The Uses and Usefulness of Participation

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Abstract

This paper is a study of contemporary approaches to participatory and collaborative architectural design in the UK. The starting position is that participatory design in the current context is practiced and understood uncritically; considered worthwhile regardless of whether it contribute to better outcomes. I will argue that this often leads to tokenistic practices, and taken as a trend can even be manipulative or dangerous. I find a lack of critical discourse on the subject and so the paper goes on to study theory from other disciplines to build a new critical view. The conclusion of this analysis is a proposal for a new critical framework, to be used in evaluating of participatory practice.

I aim to contribute to the architectural discourse on the subject, linking it to wider issues of freedom, democracy and alternative visions of the future. The hope is to prompt designers to reconsider their acceptance of participatory design and their role in formulating successful participation in future practice.

Figure 1: Invitation to participate, Hackney Wick, 2017.

Introduction

User participation in architectural design is generally seen as a positive practice. It is perceived a means to improving the quality of design and function, and can also be associated with wider goals such as reinforcing citizen agency and promoting a 'right to the city'. Participatory design has the potential to be a tangible manifestation of a citizen's right to 'make and remake' their environment (Harvey, 2012). It begins with the belief that every ordinary citizen holds valid desires and tacit knowledge about everyday life in the city.

Over the last thirty years, participation in architectural design has become widely used in a range of project types. It has steadily been introduced into legislative frameworks and the mainstream view of how public projects should unfold. From examining the current situation, it seems that participation is accepted as good by architects, developers and local authorities alike. The following discussion starts with the idea that participatory design is deployed without a critical approach to the claim that they are always of guaranteed benefit. Furthermore, by examining the range of ambitions in using participation, underlying motives and attitudes towards the built environment will be exposed.

There is much evidence of the *use* of participation today. In terms of its *usefulness* however, there is more to be investigated. The impacts of using participation range from being constructive with beneficial results visible in the completed design, to being unproductive; wasting the time and resources taken to involve the user. Expanding on that, I posit that using participatory design can be detrimental compared to not involving the user at all.

The first section offers a contemporary definition and summarises attitudes about participatory design today. Section two presents the lack of critique of this subject highlighting the need to broaden the discourse, and to allow the questioning of participation without being perceived as rejecting its superficially understood ideals. The following section looks to wider theoretical discourses to address the problem from a cross-disciplinary approach. Positioning the problem of participation in the interconnected world of complex humanity and urbanity positively contributes to its critical evaluation. I conclude by proposing a framework to support a more critical use of participatory design.

This paper is a call for participation to be a subject of critique. Reading into the implications of this topic, the argument widens to a need for re-addressing the link between the social and the aesthetic in architectural design. In taking a critical position, the designer can foster renewed productive participation that impacts on the built form, the ongoing occupancy and the wider social relations of the city.

Methodology

Contemporary approaches and attitudes towards participation are drawn from articles, legislation and guidelines. Edited books and articles in architectural journalism present the current setting however I have observed a lack of material covering critique of the subject and for this reason have looked outside of formally published work into a broader field. This includes grey literature, debates and presentations, as well as conversations with professionals who work in connection to participation.

Texts by design practitioners detail their specific approaches and uses of participation. These sources reveal how they intend their practice to be read by the public and the design sector, which isn't always critical, and requires analysis to unpick. A larger issue of recording and representing participatory methods is one that I don't examine, but requires acknowledgement. Self-published work and constructed photographs that show little of the process can be too opaque or even misleading for analysis of participatory practices. Besides this second-hand visual representation, I have attended consultation events in my locality to experience participation first hand.

Additionally, I borrow from fields outside of architecture, looking at texts by theorists in sociology, geography, political theory, art critique and urbanism. In going beyond architectural discourse, I aim to fill the gap of the lack of critique of participation. Through this I intend to offer new perspectives and contribute to better participatory design. The proposed framework sets out my claims for what makes critical successful participatory design practice, and prompts a more self-critical role of the designer.

In this paper, I address participation in architectural design in the UK. The sector of design I am focusing on is public projects, both publicly and privately funded, as well as other projects that involve a non-specific future user. This could be a public space or building, or speculative residential scheme.

Section 1
defining participation

Figure 2: Self-build estate, Lewisham. Walter Segal.

Figure 3: Construction of Segal's Way, 1980s.

Section 1: defining participation

In order to clarify my analysis of participation I establish a working definition of participation, setting it within its historical trajectory and the contemporary context. This will form a basis for subsequent evaluation of successful, unsuccessful, or counter-productive participation.

Working definition of participation

Participatory design is involving stakeholders, usually future users, at some point in the design process. This can consist of learning from the participants' way of living to inform the design. Inviting participation can also be used to draw out local knowledge such as; social networks, behaviour patterns and attitudes towards existing spaces. Additionally, the term covers presenting information or proposals to the participants and asking for their preference or feedback. The highest level of engagement is where participants directly influence the design, collaborating with the designer. Generally, the use of participatory design suggests a focus on the users' needs and desires, rather than prioritising the client or designer's own agenda.

Historical context

Participation in the UK first appears in the early 1970s with the growing disillusionment with authoritarian modes and utopian ideals of modernist planning. The proposition of 'non-planning' as posited by Banham, Hall, Barker and Price (Hughes and Sadler, 2000) kick-started 'community architecture' movements that depicted a new kind of architect acting as an advocate for the community. Practitioners such as Walter Segal and Ralph Erskine promoted the ability of the community to operate in a self-directed way, in self-build projects such as Segal's estate in Lewisham. Also, they favoured intensive approaches where the architect lived in or brought their office into the community, as in the case of Erskine's Byker Wall Estate in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, participatory processes were increasingly introduced in architecture, art and theatre parallel to a changing political and cultural climate favouring individual autonomy and expression. Another example of participatory design following the early community architecture pioneers is the Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative. This architectural practice advocated building design that prioritised the future users rather than the architect.

Participation was used to determine what women wanted in their homes, and aimed to build the confidence of a disenfranchised group (Grote, 1992). In this way, participation has also been associated with giving a voice to the marginalised.

In the last 20 years, there are many examples of participation led by socially conscious designers judging that the design will better respond to the user's needs. Progressively, private developers and local authorities alike have seen that, amidst a demand for greater accountability, inviting users to consultations can be advantageous. It is debatable whether this is with the intention to improve design, or to create public acceptance of potentially contentious schemes. This can be described as tokenistic participation, where the goal is to tick the box of holding the consultation, not to deliver a quality participation process itself.

Whether on the part of self-directed socially conscious architects, or by those looking to secure acceptance of a predetermined scheme, participation is firmly in the mainstream expectations of public projects. This can be seen in recent changes to legislation; an amendment to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 titled the 2011 Localism Act. These amendments, implementing the 2010-2014 Coalition government's 'Big Society' ideals, bring community input to the fore by allowing bottom-up shaping of neighbourhood plans supposedly to better reflect local needs.

As neighbourhood plans under the Localism Act develop, a range of successes and difficulties can be seen. Deptford Neighbourhood Action Group was one group that took up these new opportunities for participation and in 2016 was recognised as a neighbourhood forum by Lewisham Council. This allows the group to develop their own plan, prioritise empowering the local community, and define and defend 'assets of community value' (2017). On the other hand, conflict has arisen in Hackney where contradictory plans were submitted by two different neighbourhood groups and consequently the council rejected both (Geoghegan, 2013).

Ned Hercock, a Hackney councillor I interviewed, raised the question of to what extent the community wants to, or is able to, contribute to local planning. There is a fine line between appreciating local knowledge, and yet placing it within the context of trained expertise that can take a more holistic view. This better secures the effectivity of each small action, placing it within the time and space of a series of actions. Furthermore, there is a danger in the Localism Act conveying the idea that most problems can be solved through increased public engagement. This is misleading and therefore is another case of clarifying the expectations of the public. This analysis of local planning relates to a tension that exists in participatory design: where does local expertise reach its limits and the professional expertise take over.

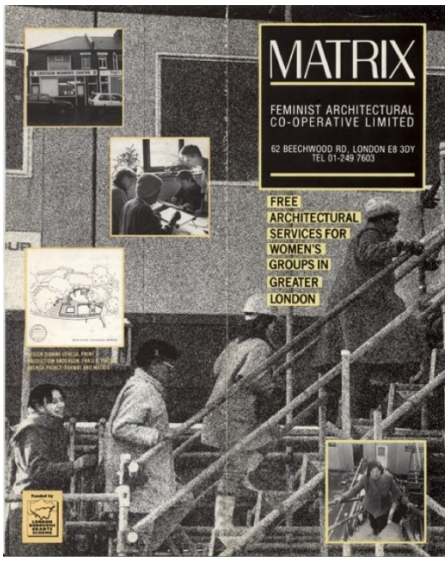

Figure 4: Leaflet for services of Matrix Feminist Architectural Co-operative Ltd., 1980s.

Figure 5: Flyer for neighbourhood forum in Hackney inviting community input, 2017.

The success of inviting community input in local planning through the Localism Act remains to be seen. It could merely be part of a politics of devolution concealing the dismantling of the welfare state, compared to actual devolution that could create a better built environment for the people. From the disparity of the examples described, it can be assumed that effectivity in community planning primarily depends on how engaged and collaborative the community group and the local authorities are. Similarly, successful participatory architectural design seems to be dependent on how socially conscious and motivated the architect is. This leads me to suggest the need for a coherent framework for evaluation of participatory processes that can be universally applied.

Current guidelines for architects

In response to the 2011 Localism Act, the Royal Institute of British Architects, (henceforth RIBA) published guidelines for architects in the form of two documents – *Neighbourhood Planning* and *Getting Community Engagement Right*. Through these documents, the RIBA shows a belief in the importance of community engagement, but also the need for clarification.

"For decades now, many architects have used community engagement and collaborative design techniques as a crucial part of the design process, essential to producing buildings and spaces that meet the needs and future potential of the end user". The document is enthusiastically positive about the merits of participatory design, but doesn't call for a critical view of its use, and whether it is always successful. I argue that utilizing participation is appropriate sometimes, rather than "essential" always.

The Localism Act introduced the 'Duty to Consult'. These are new responsibilities that the RIBA encourages architects to see as new opportunities. Thus, the role of enabler is promoted, building effective dialogue and developing a "shared understanding of places"; designing with rather than for communities. A list of 30 principles outlines suggestions for an approach to getting community engagement right. Mainly, this is emphasising inclusivity and a continual process of 'involvement' from early stages to post-occupancy evaluation. A transparent, well communicated approach is also described that educates participants as well as listens to their input. The significance of understanding the social, economic, political context being designed for, and ensuring clarity about the level of influence the community will have, is not expressed in these general suggestions. Furthermore, the case studies shown mainly utilize one-off events that focus on a 'feeling of belonging' or a 'sense of ownership'. This could be an indicator of what the RIBA considers an exemplary use of participation, however the document lacks on explaining a coherent definition of successful participation[1].

[1] One exemplar project is the Broadway Community Garden at Tilbury, Essex by muf architecture/art. In the RIBA document, the tools and techniques used by muf to successfully engage with the community, and emphasise a sense of ownership and local identity in the scheme, are listed. However, in text by the architect's themselves (muf architecture, 2005), the open-ended nature of their participation method is emphasised. This indicates the RIBA aren't promoting this kind of open-ended, community-led decision-making but are favouring a more passive consultation approach – assuming the architect will mostly pre-determine the final outcomes.

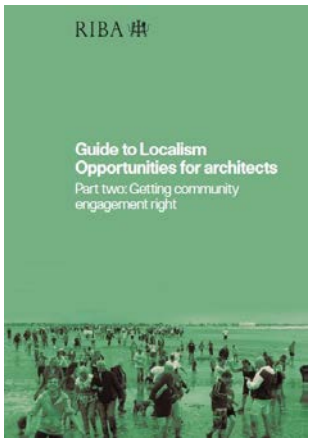

Figure 6: RIBA Guide to Localism Opportunities for Architects, part 2.

Figure 7: Broadway Community Garden, Tilbury Estate, Essex. Exemplar project by muf architecture/art in the RIBA Guide to Localism, p 9.

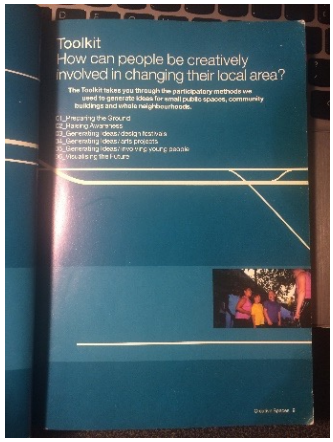

Figure 8: Creative Spaces: a toolkit for participatory design, The Architecture Foundation, 2000.

Secondly there is ‘Creative Spaces: a toolkit for participatory design’, by the Architecture Foundation (henceforth AF) published in 2000. The AF is another prominent voice that informs the mainstream profession and encourages new ideas.

The AF document promotes creative approaches, with a caution that the increasing demand within urban regeneration for participatory practices might result in dull, unimaginative methods. Methods of participation are examined in this short booklet, rather than critically examining the ambitions of their use. The subject is introduced, however, with some reference to ideas of promoting civic ownership, democracy and holistic thinking in architectural design.

The document was published at a critical moment in the rise of the mainstream acceptance of participation. However, while progressive in its focus on methods, this publication also falls short of examining the means and the success of results together. There are some references to the importance of evaluation, but guidance on measuring success isn’t provided. The methods are evaluated, focusing on making engagement inclusive and transparent, but not whether the methods benefit the result.

The two publications described come across as hesitant and superficial. This is likely to be down to the context in which they were written, and the pressures they were under, underpinned with an aspiration to remain politically neutral. Any action in the built environment inevitably deals with social economic relations and is therefore inherently political. Regrettably, sometimes architectural critique avoids the political. As an architect, you can be perpetuating the status quo, or working against it but the production of space is never politically neutral.

It is proven, therefore, that the current situation is one of general acceptance of participation. This assumption is what blurs the boundary between architects proposing user involvement for better designs, and those engaging with pacifying participation, acting on behalf of a client who retains the decision-making. Even within professional guidelines, architects are not asked to assess the ambitions of use. When participation is used to gain favour with the local authority for example, rather than a sincere interest in involving the user in the process, it can be described as ‘pseudo-participation’.

Consultation for a feasibility study for Clarnico Quay: a temporary 'Meanwhile Use' community proposal in the former Olympic park. In 5 years' time, it will be replaced by a luxury residential development. Development led by LLDC. Participants, mostly local residents, are asked to suggest what they think is missing, what can be improved and what new spaces they would like to see on the site.

Figure 9: Flyer for Clarnico Quay feasibility consultation.

Figure 10: Photograph of a consultation activity.

Figure 11: Ideas chalk board on hoardings around site.

Figure 12: "RIP Hackney Wick" and "Skate Park" - responses to the development.

A critical response

Pseudo-participation

Pseudo-participation is a concept taken from *The Nightmare of Participation* by Markus Miessen, architect, critic and writer (2010). Miessen is critical of participation linking it to political theory and exposing a token participation practice that pursues false consensus rather than real engagement. Miessen proposes Chantal Mouffe's alternative model of 'conflictual' consensus to be more productive. I posit that pseudo-participation becomes dangerous when the public is falsely appeased of having influence in the project. 'Managing expectations'[2] could become manipulative if the user is misled to believe what they can have influence over – and how impactful that will be in reality.

Another example of the term participation being misconstrued is the suggestion of collaboration or 'co-design'. I don't think it is possible to use co-design in a large-scale project. Calling it so seems to relieve the lead designer of their design responsibility as well as implying an equal status with the participant. Furthermore, I suggest that the cosmetic aspects of a scheme that users are often invited to 'co-design', are the least important part. Therefore, on one hand there is token one-way consultation and on the other, token co-design.

Thus, when real decision-making is retained by the designer, what is the ambition of 'pseudo-participation'? Is it simply extended research for the designer, to remind them to consider user experience? Perhaps this is a skill no longer prioritized in a trend of style-oriented architecture? In that case, it should be made explicit rather than implying an open-ended democratic process.

In London where space and land use are highly contested, many practices use participatory methods to better understand communities and how they may be preserved amidst the 'rampant urbanism' of capitalist development (Harvey, 2012). Unfortunately, this preservation is a near impossible aim within the current structure for financing of built schemes. With profit being the driver, the ambitions for strong communities are sometimes geared towards that which can be monetized anyway – a buzzy local atmosphere that can create a return in increased property value. This could be an outcome for the residential development following the Clarnico Quay project (see Figures 9-12)[3].

Here I have shown it is necessary to take a critical view of the ambitions of participation and uncover where it could be 'pseudo-participation' concealing another motive.

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[2] A director of community engagement for London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) I spoke with highlighted 'managing expectations' as one of the more important aspects in successful participation.
[3] This is conjecture; I hesitate to evaluate the scheme on successful participation as it has yet to be completed.

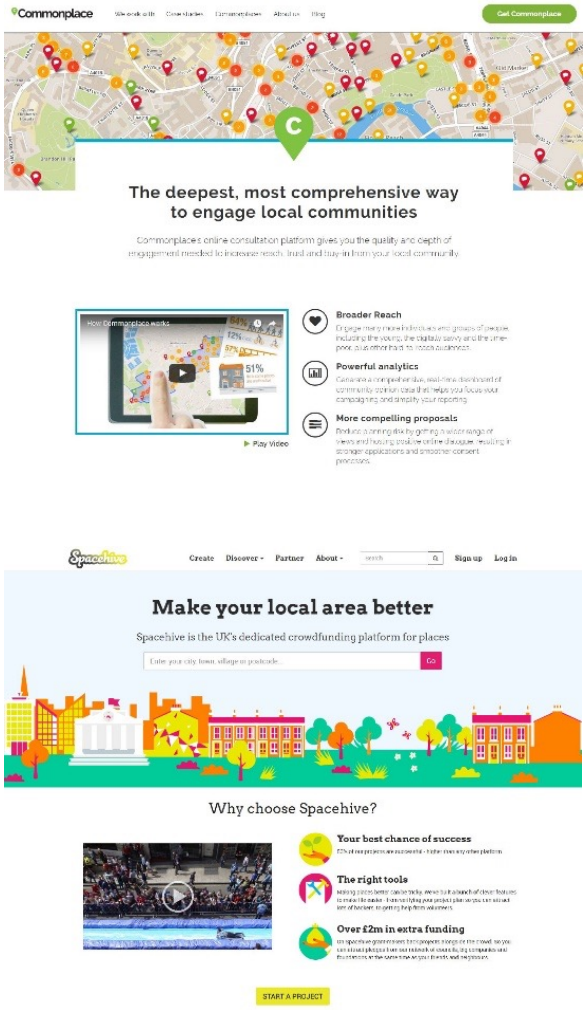

Figure 13: Commonplace, comments on local development.

Figure 14: Space Hive, sourcing funding for community led development. The effectiveness of online platforms, while increasing awareness of problems and projects, in fostering genuine participation should be questioned and not assumed.

Inclusion, consensus and communication

I have observed that the aspect most people focus on for participation today is inclusivity. The emphasis on inclusion has roots in the community architecture movement in the 1970s and 1980s, where the architects were self-styled advocates for disenfranchised communities, but is also reflective of the current societal emphasis on accountability and empowerment of the citizen. Many focus on finding ways to reach a wider demographic including, different timings of meetings, specific marketing strategies, and use of internet communication. These should be approached critically, because while important, increased participation and transparency can't be conflated with success.

Designers tend to aim to encourage as large and diverse a group as possible to participate, assuming that secures the most democratic output. Miessen frames this as leading towards false consensus when in fact a representative mode of democracy can be more helpful (Miessen, 2010). Thus, it would be more useful to focus on a productive way of reaching consensus, or dealing with dissensus, rather than purely increasing the number of participants. Furthermore, barriers in language also shouldn't be underestimated. Good communication between different groups will allow for successful collaboration and for the most information to be uncovered. A challenge for architects facilitating productive conversation and collaboration is enabling different groups to communicate with each other. It is easy to focus on the louder voices, ignoring those who are too angry or difficult. High quality communication and collaboration is therefore as important as transparency, inclusivity and diversity.

Best practice

Generally, participation best practice today is where there is an intention to go beyond token consultation. Success in this respect requires a committed and sustained effort from both designers and participants. Therefore, working to establish good relationships and trust between participants and designers is of high importance. To counter another challenge of maintaining interest throughout, a variety of methods can be used that are thoughtfully designed for the specific group. It is beneficial to see participation as a process of re-learning the context from the locals' perspective. Overall, there needs to be a continual rethinking of the brief, challenging presuppositions and permitting everything to be up for questioning by which an open-ended process is promoted.

Outlined in the following pages are some examples that use participatory methods contributing to the outcome; with an emphasis on both quality process and product.

In ‘Chrisp Street on Air’, 2013-2014, architectural practice The Decorators acted as consultants in preparation for future regeneration. The architects devised novel ways of building trust with the locals, drawing out existing priorities, social and cultural networks. These were recorded using radio, archiving, and events to establish what should be preserved in the local community. This research is feeding into current regeneration proposals by Tower Hamlets. The process brought the community together to celebrate their space and activities, and the result will be a regeneration proposal that uses this local expertise to support community and cultural life (Museum of Architecture, 2017).

Figure 15: Process - Chrisp Street On Air, The Decorators.

Figure 16: Product - Chrisp Street Market, Tower Hamlets, 2013-2014.

In 2005 muf architecture/art were commissioned to research an underprivileged estate in Essex to inform the design of a community garden. Through working with residents, the architects found that horses were important to the local cultural identity and consequently organised events titled ‘A Horses’ Tale’. This led to a specific design for the community garden that responded to the contestation of space, with a dressage arena for horses as well as play areas. The architects wished to be non-prescriptive, allowing the proposal to be open to adaptation by the users. The area’s identity was amplified through the participation events which resulted in an open-ended design that promotes a sense of ownership (muf architecture/art, 2005).

Figure 17: Process - ’A Horses Tale’. muf architecture/art.

Figure 18: Product - Broadway Community Garden, Tilbury Estate, Essex. 2005.

Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (AAA) focus on reclaiming leftover spaces in cities and empowering local communities allowing projects to constantly reinvent itself as the users decide. ECObox in Paris, 2001-2005 began with a community garden, constructed from easily found materials, so that it could be shaped and guided by the users as time went on. Subsequently it hosted workshops, events and community meals (Petrescu, 2005).

Figure 19: Process – Community desires brought together.

Figure 20: Product - ECObox, AAA, 2001-2005.

A more traditional example is Heinrich Nordhoff School in Germany, 2011-2014, by Die Baupiloten architects for whom participation is a core principle. Workshops were held to determine what students wanted in terms of specific spatial zones. The result is a unique learning space that students feel a sense of ownership of through being part of the design process and decision-making (Hoffmann, 2014).

Figure 21: Workshop including model making, Die Baupiloten.

Figure 22: Central atrium with flexible spaces as chosen by the students, Heinrich Nordhoff School, 2011-2014.

These projects show the productive use of participation for a positive outcome specific to each circumstance. Refined criteria for evaluating the success of these projects will be further investigated through this essay.

Conclusion

In applying a working definition of participation to the mainstream understanding and use, it is clear there is a wide range of attitudes towards the term. The use of participation is ambiguous in 2017 due to multiple assumptions about its usefulness and an overarching acceptance by mainstream architectural voices. This is seen in guidance for architects and legislative changes that point towards a more participatory approach. Amongst the range of different definitions, and ambitions of use, there is confusion over what constitutes participation and the expectations of participant and designer. It is sometimes misused to gain favour, or pretend a social focus, and conversely best practice isn't explained sufficiently. The mainstream profession side-lines participation, and aesthetics and tactics may be distracting from analysis of positive impacts.

The scarcity of critical discourse that I will explain in Section 2, could reveal why people struggle to define participation. This lack of clarity means we lack rigorous evaluation and comprehensive measurement of success.

Section 2
the lack of critical discourse

Section 2: the lack of critical discourse

In mainstream architecture, there is a general acceptance of participation tools as positive wherever they are employed. However, there is little critique discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using participatory practices, and indicating where they are most successful. The lack of critical discourse on the subject means that the distinctions between pseudo-participation and genuine participation aren't understood.

Proponents of participation

Firstly, Roger Katan and Robert Schiffman describe their practice from 1950s to present day in *Building Together* (2014). The participation portrayed is collaboration between the architect and the residents. In each example, Katan would move into the local area becoming personally invested in the problem and the solution. As a result, he would become acutely aware of the needs of the area, as a trusted member of the community, developing a high level of communication between himself and the users. As mentioned in Section 1, such an invested approach from an enthusiastic individual who is fundamentally convinced of his social responsibility is a rarity. Katan himself shows how his approach is not suitable in all circumstances: in some projects, he had to resign where the conditions were not appropriate the time allowed wasn't sufficient for his rigorous approach. Participatory practice should look like this, replicating the same information transfer and engagement but in a condensed manner that is feasible for most circumstances.

Secondly, *Architecture and Participation*, edited by Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till and published in 2005, covers a lecture series on participation at Sheffield University in 2003. The aim was to increase awareness of participatory design through essays by practitioners who all believe that it is important. The range of attitudes among these contributors is demonstrated. Common themes include: inclusivity; the aesthetic of participatory design; the role and status of the architect; how to measure value of such a scheme and links to public art. As such, this publication is valuable in bringing together a range of self-critical practitioners on the subject. It doesn't, however, take it to a deeper level of critique or provide a conclusive argument for how to develop future practice.

More recently, in a debate organised by the Museum of Architecture in February 2017, the question 'does user involvement create better designs' was posed. Four practitioners were invited to speak on their experience and the consensus was 'yes'. Most were employing forms of participatory design because it was requested by the client, or considered useful for informing the design, but overall there wasn't a deeply critical approach to the tool. The point was raised that user participation is most useful in shaping the brief and for in-depth site analysis. The issue of limitations, and the idea of better post-occupancy evaluation were among other ideas raised at the debate, along with a suggestion of community consultation being included in the RIBA plan of work. However, the broader ambitions of participation weren't discussed as it was assumed that everyone present saw it as worthwhile. Consequently, the discussion remained flat, and focused on effectiveness of methods, inclusion and communication, but not why participation could be useful today. The main point seemed to be gaining community support; important to the architect who is delivering a smooth process of acquiring planning permission.

I propose, then, that the problem of participation isn't the limitations encountered in practice, but its apparent exemption from criticism. Claire Bishop describes this problem for 'social art' in *Artificial Hells* (2012). She argues this exemption from criticism concerning aesthetics and the social impact is due to social art's position between the disciplines of art and social theory. The architectural profession is, by nature, cross-disciplinary: architects are expected to negotiate between aesthetic, economic, environmental and social issues. However, the profession has become self-referential, more concerned with presenting to other architects than communicating with the untrained. I think effective use of participatory design can bridge the gap in architecture between the aesthetic of the building, and the social implications of the process and the product.

Conclusion

Conceptually, participation is a valuable undertaking encompassing the promise of improving the social and the aesthetic in an architectural design proposal. However, when situated within the contemporary picture painted in Section 1, designers are often complicit in the target-driven goals of their clients which detracts from the power of participatory design. Designers are therefore placed in 'pragmatic and compromising' situations (Kaasa, 2016) where it is difficult to take a critical stance even when starting with the best intentions. Currently, a lack of criticism, critical discourse and full understanding of the ambitions of participation, means we don't have the adequate tools to evaluate whether participatory processes can or do achieve their full potential.

Section 3
cross-disciplinary theoretical approach

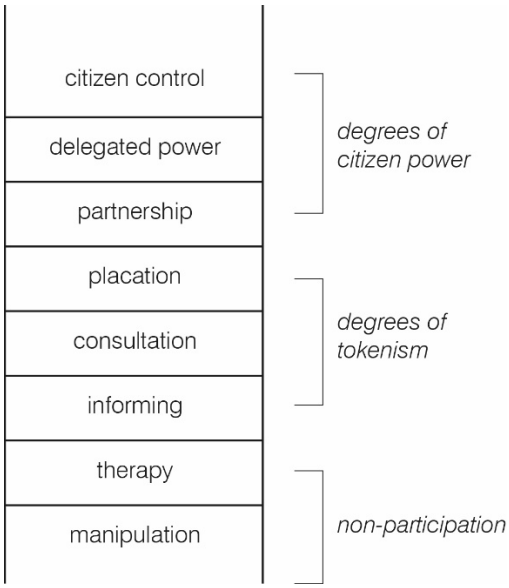

Figure 23: Ladder of Participation, original. Sherry Arnstein, 1969.

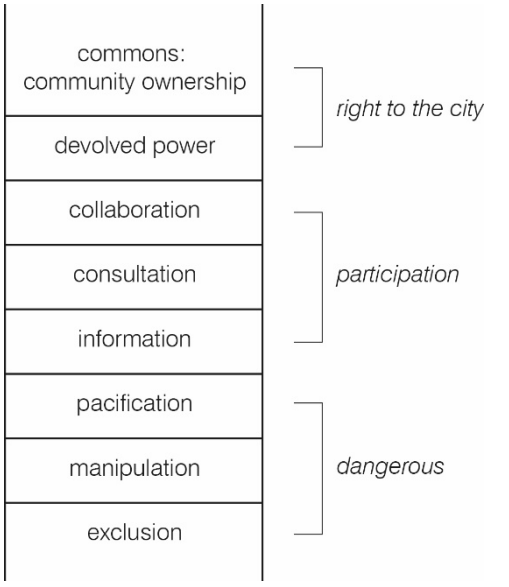

Figure 24: Ladder of Participation, edited.

Section 3: cross-disciplinary theoretical approach

In seeking to expand the topic of successful or unsuccessful participation, I am looking to critical thought from a range of disciplines. Within the wider ecology in which participation sits, there are numerous associated factors to be considered. Firstly, there is the fight for a democratically produced built environment and a universal 'right to the city'. There is also the collectivity in collaborative participatory practices that opposes individualism and isolation in contemporary society. People today have a desire for authentic design of cities that reflects their rights and needs, rather than an egotistical architecture that symbolises the power of private interests. Ordinary inhabitants feel increasingly alienated in cities that are becoming the playgrounds of the rich (Cantu, 2014). A desire for an open public architecture could a reason for today's pursuit of participation.

Ladder of participation

A basic form of evaluation is Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation', published in 1969 (Bishop, 2012). The diagram was devised for citizen involvement in US planning in the 1960s, an early stage in the development of participation. While different to the context of UK architectural design, it still bears relevance today.

In the current context, it is highly unlikely that those in control will hand over major decision making powers to the community to attain the top of Arnstein's ladder – 'citizen control'. Therefore, I'm proposing a new ladder for this context. The 'right to the city' is the top of the ladder that replaces 'citizen control' as I think that is what successful participation enables.

The pursuit of liberty can be reflected on using the 'right to the city'; a concept originated by Henri Lefebvre in his seminal text from 1968. The geographer David Harvey expands on this saying that, above individual freedom and private property, it is a 'right to the city' that is important to reclaim today (2008). This extends an individual's right to freedom beyond merely accessing urban resources, as shaping one's environment gives the right to shape oneself. Having the freedom of a right to the city allows the inhabitant to determine their own future possibilities. The right to the city is not just for an individual but relies on social relations and collective power to accomplish such changes in the urban environment. Thus, I argue that good collaborative participation goes towards reclaiming a 'right to the city'.

This desire for freedom in the city also relates to the desire for an authentic urban experience, as studied by Sharon Zukin (2010). She decries the increasing

privatisation of public spaces in New York and treatment of the citizen as a consumer rather than an inhabitant. Within the use of participation is the implicit ambition to facilitate inhabiting, rather than consuming the city.

The 'right to the city' is different to 'citizen control' in Arnstein's original diagram. The term acknowledges every citizen's right to shape their own environment, but accepts they rarely hold total control. One-way informing, two-way consultation and two-way collaboration, are levels of participation that would provide scope for improving design but not lead to full right to the city. The bottom of the ladder is categorised as 'dangerous' as these forms of participation are counter-productive. Using this simple form of analysis can help to assess a form of participation and whether it is useful.

Wider political context

The early movements of community architecture were partly initiated by the political upheavals of the 1960s, and subsequent development participation has also been influenced by political shifts. To consider broader contemporary political and social shifts, we can look at the decline in democratic participation across Europe in the last 30 years as described in *Ruling the Void* (Mair, 2013). The western idea of democracy is often assumed to be an ideal to be replicated across the developing world. However, there is a surprising turn to rejection of traditional modes of democracy. Mair explains this turn to be due to rejection of the partisan system of politics, not democracy itself. Party membership and voter loyalty is declining, with voters likely to change allegiance right up to the day of election. And he describes the general indifference towards politics comes from a spectatorship attitude to politicians who are seen to be 'out of touch' with the general population.

Mair discusses reassessing our idea of 'democracy', highlighting the need to reinvent the methods of inviting participation, to counter indifference. A simple reason for this indifference is the perception that it won't result in great changes – or at least not in what it claimed to address. What is needed then, is a re-examination of appropriate ways of communicating the public's needs and desires. It also requires looking at what they believe they can influence, and how they link systems of governance to everyday issues. There are many factors that affect how the general population approaches being invited to participate, impacting on whether they engage with sincerity. I am making the link between issues of effective political participation and design participation, as they both hinge on a citizen's sense of self in society.

FIGURE 1. *Turnout levels in Western Europe, 1950s–1990s (per cent)*

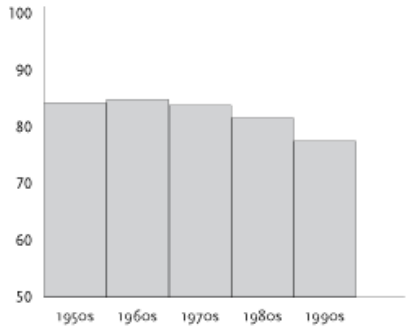

TABLE 3: *Change in party membership, 1980–2000*

Country	*Period*	*Party membership as % of electorate*		*Change in numbers of party members*	*Change as % of original membership*
		Start of period	*End of period*		
France	1978–99	5.05	1.57	–1,122,128	–64.59
Italy	1980–98	9.66	4.05	–2,091,887	–51.54
UK	1980–98	4.12	1.92	–853,156	–50.39
Norway	1980–97	15.35	7.31	–218,891	–47.49
Finland	1980–98	15.74	9.65	–206,646	–34.03
Netherlands	1980–2000	4.29	2.51	–136,459	–31.67
Austria	1980–99	28.48	17.66	–446,209	–30.21
Switzerland	1977–97	10.66	6.38	–118,800	–28.85
Sweden	1980–98	8.41	5.54	–142,533	–28.05
Denmark	1980–98	7.30	5.14	–70,385	–25.52
Ireland	1980–98	5.00	3.14	–27,856	–24.47
Belgium	1980–99	8.97	6.55	–136,382	–22.10
Germany	1980–99	4.52	2.93	–174,967	–8.95
Portugal	1980–2000	4.28	3.99	50,381	17.01
Greece	1980–98	3.19	6.77	375,000	166.67
Spain	1980–2000	1.20	3.42	808,705	250.73

Figure 25: Chart showing declining electorate turn out.

Figure 26: table of declining party membership. (see article: Grice. 2016)

The democratic urban human condition

Amidst the declining in political participation, there is also a demand for a more democratic approach in the built environment. This could be the anti-capitalist struggle, as David Harvey suggests, or demanding more control in everyday life. I use Harvey's work to link between contemporary political and economic struggles and the urban setting (2012). It is in the physical details of the city that power structures are made visible to the ordinary inhabitants. The importance of the urban environment on the sense of self and society is generally underestimated. As the geographer Ash Amin says, "the human condition and the urban condition may have become one and the same" (2013) but this isn't yet recognised across disciplines. He is asking for a holistic view of urban, social and aesthetic study. Describing the human condition as urban conveys the belief of a specific urban experience and participation looks to learn from this unique knowledge. The prevalence of the expert today can diminish this local expertise, leading to a mutual lack of trust. Good participation, however, harnesses this local knowledge to research the ever-changing urban human condition.

Freedom

Underlying the topic of participation runs the question of freedom. How free are we to 'make and re-make' our cities (Harvey, 2008), and in turn how does that affect our perception of freedom in our everyday lives? In current society, some desire greater freedom and autonomy in some form. In Berlin's important essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1958), he explores two different interpretations of liberty: positive and negative from a political philosophical approach. Negative liberty is removing interference and limitation by the state into private interests. Positive liberty is enabling open-ended possibilities and respecting the autonomy of the individual in pursuit of their own rational self and desires. By definition, participation should be promoting positive liberty in the sense that the completed design permits a space for self-determination of an individual's future possibilities. Participatory practices can celebrate the diversity of individual needs and desires, hold these together in a pluralistic mode of governance and allow for user appropriation of the city.

Educating the public of their agency in the built environment is important; as described in Colin Ward's essay collection, *Talking Schools* (1995). He promotes allowing children to claim agency in using and shaping their environment. Increasingly, children are discouraged from experiencing public space environment in the first place, amidst concerns about security and fear of crime. When children are permitted to occupy space, it is often in a restrictive context. Ward calls for a more active form of environmental education. I extend this further to say all generations need re-educating to encourage occupation of the built environment: another purpose for participation[4].

Participatory practices that respect the knowledge of autonomous individuals can lead to design that promotes positive liberty. This goes beyond the effectiveness of the project to affect social and political processes. However, "participation is not a liberating technique in itself" (Petrescu, 2005). The need for a critical approach remains as participative processes can be used to control as well. Also, there is danger in the falsely claiming to address these larger issues by allowing participants to influence the built environment.

[4] A sensitive, critical attitude towards this desire to 'educate' the public should be taken. Successful participation emphasises the value of the expertise of the ordinary citizen, and respect and trust can only develop if an overbearing hierarchy of professional experts vs. untrained participants is opposed.

Democracy

Participation pursues democratizing design: in a building's physical form, brief and operation. This aim underpins *Designing Democracy* by the Design Commission (ed. Howell and Simmons, 2015). The interrogation of specific democratic spaces is widened, by several contributors, to include the city and design processes. This is where a citizen's everyday experience of democracy lies. Similarly, broadening the scope of 'design' is discussed in *Designing Politics*, a set of papers compiled by Theatrum Mundi (ed. Kaasa, 2016). A problem of participation is that, with unclear ambitions and expectations, the notion of a democratic process is blurred. This can end with participants feeling cheated out of having their voice heard in the discussion.

A physical playing out of our democratic rights as urban citizens is important. As is recognising that the physical structures around us, their day to day operation and systems of control and surveillance, reflect surrounding intangible power structures. All public space is a product of social and political as well as physical relations (Massey, 2005).

David Harvey also details the importance of the built environment in the context of unsustainable capital accumulation (2012). Developing from Marxism, Harvey states that the city rather than the factory is the place for surplus capital production, and therefore where greater democratic control should be demanded. While participation can suggest taking control over the processes of urbanisation, it is misleading to suggest that it can become full citizen control, (see the Ladder of Participation, page 31). In participatory processes, the extent to which the participant can assume a democratic role should be made clear. Such clarification of expectations is required for democratic design.

The commons

The commons is an example of citizen control. Historically functioning on a scale of a piece of land for grazing or forest, members of the collective who owned it had the right to use the land but always prioritising the mutual benefit of the collective. This was a sustainable way of managing land and sharing resources (Bingham-Hall, 2016). In light of these benefits, the commons is currently proposed as a new way of treating urban space going beyond the binary of private vs public: a binary that may not be so clear cut. Public goods are managed by the state for specific agendas that may not prioritise the users. Conversely, increasing privatisation of public spaces indicates that what we perceive as public may not be.

Massimo de Angelis, in *Designing Politics* (ed. Kaasa, 2016), describes the idea of urban commons as democratizing design. He explains commoning to be an alternative vision of the future. If social co-operation can be reorganised around shared resources and community governance, then an alternative economy based on and sustaining social values can exist. The commons democratize market and social practices, bringing control back into the hands of those directly impacted.

I argue that participatory design processes are like an acting out of the commons within the overarching desire for citizen control. Often practitioners state they are looking to encourage a 'sense of ownership' over a space. Participation simply illustrating a vision of the future could be perceived as futile, or on the other hand as hinting at this alternative economy and bringing such ideas into the public imaginary; opening the way for change to occur in the future. This is a picture of participation *representing* a more socially responsible and integrated future, when it cannot be fully realised right now. The complicated development of that idea is that participation being used in the context of private interest, may restrict how far the whole process can depict this imagined future – as the owner wants to continue the traditional process of profits remaining in the hands of the individual. With careful use of the term 'sense of ownership', perhaps we can question how little there is *real* ownership by the people.

If respect for the members of the commons, and the knowledge they bring, is fundamental, the implication for participatory design practices is that appropriate techniques and frameworks need to be carefully designed in order to incorporate these differing voices and create a responsive outcome. Changing these attitudes to small groups at neighbourhood level could start to pave the way for a different politics and system that recognises social values above private interest and capital gain. This is the alternative economic model that Elinor Ostrom devoted her life's work to in describing how local commons could work as a sustainable model without state regulation or private control.

Collectivity

Participation calls for collectivity – the individual acting with regard to the mutual benefit of the whole. The need for collectiveness and collective action is discussed in a set of essays titled *Collectivize!* (ed. Angélil and Hehl, 2013). In this instance collective also refers to collecting in cross-disciplinary collaboration that forms the complex background to the production of urban space; described as the parliament of things by Bruno Latour. It is stated that many of the world's major problems can only be solved collectively (Ibid.). But the challenges of collectivizing are also introduced: for example, how a group, composed of many diverse interests, can productively act of a single will. In other word, progressing beyond the ideology of the collective, to a successful collective operation.

Collective freedom is more important than individual freedom (Bo Bardi, 1976). How we co-exist in society affects our sense of freedom of possibility as individuals. Architects can design for this kind of collective freedom, promoting social cohesion and recognising the value of maintaining community or its spirit. In turn it manifests in the 'cityness' (Sassen, 2015) or a vibrant social life of the streets as described by Jane Jacobs (1961).

Another aspect of collectivity to be considered, is authorship. Claire Bishop talks of the value of collective authorship in social art, and asks how we can validate it with varying degrees of hierarchy within a group of participants (2012). This question hints at the association of 'co-design' in participatory design. The value of collective authorship should be appreciated, but that shouldn't absolve the leading designer of responsibility to the design. By its nature, participatory design is inviting others to participate in a scheme led by a commissioned design team who retain design responsibility.

Lucien Kroll, an early community architecture pioneer, dealt with authorship by moving his staff around different parts of the project so that they didn't assume ownership, which would detract from the influence of the participants (ed. Blundell Jones et al., 2005). This clearly leans towards co-design and participant as designer, a problem I have raised before. As described previously, the designers can maintain authorship of a design that includes the built form, the brief and operational framework, and also the modes of participation. The design of strategies for including and maintaining participant's input, and for addressing collectivity, are part of the architect's skill in formulating a design solution.

Figure 27: Maison Medicale by Lucien Kroll, 1976. Collective authorship is evident in the 'democratic' collaged façade reflecting the collaborative design with the students who were the future residents.

Figure 28: Sensing Spaces: Architecture reimagined, Royal Academy (2014). Pavilion by Kéré Architecture. Involved participation by the visitor but aesthetic control is retained by the designer.

Collaboration

Amidst the negotiation of collective participation and action is the question of good collaboration. In *Together* (2012), the sociologist Richard Sennett describes it as an art to be cultivated. He writes of how changes in modern labour have weakened our ability to collaborate. Communication in dialogue, rather than merely sharing information, is key. Sennett promotes open-ended discussions that involve listening well and responding confidently. Such methods contribute to a generative debate rather than disagreements leading to forced consensus. This is similar to the agonistic model that Mouffe and Miessen discuss, in the *Nightmare of Participation* (Miessen, 2010). 'Conflictual consensus' is more useful than flat consensus that avoids conflict and is considered a form of 'pseudo-participation (Ibid.).

Some may be wary of participation due to the challenge of dealing with dissenting opinions. If false consensus could be avoided, and 'collaging' conflictual views together appreciated as a constructive method (Petrescu, 2005), then a participatory process would be more effective. Understanding participation in this way is appreciating the depth of lively humanity. False consensus, compromise and appeasement avoid this principle and deny the citizen's right to a unique voice. In practice, different views are given equal priority, but it is accepted that one design solution cannot encompass them all. The value is in their contribution in the process, even when not directly represented in the outcome. The product will reflect this rigorous process, by how tightly it addresses the many considerations proposed.

Thus, a challenge for architects acting as facilitators is fostering good collaboration. Participation is likely to be most successful where the participant feels their opinion, unique knowledge, and personal desires are respected as a valid form of expertise.

The role of the designer

As I have demonstrated, there are many demands of the designer in this new broadened role of a self-critical practitioner of participatory design. In establishing the aims of using participation, practitioners need to consider the intricate context of each project. Also required is an awareness of the ideology of freedom in the approach. In a commons-like situation, the designer can nurture a sense of working together for mutual benefit as a facilitator of effective collaboration and communication.

A primary role of the designer is to negotiate between the different actors involved and their expectations. Done well, the designer can prioritise the information contributed by all participants and carefully curate this knowledge. The design is in the selection and hierarchy which is just as valid a work of design as the finished built form. Furthermore, the participation process itself should considered a work of design subject to the same attention as the other processes and outcomes.

The diagram in Figure 28 shows a range of positions an architect may take in their practice. Critically evaluating the priorities of one's approach is vital to articulate to clients and users the emphasis that will be present in the design process.

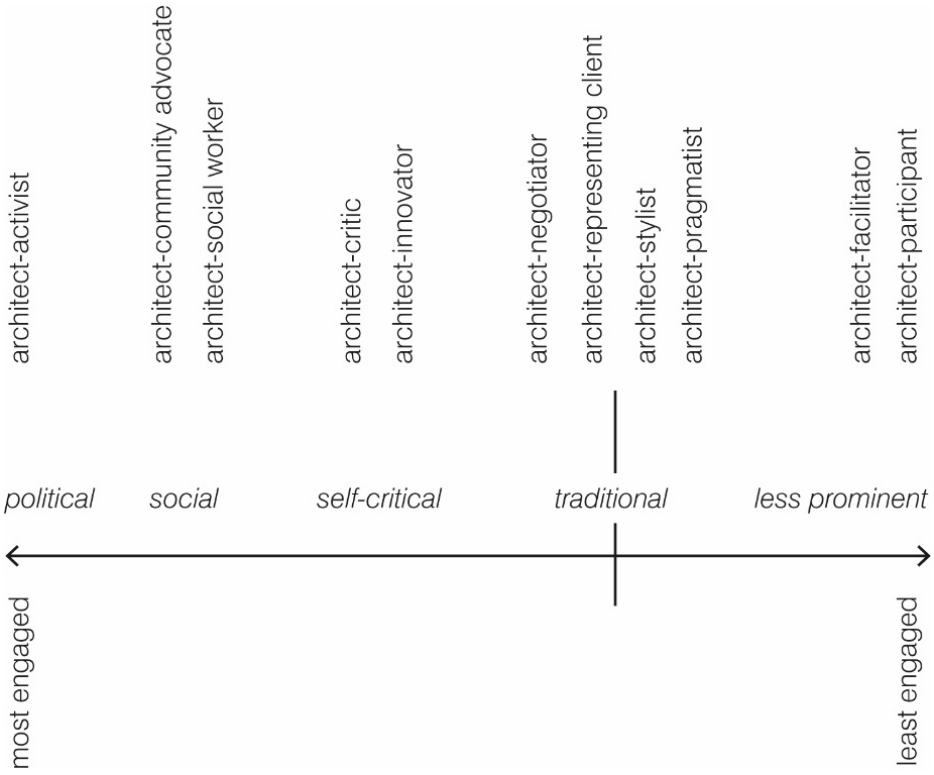

Figure 29: diagram of different emphasises an architect may take in taking a position in their practice (not mutually exclusive).

Roger Katan promotes a role for the architect which is intense and immersive (2014), as described in Section 2. This comes across as a heavy-handed approach, literally of trial and error on the ground as architect-participant, which is not easily replicable. Markus Miessen also treats the role of the designer as a primary concern in his work, but takes a more removed stance. He describes the architect as a polymath, who is expendable in the current capitalist system of valuable expertise and consultancy, but suggests that this role should be more like a 'cross-bench practitioner' (Miessen, 2010). In this way, he recognises that the architectural profession is vulnerable in an environment of specialisation and financial pressures. The response is not to retreat but to re-establish the value of the architect in their creative skill drawing various strands together to offer an effective solution.

Detachment, specialisation and retaining value in the role of the architect always seems to be the struggle with taking the critical position of the outsider. At the beginning of the emergence of participatory processes, Banham, Barker, Hall and Price published Non-plan in 1969 as a call for deregulation making space for environmental freedom and participation (Hughes and Sadler, 2000). It isn't always the case that full devolution of power will result in benefit for local communities. For the designer, it is important to take a critical view of the position they hold in approaching these processes of design, advocacy and empowerment.

Informality

While considering the importance of the design professional, I propose that informal design is important to consider as well. I argue that participatory design contains aspects of informal and loose processes: a suggestion of movements at work without the formal leadership of a design professional. In one way, participatory design practices engage with informal practices by questioning traditional modes in bottom-up approaches to the production of space.

In the debate by the Museum of Architecture (2017), introduced in Section 2, Carolina Caicedo from the Decorators talked of harnessing what the community is already doing. She stated that the architect's role is to facilitate the upscaling of these existing energies. Where making and shaping community is happening, all that is required is identification and amplification of processes with potential.

A wider implication of participation, is that it could empower participants to take an active role in other informal processes in their localities. "If people are to feel a sense of belonging to the world in which they live, an involvement in the spaces they inhabit is a good starting point" (ed. Blundell Jones et al., 2009). In an urban environment where there are endless possibilities for inhabitation and adaptation by those who claim a right to it, or have a sense of ownership over it, there is a possibility for constant transformation towards greater freedom for the citizen (Harvey, 2012).

Informalize! (ed. Angélil and Hehl, 2013), delves into the implications of issues surrounding informal building. Informal growth is the most rapid form of urban growth globally today. Seen in poor as well as rich countries, it is a response to the absence of the state (survival), or excessive state regulation (creative DIY) respectively. While informal development can be more effective for local life than a rigid top down imposition, it is vulnerable, and issues of exclusion, insecurity and instability are still to be addressed (Ibid.).

In *Informality and its discontents* (2013), Fran Tonkiss discusses the phenomenon of 'Meanwhile Use'. Originally a response to sites lying empty in post financial crisis London, they are now becoming sites of research and commerce, often incorporating participatory practices in advance of the postponed development. I observed this kind of project in the consultation for Clarnico Quay (see page 17). The phenomenon is an example of informality, in an illusion of open-use, but temporary in nature. The usefulness of such temporary projects, and the expectations of the participants should be addressed much more critically than they currently are. Public Works make a similar observation of unease towards uncritical acceptance of temporary projects, and the hype around temporary urbanism that claims to activate neighbourhoods: see *Notes from a Temporary City* (Ferreri and Lang, 2017).

Figure 30: Way-finding in Boston, Uneven Growth, MoMA

Figure 31: Sidewalk interventions, Rio de Janeiro, Uneven Growth, MoMA

Figure 32: Hub 67. Meanwhile Use in Hackney Wick.

Informality is also discussed in the exhibition *Uneven Growth* at MoMA in 2014. 'Tactical urbanism' is described as a form of intervention that is small yet impactful because of the larger issues addressed by the designer (Gadanho and Lowry, 2015). The accompanying book to the exhibition includes texts by a range of theorists who are supporting the idea of harnessing informality and examining informal processes. Yet the proposals in the exhibition seem to be limited in their scope. They appear to be part of a trend of small-scale makeshift interventions that have little long-lasting impact, rather than significantly affecting larger power imbalances as the curator of the exhibition claims.

A problem of participation is that sometimes it pretends to be a bottom-up approach. However, in most cases this is not accurate. The project belongs to the proprietor and they are inviting the user to participate, in order to create a more successful proposal. Genuine informal self-governance is fundamentally different.

Informality can be romanticized as a form of spontaneous 'self-expression' rather than an essential survival mechanism. As such, the aesthetic of participation may be extolled when it may not have anything to do with the participative method. Thus, the value of participation is demeaned to a representation. I think sometimes participatory design projects lean towards this aesthetic of urban informality. In some cases, softening the design is a way of appearing more 'friendly' and accommodating to the local population while masking an exclusive and target-driven development that has little regard for the needs of the local community.

Evidence of this use of the informal aesthetic can be seen in projects such as 'hub 67' by the LLDC. Recycled materials from the Olympic Park and makeshift features are incorporated into the design of a community centre, but the site was only made available for 5 years and soon an exclusive luxury development will replace this cute social project. The aesthetic distracted from the real intent, and only when the space is taken away will it be revealed that community provision wasn't the main purpose.[5]

[5] The shipping container aesthetic has been used by Makeshift in other projects.

Craft and the aesthetic

The parallel conversation is the elevation of craft as a noble process. It is given political or intellectual weight though the outcome may not speak of the process at all. An article in the Architectural Review describes the current trend of a return to craft for the sake of itself. This is not just nostalgia for a pre-digital time, but a reaction to financial crises where the homemade is appreciated as a response to austerity and scarcity (Wilkinson, 2017). I am relating the trend for participation with this trend for craft and a search for 'authenticity'.

In some cases, by using participatory methods the designer might only be chasing the aesthetic of an authentic, democratic process. In this way, the aesthetic skill of the architect is lost, as they adopt a participatory style which has specific rules of critique but also marginalises the practice in the eyes of the rest of the profession. Participation architecture is put in a box of ad-hoc, homemade, 'dirty architecture' (Blundell Jones et al., 2005) not considered part of a quality design-led architecture. I posit that using participatory processes does not require the architect to leave their aesthetic skill and taste behind. On the contrary, good design of participative processes and communication with the public can be an additional tool in the architect's skill set. This is a more astute response than co-opting a rustic handmade aesthetic for its visual associations.

Conclusion

By exploring literature related to participatory design, I have drawn new ways to view participation, placing it in a richer context. Through this method I am beginning a process of clarifying the ambitions and capabilities of participation.

Setting it within broader trends, such as political shifts and pursuit of freedom and authenticity, I have discussed why people may respond to participation in different ways. I have also stressed the importance of considering the level of participation, quality of collaboration and the challenge of ascribing authorship to the project. Additionally, I have highlighted the opportunities available in mobilizing pre-existing energies of informal community building while avoiding elevating the aesthetic over the substance. Finally, I acknowledge the designer's responsibility of devising suitable participation, and creatively bringing together the outcomes in an appropriate design solution.

I conclude that successful use of participation promotes empowerment of the user within an overarching aim to establish the 'right to the city'. This is a goal for the user and the wider community in a practice that starts to look more like a commons situation of individuals working together for the mutual benefit of the collective.

Section 4
a new critical framework

Section 4: a new critical framework

Summary of sections 1-3

In this paper I have described the lack of critical discourse on participatory design, as used in public projects in the UK. To set it within a richer theoretical context, many facets of the term and its associations have been assessed. Participation can impact on a sense of self in society by reclaiming a 'right to the city' and speaking of freedom and democracy in the modern Western world. It also comes down to the detail of an individual's desire in a singular project, and a part to play in organised collective action.

In a broader sense, the struggle to combine the social and the urban remains. As Bishop describes, there is difficulty in critique crossing the borders of the social and the aesthetic. Amin also argues there is an absence of cross-disciplinary recognition of the urban human condition. Additionally, Harvey posits the urban as the site for reclaiming democratic control. In many cases, citizens, designers and policy makers struggle to articulate the problem, the right questions and the necessary solutions. The lack of cross-disciplinary critique needs to be addressed so that new modes of urban living can be found that challenge the inequality and alienation prevalent today.

Furthermore, I have argued that the term participation should be clarified. As with all terminology, associations attached to words can change over time, impacting on its reception. Redefinition of democracy in the public eye has been suggested as necessary in Section 3, wider context. The overuse and tokenism of the word 'community' is also noted by Doina Petrescu, AAA (2007). The role of critical discourse is to continuously assess and redefine these terms, to clarify how they are used thereby improving accuracy of communication. A result of the lack in critical discourse is that the powerful meaning of the word participation has been forgotten. It has become a flat buzzword, taken for granted and uncritically employed.

A suggestion that came out of the debate, *Does User Involvement Create Better Designs?*, (2017), is that community engagement should be included in the RIBA Plan of Work. There is a good reason it's not a prescriptive part of the design process - although it is getting closer with trends in planning policy and the Localism Act – because there are clearly limits to the effectiveness of participation. It is necessary critically assess when and whether it would be effective for the specific project at hand.

Dangers of participation:

- temporary change, but no lasting gain
- 'managing expectations' in a restrictive or false manner
- monetizing 'community spirit' as another added value to property in the area
- seeking false consensus, purposefully ignoring those with extreme or difficult views
- pacifying and appeasing to allow planning applications to go by unopposed by locals
- using labour of community volunteers
- using participation to control and manipulate desires of participants
- masking exploitation
- suggesting permitted participation in processes affecting the built environment can replace more subversive actions of challenging the status quo – suppressing citizen power
- pretending to affect larger systems of power while furthering a destructive neoliberal agenda

Figure 33: Dangers of participation

Designating participation as dangerous describes the fear that many implicitly hold. Is this fear of 'doing it right', or fear of its potentially powerful outcomes? Seeking genuine participation, can be seen as engaging with the complexity of the human urban condition – rather than dismissing it, or reducing it to simplified abstractions. Condensing the knowledge gained should happen *after* assessing the full extent of the situation, rather than avoiding such complexity and forcing consensus. The subsequent design of a hierarchy of needs and solutions should be seen as a legitimate and necessary part of the design process in which the designer retains responsibility.

Another outcome from describing participation as dangerous, in the sense of powerful and influential, is that there are risks to be taken. An unfortunate consequence of processes being written into legislation and mainstream guidelines, is that they become softened and flatter; appeasing rather than actively presenting something new. It is a worthy ambition to take risks in pursuing effective participation, outside of a flat mainstream acceptance, aiming to establish a 'right to the city' for all.

A new critical framework

The following two pages are a new critical framework that I have constructed from new aspects of participation raised in this research. The questions do not require right answers, but the value is in requiring these questions to be asked in the first place. In this sense, good participation is critical participation. Based on the conclusion that participation can be dangerous or powerful, this framework could be used to advance participation towards usefulness and away from tokenism. More importantly, it could go towards instituting a renewed 'right to the city'. By proposing the framework, I endeavour to expand what it means to critically invite participation to benefit the social life of the city and the urban human condition.

Preparation:

questions to be asked beforehand to clarify ambitions and expectations, potentially justifying why participatory processes would not be useful in this instance.

1. new ladder of participation (page 31): where is the project intended to sit?
2. ambitions: what are the ambitions of using participatory processes? how will these be made explicit during the process?
3. communication: how will ideas be successfully communicated between actors? what language and knowledge barriers are there to overcome?
4. wider context: what is the political context? what are the embedded attitudes and expectations of engaging with participation?
5. freedom: how will it promote a positive liberty, widening people's imaginations rather than restricting?
6. commons and collectivity: how can a sense of ownership by the community be created? how will collective action for mutual benefit be promoted?
7. collaboration: how will quality collaboration be encouraged? (false consensus avoided and dissenting views held together)
8. role of the designer (page 41): which role best describes the priorities in your approach?
9. informality: what existing informal practices are there to be harnessed and amplified?
10. aesthetic: how will the finished product be subject to aesthetic critique throughout? how will the participation input be visible in the finished design?
11. time: how will participation sustained throughout as much of the design process as possible? at what points will user input be most relevant?
12. relationships: how will good relationships and trust be established and sustained throughout the process?
13. limitations: are some 'behind the scenes' decisions expected? how will inclusivity and diversity be promoted in the assembled group? do people want to engage at all? what techniques can be used to motivate?
14. risk: will the process be open-ended and open to unknown possibilities?
15. wider impact: how is it expected that the whole process will have deeper impacts on the lives of the participants beyond that of the specific project outcomes?

Figure 34: Questions for preparation

Evaluation:

determining how useful participation was in this instance and how the experience can be learned from for future practice.

1. new ladder of participation (page 31): where did it measure on the ladder?
2. ambitions: were the ambitions achieved and made explicit throughout?
3. communication: were language barriers overcome and ideas successfully communicated between actors?
4. wider context: what was the political context? what were the attitudes and expectations for engagement?
5. freedom: did it promote a positive liberty, widening people's imaginations rather than restricting?
6. commons and collectivity: was there a sense of ownership by the community established? did the project seem like an idea of the commons?
7. collaboration: what was the quality of collaboration? was consensus forced or were dissenting views held together?
8. role of the designer (page 41): which emphasis was most evident during the process?
9. informality: were existing informal practices harnessed and amplified?
10. aesthetic: how does the finished product measure up as architectural design? how is the participation input visible in the finished design?
11. time: was participation sustained throughout as much of the design process as possible? at what points was user input most relevant?
12. relationships: was there a good level of trust, and good relationships established throughout the process?
13. limitations: were there 'behind the scenes' decisions? was inclusivity and diversity evident in the assembled group of participants? did people want to engage at all? what techniques were used to motivate?
14. risk: were any risks taken, were there any major changes to what was initially expected? was the process open-ended and open to unknown possibilities?
15. wider impact: did the whole process have deeper impacts on the lives of the participants beyond that of the specific project outcomes?

Figure 35: Questions for evaluation.

Further questions

To follow up this research, a set of further questions are proposed for practitioners to test my conclusions. Certain emphases and priorities I have made need to be tested against issues in the reality of contemporary practice.

Further questions:

to form a basis for interviews with contemporary practitioners

- Could you define the word participation in terms of your attitude and practice of it as a design tool; do you see it as a design tool?
- Would you say this definition is shared by collaborators / design professionals / participants / the general public?
- What associations with the word participation do you wish to align with / distance your practice from?
- Have you evaluated any completed projects that used participation? What were the findings? Is post-occupancy evaluation useful?
- Do you feel positive about using participatory methods again? Are there particular types of projects you believe would / would not benefit from incorporating these methods?

Concerning a specific project:

- How was the intention to include participation in the design process perceived by the client, colleagues and participants? Was it a positive reaction? Did the perception of 'participation' change over the course of the process?
- Where would does this example sit on a scale from consultation / informing to collaborative design?
- What was the expectation of results before the participatory process (for yourself and for participants)? Were there any surprises or unexpected outcomes or ideas brought up? In this sense was the commitment to participatory practices worth it in light of the outcome?
- What aspects of the completed design can you identify as demonstrating the participatory nature of the design process? Are there any aesthetic or spatial indicators?

Figure 36: Questions for interviewing practitioners.

Concluding remarks

While setting out the premise for a critical approach to participation, there is still the need to prove these conclusions and deal with the complexity of real contemporary examples. The framework could be furthered analysed starting with questions such as:

- Can the framework encourage genuine participation that remains open-ended according to the input of the participants?
- Does it raise- awareness of the deeper issues at stake, or does it remain fixated on the *process* rather than the *product*?
- How can a general framework for evaluating the success of the project avoid limiting it to measurable outcomes?

This initial research could also be taken forward in a number of ways to further the critical discourse on participation and its use in practice. Outlined below are some initial thoughts:

- application of the evaluative framework to real participatory design projects in practice
- research to prove ineffectiveness of participation in contemporary examples
- research into how participation is incorporated in legislation currently, and whether that is effective in achieving its ambitions
- research of pedagogy in this field and design methods of teaching designers how to facilitate effective participation
- research the notion of labour, addressing the problem of reliance on voluntary community labour
- design of practical steps based on this framework for practitioners to use in pursuing successful participation
- design an experiment in a new form of critical participation method and test in practice

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