstein discussed the crucial issues between undertaking an empty ritual of public participation and having the actual power needed to influence the outcome. Therefore, her ladder of public participation was intended to offer a solution to this issue. She described non-participation, shown on the bottom rungs of the ladder, as *Manipulation* and *Therapy*; these levels merely allowed the public to participate in planning but without authority. Decision makers were compelled merely to inform and educate. The rungs labelled *Informing*, *Consultation* and *Placation* are described as degrees of tokenism where the public are allowed to hear and be heard, and. *Placation* is simply a higher level of public participation in which the public is allowed to advice but does not have the power to make the decision. Meanwhile further up the ladder are levels of citizen power, which allow different degrees of decision-making. She says that the public are allowed to enter at the level of *Partnership;* the public are permitted to engage and negotiate with the authority and decision-makers. The highest levels of participation are recognised as *Delegated Power* and *Citizen Control* where the public acquire a major role in the decision-making process or even have full managerial power. One of the most obvious consequences of Arnstein's ladder is that the higher the level at which the public can participate, the greater public participation could be achieved.

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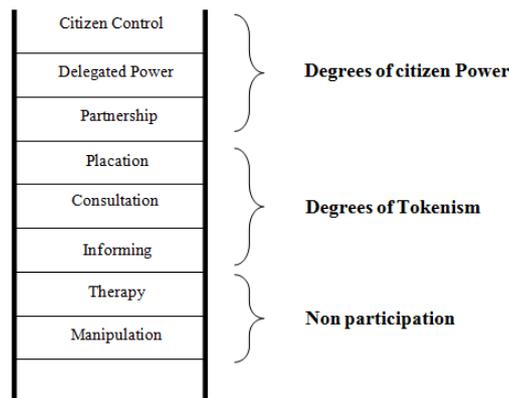E-mail:mohdyazid@upm.edu.my

Fig. 1: Arnstein's Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Public Participation.

Frequent researchers, planners and landscape professionals frequently cite Arnstein's ladder of participation; many researchers have revised and redeveloped it to suit their particular context in relation to gaining effective public participation. One of these is Wilcox [35], who he amended, Arnstein's ladder to five levels: *Information, Consultation, Deciding Together, Acting Together and Supporting Independent Community Interest.* On the other hand, Wilcox stressed that effective and successful public participation is about style and approach. He disagreed with Arnstein's ideas that the higher the level of public participation, the more effective will be the achievements gained from that participation. He argued that different interests might be seeking different levels and different phases of public participation. These ideas led him to propose some techniques to bring about effective public participation, such as providing good leaflets, video and exhibitions during public participation sessions, commissioning a survey such as a questionnaire study or in-depth discussion group, appointing a liaison office, working through the voluntary sector, setting up a consultative committee, running a Planning for Real session and bringing in consultant experts in community participation. Such guidelines were postulated by Wilcox for nurturing effective public participation such as clarifying why is it necessary to involve other people, understanding our role in public participation, deciding where we stand and which level of participation is appropriate, preparing for participation, choosing public participation methods according to their appropriateness, developing support within our organisation as many public participation processes fail because organisations promoting the process cannot deliver when others respond and developing your skills as an enabler.

Healey [16] highlighted that public participation is a close relation to collaborative planning as 'is thus not a simple recipe, but a site of contestation and struggle, both intellectual and experientially, in theory and in practice'. Added to this, Healey emphasised collaborative approaches are very concerned 'with consensus-building rather than working with the energy of conflict and contestation'. Healey also stressed the possibility of the evolution of new approaches in relation to widening the range of voices from the public and their values. Some perspectives about public participation stress that it involves unpaid work, doing something in order to benefit individuals or groups, in addition to benefitting the environment [11,23]. Roe and Rowe [28] supported this statement, noting that public participation was often unpaid voluntary activity carried out by communities or citizens who could influence democratic conscientiousness, policy-making and government.

As Roe and Rowe noted, participation is a 'voluntary activity'; the International Labour Organisation (ILO) [22] uses a similar term to define public participation as a voluntary process whereby individuals or the community can exchange and express their interests, ideas, opinions and needs in order to influence decisions or the outcome. It seems that public participation methods and techniques took root in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the subject has concerned researchers, planners and other professionals ever since [10]. However, Ericson noted that the practice of public participation was broadly accepted by the early 1990s, stimulating an increasing level of interest among NGOs, governments and academic institutions.

According to Kaufman [19], many social theorists perceive the term participation as a very broad and imprecise concept. He himself determined the meaning of 'public participation' as the public's need to develop a voice; they have to express their needs and to have a direct say in the resolution of social matters. As a result, he simplified the concept, stating that the historicising of the idea of public participation emphasised the process of change and the dynamic of empowerment, and that of course those processes would cause conflict. However, Kaufman's statement and opinion was consciously influenced by political and democracy issues. As stated by Graves, public participation is essential as a device to make the government responsive to the needs of public and the community; as a consequence the government will be made aware by the public of any problems or issues. His point related to the decision-making process and Burke pointed out that public participation always

becomes the significant voice in public decision-making. However, Burke only looks at public participation in terms of decision-making, disregarding the aspect of involving the community involvement in the implementation.

Public participation is also seen as a vital factor in achieving better neighbourhood regeneration, where physical and environmental planning and landscape design all have a fundamental role at a public or citizen level. They also pointed out that any attempt to improve the environment and housing without community involvement runs the risk of ignoring the real problems and will waste the opportunities provided by local government. The lack of public participation in neighbourhood regeneration processes seriously degrades the quality of any development. This idea is discussed by Beresford and Croft [5] who asks how people will gain their rights if they have no say in them and how can services be sensitive to public need when they exclude people's opinions? As a consequence, they noted that an assemblage of words persists when people talk about public participation, words such as 'say', 'control' and 'empowerment'. And this phenomenon happens because the significant issue is about people *taking control* of their lives, of the services used, of their environment and the political worlds in which they live. Public participation is familiar with the words 'control' and 'empowerment'; but as Arthurson [3] pointed out, it is a basic democratic right for the community to have a voice and opportunity to speak about issues that directly concern their lives and where they live. In addition, Arthurson believed that involving local communities in public participation could bolster neighbourhood regeneration, and Power mentioned that local communities should be provided with some ongoing commitment to increase a sense of responsibility for projects and development. However, that situation is unlikely to be an easy one; public participation could create conflict by setting one group against another. Taken as a whole however, both put an emphasis on the people's right to have a say and be involved in the services they use in the neighbourhood in which they live.

2.0 *Public Participation in Garden Design Process:*

Incorporating public participation in garden design is not a new concept. In fact as stated by Baum [4], it has long been implemented in some communities as a way to avoid unfairness in development process decision making. The integration of public participation into planning and development processes involves interacting with social or community groups, resident within a defined geographical area, in initiatives to enhance their space or neighbourhood. This could involve economic, cultural or social issues [24].

Healey [17] highlighted that garden design is not an isolated process just for practitioners and planners, but should respect all participants by giving them a voice, and by listening to their opinions in order to learn their values, images and identities. The author agrees with Hillier on the importance of planners and professionals dealing with local people when planning and designing garden and public spaces: 'planning cannot achieve empirical reality through the work of planners and designers alone'. Concurring with Hillier's statement, Albrechts and Denayer believe that if design and planning is to be taken seriously in the future, planners and related practitioners must adjust both their 'tool-kits' and mindsets to the changing needs of communities and the challenges of democratic society.

3.0 The Issue of Public Participation in Garden Design Process:

Nevertheless, the concept of public participation in development has been problematic in recent decades in both developed and developing countries [9]. Guha [15] noted that the problem was driven by a variety of contexts. Some of the issues concerning public participation in the design and planning process are identified and discussed from the varying experiences of planners, landscape professionals and other practitioners and discussed in this sub-chapter. It is important to identify some of the issues highlighted by experienced practitioners, as this could help to determine issues of relevance for the research.

3.1 Lack of Information:

Smith identified that people were hesitant to participate in any community activity when there was a lack of information to enable responsible action. He explained that in general, people do not know how to act and they will ignore public participation until they receive adequate information. Smith's statement could be generalised by saying that the public volunteer to participate only when they have better information and knowledge of the situation. In addition, he (1999) also highlighted the issues; first, the lack of accessible information about public participation in newspapers, magazines, on websites, television, radio and public notice boards; second, of the dearth of understandable information from the public as they often had negative views about participation. Smith claimed therefore that there were several issues related to the lack of information, for instance accurate information, relevant information, and timely information.

3.2 The Dilemma of Cost and Time:

Engaging the public directly in public participation carries a cost and takes time, and planners and decision-makers perceive these as constraints [34]. Acquiring information from the public is also time consuming and it

possibly expensive. Tyler also argued that planners and local authority are concerned about the financial cost of public participation. Correspondingly, Lowndes *et al* [22] noted that those participants who sacrificed their time, as a result felt committed to the public participation experience; they gained the capability to benefit from their investment.

3.3 Conflict between Local Authority and Public:

Many planners, urban designers and landscape designers perceive public participation as a burden as it requires them to possess certain skills in dealing with anger, strong emotions, shifting agendas, suspicion, conflicting parties and more [13]. Hoch [18] and Forester [12] 1999) both argued that conflict between authorities, planners and the public often occurred because 'participation' means dealing with different styles, fears, opinions, demands, and ideas. For that reason, they claimed 'participation' could be understood as 'conflict'; to achieve effective participation requires skills in managing, supporting and dealing with conflict.. This issue reinforces the fact that planners, urban designers and authority need several talents in addition to the technical skills of their area of specialisation.

3.4 A Negative View of the Local Authority:

This issue was discussed by Lowndes *et al [22]*, who in their research found that some people had overwhelmingly negative views of their local authority, whether it be their services, members or officers. Some researchers argued that such views were based on personal experience but Lowndess *et al* felt that such views were often delivered simply as 'common sense'. This issue could be seen as a constraining factor in achieving effective participation.

3.5 Lack of Local Authority Response:

A lack of response from the local authority could be seen as a big restriction on public participation. The public are deterred because of their perceptions of the local authority as 'not doing anything'. In this context, the public felt disappointed when the local authority asked them to participate, but then did what they wanted anyway, regardless of public needs and response. Lowndes *et al* (2001) argued effective public participation requires the redesign of decision-making processes to take public opinions and ideas into consideration. Even if the final decision is against the majority public view, the local authority needs to inform the public about the reasons for the final decision; otherwise the result will be an increase in the gulf between local authority and the public.

3.6 Lack of Local Authority Experience:

Numerous factors have contributed to the failure of public participation exercises in planning and design over the past 50 years insufficient experience was one reason for poor planning and design [27,8,31]. Steelman and Ascher [33] stated that the lack of experience shown by the local authority was a major reason for ineffective public participation. However, they were left to grapple with this situation unaided, interpreting and rationalising the idea according to their own perceptions, and misunderstanding the concept of public participation [30]. Hence the local authorities, planners, landscape professionals and urban designers need to develop their efforts, appreciation and experience of public participation.

3.7 An Interruption of Bureaucracy:

Excessive bureaucracy can be seen as a major constraint on public participation, affecting decisions and outcomes. Berry *et al* stressed that excessive government bureaucracy did not reward any public participation programme as the government did not see it as giving the public real decision-making power. Support for this interpretation comes from Kweit and Kweit [21] they argued that bureaucratic norms, such as efficiency in decision-making, were seen as conflicting with public participation norms. They noted in this context, that participants could argue their lack of empowerment and rights in the decision-making process as the government bureaucracy could change their consensus without notice. In additional, this situation caused a bad impression and perception of the local authority and often contributed to dissatisfaction with the outcome of public participation. It leaves a negative impression, as public participation mandates have not often been sincere in their intent and the public perceive it as being part of the political interaction between agency politics and legislation. Ultimately, the public lose their trust and confidence in the local authority and decision makers.

3.8 Lack of Public Interest:

One of the major hindrances to public participation in planning and design is the assertion that the local community is not really interested in becoming involved. Local authorities and professionals view this as a critical problem contributing to the failure of attempts at public participation. This issue is highlighted by Kok and Gederblom [20].

"The question whether people really know what they want and what is likely to be in their best interest is another area of concern that is frequently cited. It is often said that people need to be protected against themselves. This notion implies that people are ignorant and need to be steered in the right direction by those who 'know better', presumably the professional experts"

Botes and Rensburg [6] responded to this issue by stating that the public's lack of willingness to participate is probably caused by past experiences of public participation where expectations were not fulfilled. On the other hand, the World Bank had to learn the difficulties of involving people in public participation: the country does not have a social tradition supportive of public participation; there is inadequate appropriate technology and the government unenthusiastic at the idea of building public participation into its projects designs.

4.0 Conclusion:

As respond to the discussion above, Botes and Rensburg [6] argued that that the public's lack of willingness to participate is probably caused by past experiences of public participation where expectations were not fulfilled. On the other hand, the World Bank had to learn the difficulties of involving people in public participation: the country does not have a social tradition supportive of public participation; there is inadequate appropriate technology and the government unenthusiastic at the idea of building public participation into its projects designs. This study has shown that the nature of public participation is both to share and gain benefits for individuals, groups and the environment. Public participation is usually unpaid; it requires the authority to spend time with a community and professionals, and results in a joint decision-making process. This study has explained that the concept of public participation took root in the late 1970s and early 1980s following the use of Arnstein's typology of participation as a reference point in research and planning practice History shows that public participation has been long implemented in garden planning and design process to ensure equality in the decision making process and to gain consensus. In order to understand it expansively we need to reveal multiple layers of issues and problem as public participation can be continuously applied into garden design process. It is expected that this paper can begin more critical discussion regarding this topic in the future of garden design process to achieve a proper planning process with the object of creating a better quality environment for the community.

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