



## COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE AND THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONERS: A CASE STUDY OF WOODSTOCK AND SALT RIVER, CAPE TOWN

Willard Matiashe and Naeemah Sadien - Development Action Group

Contemporary forms of participatory arrangements in South Africa have been dominated by mainstream conventional architectural and planning practices, which run the risk of being purely ‘tick-box’ exercises. In many instances, public engagement processes leading up to key urban development decisions have been dominated by middle class and or powerful local leaders with vested political interests. The lack of representation of the urban poor in participative forums seriously undermines the constitutionally envisaged aim of ‘deepening democracy’.



PHOTO: DEVELOPMENT ACTION GROUP

ALL THESE FACTORS necessitate the need for innovative methodological approaches to promote collaborative relationships within and between government and civil society. The term collaboration as used in this article implies multiple stakeholders and role-players engaging in a process designed to influence decisions that affect them. The term stakeholder implies any individual or collective with

interest in the outcome or decision made. There are many different objectives and circumstances that offer various stakeholders appropriate platforms to collaborate. The objectives underpinning the desire to collaborate may be motivated by the urge to force a particular position or could be a result of circumstances offering opportunity to influence and/or settle disputes.

Given the current development context of South Africa, collaborative relationships within the urban sector have the potential to influence processes to become more inclusive, integrated and sustainable. Collaborative practice is an important cornerstone to participation and engagement and requires skilled development practitioners to facilitate an equitable and inclusive process; this skill is acquired through reflective practice of practitioners often positioned within civil society organisations. In South Africa, many NGOs possess the relevant skillsets and expertise, gained from their active engagement in neighbourhoods as intermediaries (Adler, 2016; Architecture Sans Frontières-UK & Development Action Group, 2016).

This article highlights methodological approaches for facilitating community collaboration and relationship building within and between government and civil society. Based on DAG's experience in facilitating community collaboration in Woodstock and Salt River over the last three years, the article highlights the dynamic tensions that often lie within and between collaborative relationships among citizens, civil society and the public sector.

## UNPACKING COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

The term collaboration originates from the Latin words *com* (prefix together) and *laborare* (verb to work). It refers to a process where parties, seeing different aspects of a problem or issue, mutually explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Gray, 1989). Collaborative relationships are complex, multi-dimensional processes characterised by constructs such as shared interest, negotiations, and dependence. There are also various aspects that have potential implications on the sustainability and or dynamic tension that lie within collaborative

Based on DAG's experience in facilitating community collaboration in Woodstock and Salt River over the last three years, the article highlights the dynamic tensions that often lie within and between collaborative relationships among citizens, civil society and the public sector.

relationships between citizens, civil society and the public sector. These may include, but are not limited to inter-organisational relations, and participatory strategies available to collaborators when faced with challenges or difficulties. Other common factors and characteristics influencing a collaborative process include internal communication, external communication, membership, and goal setting (Border, 1998).

## WOODSTOCK AND SALT RIVER IN CONTEXT

Figure 1: Woodstock locality map



Source: DAG (2015)

Woodstock and Salt River have experienced a rapid form of revitalisation that has progressively changed the social fabric of the community. Contemporary residents have expressed that while Woodstock and Salt River escaped racial segregation, they are now fearful of it becoming economically segregated. It has been argued that Woodstock and Salt River cannot

Contestations in these neighbourhoods have largely been in response to big redevelopment projects that are believed to have negatively impacted the community's quality of life.

simply be reduced to 'real estate value' (Sadien, 2017b) but is a neighbourhood that has been built on decades of human relations that speak to a quality of life unique to Woodstock and Salt River. The area is characterised by mixed income, high density, public transport, and is multi-racial, inter-faith and has diversity of nationalities – elements which truly reflect the aspirations of national development plans and local policies.

Contestations in these neighbourhoods have largely been in response to big redevelopment projects that are believed to have negatively impacted the community's quality of life. The residents and community-based organisations (CBOs) that have been engaged thus far (as part of DAG's organising work) have expressed they are not anti-development or investment (Sadien, 2017a), but are against being excluded from the City of Cape Town's urban renewal initiatives. Equally so, the change is worrying for the marginalised and local residents who are likely to end up victims of market-led displacement. The eviction of families is currently a point of contestation between policy makers, various activists and residents.

While gentrification has pushed low income households to city peripheries and consequently triggered civic activism, the few residents surviving gentrification have spoken about a unique quality of life and shared community values threatened by a booming property market. As one resident stated, 'Salt River used to be the hub, we had places like Bonwit, Rex-Trueform and the streets were filled with brokers on either side selling fresh produce where people walked in droves, either to or on their way from work' (Sadien, 2017b). Now, many residents feel

like strangers in their own backyard stating, 'there is nothing for us except coffee shops on every other corner and places we cannot afford to eat at, buy from, and enjoy' (Sadien, 2017b).

The newly developed bicycle lane in Albert road came along with its own contestation. Local businesses expressed their frustration at the loss of customers since its development and residents shared their grievances of being prevented from parking in front of their homes – some have incurred additional parking charges and fines of up to R1000 (Sadien, 2017a). All these issues and concerns set the basis for a shared intent or the least they necessitate collaborative relationships between concerned stakeholders in Woodstock and Salt River.

### RE-IMAGINING WOODSTOCK AND SALT RIVER – TOWARDS A COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

In 2014, DAG embarked on a process aimed at enhancing collaborative relationships within and (in) between citizens, civil society and the public sector in Cape Town's inner city suburbs of Woodstock and Salt River. This process was two-pronged, seeing DAG playing the role of stakeholder and principal organiser.

### DAG AS THE STAKEHOLDER

In early 2016, following a series of strategic meetings and workshops in 2014/2015 between DAG, the National Association for Social Housing Organisation (NASHO) and the City of Cape Town's Spatial Planning & Urban Design and Human Settlement Departments, a decision was taken to formalise the collaborative working partnership into an inner city Project Steering Committee (PSC). The PSC was focused on unlocking social housing opportunities in Woodstock and Salt River through a coordinated multi-stakeholder process, where DAG would play

a specialised role in working with local leaders, civil society organisations and the public sector to realise more equitable and inclusive neighbourhood development processes. To date, the committee members have maintained collaborative relationships in the process, although with varying degrees of vested interest.

## DAG AS PRINCIPAL ORGANISER

The second approach was the collaborative issue-based organising work which saw DAG playing the role of the principal organiser in the process. The adoption of this approach was informed by a series of engagements, meetings and workshops with partners, including expert organiser and facilitator Josie Adler and Architecture Sans Frontières - UK between 2015 and 2016; this provided the framework and refined the approach for DAG's collaborative work in Woodstock and Salt River as a principal organiser.

In 2015, DAG, in partnership with Architecture Sans Frontières - UK, hosted a ten day participatory Change by Design workshop with residents in Woodstock. A number of strategic recommendations were made, including the need to improve stakeholder coordination and to enable opportunities for meaningful citizen participation in Woodstock and Salt River within and between the state and private sector. The recommendation was to go beyond simply questioning the status of market-led regeneration, to facilitating new partnerships between developers, corporations, small businesses, and residents to act on areas of common interest through a shared social compact.

In 2016, the abovementioned recommendations were further explored through a series of follow-up meetings, learning exchanges and seminars. The most notable follow-ups were the seminars hosted by DAG on community-led neighbourhood regeneration and inner city affordable housing. The seminars

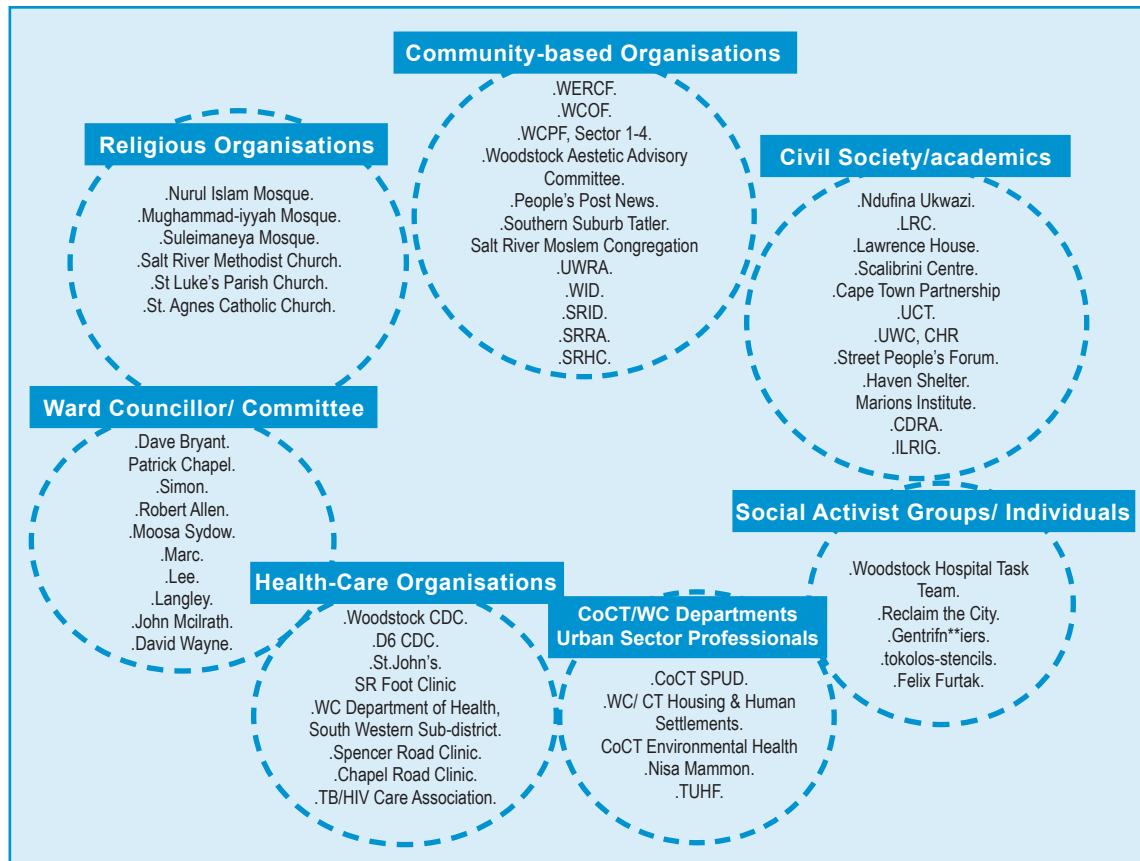
surfaced the importance of adopting an issue-based organising methodology – noting lessons learnt from inner-city suburb of Hillbrow, Joburg. Keynote speaker, Josie Adler, a community organiser for the eKhaya Neighbourhood Project, clearly articulated the importance of a collaborative practice which goes beyond mobilising citizens to facilitating a process of collaborative relationship between citizens, private sector and state around aligning competing interests through the use of the organising framework (Adler, 2016; HDA, 2012).

In 2004, The Ekhaya Neighbourhood Project was initiated by social housing institutions who had invested in Hillbrow and who were eager to use the social housing investments to support and catalyse wider neighbourhood regeneration. The project was driven by a collaborative initiative between various stakeholders such as property owners, NGOs, CBOs, the local councillor and residents (HDA, 2012).

This approach was believed to have unlocked the neighbourhoods' potential to achieve social cohesion. These meetings, seminars and workshops held over a two year period were fundamental in framing and refining DAG's collaborative process initiated in Woodstock and Salt River as a principal organiser in 2016/2017

DAG's collaborative organising work as the principal organiser undertaken in 2016/2017 in Woodstock and Salt River involved the mapping of 55 active organisations, leaders and forums. Over a six month period, DAG held over 35 strategic one-on-one engagements to uncover, understand and capture their organisational issues, strategy and challenges. This process was pivotal in understanding local neighbourhood issues being resolved through local forums and associations, policing forums and neighbourhood watch groups, religious organisations, civil society organisations, academics and professionals, and health-care organisations.

Figure 2: Institutional Mapping - Woodstock and Salt River



Platforms for horizontal engagement between players and organisations in the space were created in early 2017 and it was through these platforms where shared issues were discussed collaboratively; this included supporting health-related processes in Woodstock and Salt River around the commissioning and decommissioning of the District Six Community Day Centre (CDC) and the Woodstock Community Day Centre (CDC) respectively. Also included in these engagements was the collaborative process of selecting Chronic Disease of Lifestyle Units (CDUs) and the establishment of a District Six CDC Interim Health Committee. Additionally, the organisation was a member of, and offered support to, the Woodstock Hospital Task-team, where efforts were pooled following the *SAY NO TO CAPE NATURE'S*

*APPLICATION* community meeting which responded to Cape Nature's redevelopment application (for the Woodstock CDC). The Woodstock Hospital Task-team objected to the application on the basis that the redevelopment application was inappropriate and did not meet the social development needs of the community. As a result of this collaborative initiative, Cape Nature's application was revoked by the City of Cape Town. More importantly, DAG's active presence in the space as an organiser, using an issue-based organising approach, has resulted in Woodstock and Salt River Civics requesting Development Action Group's socio-technical support to bolster their organisations.

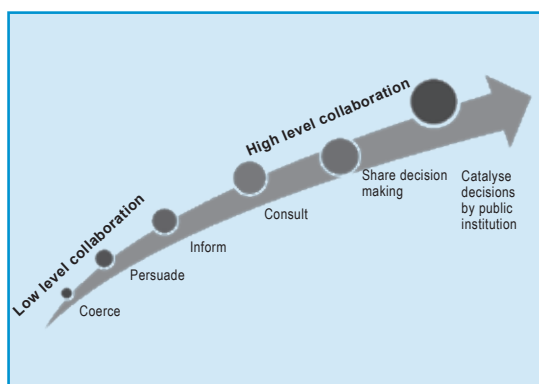
Through DAG's organising work, this process was initiated and was aimed at building collaborative

trust relations between 35 of the 55 organisations (64%) and individual change agents across Woodstock and Salt River.

## ANALYSIS OF DAG'S COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES – OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

The two collaborative approaches adopted by DAG saw the organisation playing the role of stakeholder and principal organiser. These two different roles resulted in varying levels of collaboration. When applying the continuum of collaboration modified from the Arnstein's Ladder of Participation Concept (1969) both DAG's approaches sit on the spectrum of high level collaboration, but to varying degrees.

**Figure 2: Continuum of collaboration**



Source: Modified from Arnstein's Ladder of Participation Concept (1969)

DAG's role as a stakeholder in the inner city Project Steering Committee sits at a high level on the continuum of collaboration due to the potential to catalyse decisions made by public institutions through the implementation of social and affordable housing in Woodstock. The DAG team believe that the success and sustainability of this collaborative partnership can be attributed to a number of factors:

- ✦ The collaborative process is driven by open and clear communication.

- ✦ Political buy-in in the overall objective, i.e. the provision of social housing.
- ✦ Availability of resources was not a limiting factor as the partners were all self-funded and participation in the PSC was not predicated on a client-service provider relationship which meant that all stakeholders committed to a common or shared interest which brought the collective together.
- ✦ Historical relationships of individuals serving at the PSC-level having to work collaboratively at one level or another, prior to this process. For an example DAG and the City of Cape Town had maintained good working relationships strengthened through partnership arrangement under processes initiated by National Upgrade Support Programme (NUSP) and this indirectly implies the level of trust that existed as a factor.

DAG's role as principal organiser is currently sitting on the spectrum of consultation with the intention to facilitate high levels of collaboration towards shared decision making and ultimately catalysing decisions made by public institutions, including the PSC. DAG is optimistic that continued collaboration in Woodstock and Salt River in 2017 will result in the establishment of more inclusive and equitable broader forums, networks and specific committees addressing particular neighbourhood issues, including social housing unfolding in Woodstock and Salt River. The DAG team believe that the success and sustainability of this community collaborative partnership will be attributed to a number of factors:

DAG's role as principal organiser is currently sitting on the spectrum of consultation with the intention to facilitate high levels of collaboration towards shared decision making and ultimately catalysing decisions made by public institutions, including the PSC.

- ✦ The diversity of active organisations, leaders and forums with a varying range of visions and missions for Woodstock and Salt River. These organisations are fairly well networked with each other and actively enjoy support from local elected officials.
- ✦ The existence of catalytic issues in Woodstock and Salt River has and will continue to bring organisations and leaders together. This presents the opportunity to sustain collaborative relationships in the short to medium-term process. These catalytic issues include the redevelopment of the Woodstock Hospital, and the necessity to mitigate the current negative implications partly imposed by the World Design Capital revitalisation framework for Salt River.

Equally important is the degree to which these collaborative partnerships are sustainable, and this, in part, is determined by a number of factors. On the one hand it relies on the skill and ability of the facilitator to navigate complex interpersonal social relationships in order to build collaboration between actors, sometimes referred to as dynamic tension between stakeholders. Similarly it relies on the availability of resources, community interest, leadership capacity, political climate and trust between actors.

In the case of DAG's role as stakeholder in the PSC, there are no clear signs of underlying dynamic tension that could potentially hamper collaborative relationships within the committee. However, DAG was concerned about the implementation of the new Organisational Development and Transformation Plan (ODTP) which included a restructuring process at a local government level. The restructuring resulted in the downscaling of Spatial Planning Urban Design department's staff compliment that provided human resources through skills and expertise – vital to the

collaborative work at the PSC level. DAG's fear was mainly the withdrawal of influential officials from the process.

On the other hand there are there are a number of factors that pose a potential threat to the sustainability of collaborative relationships established through DAG's role as principal organiser. These include:

- ✦ Whilst many of these organisations recognise the contribution that each provided to the community, there is limited historical evidence of active collaboration between identified organisations.
- ✦ One of the emerging principal reasons that alluded to an existing tension, which DAG noted through its organising work, was competing organisational visions and missions and the lack of frameworks that enable the Woodstock and Salt River communities to collectively frame and align interest, issues and priorities. For example, the Upper Woodstock Resident Association (UWRA) is a registered Ratepayers and Resident Association, with the aim of unifying, beautifying and creating a safe environment in Woodstock embedded in improving the aesthetic character of the area alongside the Aesthetic Committee. Woodstock Community Outreach Forum (WCOF) on the other hand is not registered (not formally recognised), yet very active in unlocking public and civic nodes in Lower Woodstock to address social development issues such as youth development, social rehabilitation, and health education etc. Other organisational visions and missions straddle between UWRA and WCOF in terms of interest, community engagement and activism.
- ✦ Additionally, another important factor noted was poor inter-organisational relations. For example, poor relations between 'Upper' and 'Lower' Woodstock Civics exemplified by little or lack of

eagerness to reach consensus around shared intent for the neighbourhood development.

- \* The tension is also evident when dealing with matters concerning which issues are prioritised, how they are resolved and reasons for selecting and using a particular approach. The tension is often exacerbated when stakeholders begin to question the legitimacy of other organisations involved in a particular collaborative process. This tension usually occurs in a process where mixed organisations are brought together with different backgrounds, i.e. those 'formally' and 'less-formally' organised organisations either registered or not on the City of Cape Town's sub-council CSO database. The other source of tension noted is leadership personalities, capacity and the diverging interest espoused by organisations representing different social classes.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, neighbourhood-level organising has proven to be essential in establishing the basis for effective and sustainable collaboration in Woodstock and Salt River. Prompted by the need to address

threatened tenure security rights and better understand the impacts of urban renewal, DAG's principal objective in Woodstock and Salt River was aimed at influencing the equitable, inclusive and sustainable regeneration of these neighbourhoods.

The two parallel collaborative approaches undertaken within government and civil society in Woodstock and Salt River, presented both opportunities and risks. DAG's issue-based organising approach has the potential to see the establishment of more inclusive and equitable broader forums, networks and specific committees addressing particular neighbourhood issues, including social housing unfolding in Woodstock and Salt River.

The principal lesson emerging from this process is that the skill and ability of the reflective facilitator in navigating complex interpersonal social relationships and divergent goals in a rapidly changing political climate is critical in order to sustain a collaborative process. For those intending to undertake similar issue-based organising collaborative processes, it is vital that they are resourced, supported and provided the space to reflect critically as a practitioner.

## REFERENCES

- Adler JA (2016) Social Cohesion in Successful Neighbourhood Regeneration. *Neighbourhood Regeneration Breakfast Seminar*, 24 August 2016.
- Architecture Sans Frontières-UK and Development Action Group, ASF-UK & DAG (2016) Re-imagining Regeneration through Participatory Design in Cape Town Workshop Report, *Change by Design 2015: Cape Town*, 2 September 2016.
- Borden LM (1999). Interagency collaborations: Addressing social issues from a Community Perspective. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 30 (1), 48-65.
- Gray B (1989) *Collaborating*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sadien NS (2017a) Woodstock and Salt River Neighbourhood Profile Report Draft, Development Action Group (DAG, unpublished). Re-imagining Woodstock and Salt River.
- Sadien NS (2017b) Regeneration is Creating Uncertainty in Suburbs. *Cape Argus*, 14 February 2017.
- The Housing Development Agency (2012) Regenerating a Neighbourhood: Useful Lessons from Ekhaya. *Case Studies*. [http://thehda.co.za/pdf/uploads/multimedia/HDA\\_Regenerating\\_a\\_neighbourhood\\_case\\_study.pdf](http://thehda.co.za/pdf/uploads/multimedia/HDA_Regenerating_a_neighbourhood_case_study.pdf)