Article

Contesting ‘invited spaces’: where a ward committee and a social movement meet

Anneke le Roux
Annekeleroux87@gmail.com

Abstract
Since the late 1990s the South African state has placed a large emphasis on the restructuring of local government to be more participatory, and the creation of ward committees was one outcome of this process. Simultaneously there has been a rise in social movements which serve to represent the needs of the poor and marginalised who have seemingly been ignored by the state’s neoliberal policies. This paper focuses on a local government ward committee (WC) and a social movement organisation (SMO) – the Thembelihle Crisis Committee (TCC) – within the context of the Thembelihle informal settlement in Johannesburg. The former is an ‘invited participatory space’ which has been created by the state to invite residents to participate. The latter is an ‘invented participatory space’ created from below by the grassroots, through which residents assert their agency as active community members.

Many scholars have conceptualised these participatory spaces as separate and distinct. Subsequently, ‘invited spaces’ were labelled as pseudo-democratic, state controlled, and hence there was the suggestion that they should be abandoned, while ‘invented spaces’ were perceived as more accurately reflecting the views and needs of the poor in South Africa. More recently, scholars such as Claire Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi (2015), and Luke Sinwell (2012) have begun to argue that the binary of invited and invented is too simplistic. They have urged that we look more closely at the relationship between these two spaces as opposed to setting them apart.

This paper attempts to argue that invented spaces can contest the invited spaces of the state. The concept of contesting ‘invited space’ will be used to reconsider invited spaces by more accurately analysing the interface of the ‘invited’ and the ‘invented’. By analysing how and where the two meet, we begin to see what happens when a powerful SMO inserts itself onto the invited space of a ‘second generation’ ward committee.
**Introduction**

The rise of participatory governance and its importance for deepening democracy is a vast topic within academia. Before starting a brief discussion on the topic, it is important that I present a suitable understanding of democratic politics. This article will make use of Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright’s explanation of the ideals of democratic politics, which include:

- facilitating active political involvement of the citizenry, forging political consensus through dialogue, devising and implementing public policies that ground a productive economy and healthy society, and, in more radical egalitarian versions of the democratic ideal, ensuring that all citizens benefit from the nation’s wealth. (Fung and Wright 2001:5)

Moving on from this explanation of democratic politics, we can now begin to discuss whether this level of democracy can be achieved through participatory means. The question of whether participation within local government is a useful tool for deepening democracy is not a new one. Over the years it has become evident that representative democracy – a system characterised by regular, free and fair elections in a multiparty environment alone (Piper 2014:51), does not satisfy the public’s want to be more involved in the decisions which influence their everyday lives. The result has been a growing interest in participatory democracy; as explained by Baiocchi, et al (2011: 11): ‘the interest in participatory democracy has grown apace with the increasing recognition of the deficits of representative democracy, especially in the developing world’ (also see Fung and Wright 2001:5).

John Gaventa argues that in order to ‘deepen democracy’ we need to focus on ‘the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the political process than what is normally found in liberal representative democracy alone’ (Gaventa 2006:7). In short, participation fosters a more democratic system of representation and decision-making by taking into consideration the views of the majority, and making decisions based not only on the opinions of the elected representatives. As illustrated by David Brown, the reason why participation is viewed to be important is because elections alone do not sufficiently represent the masses and offer only a limited form of democracy (Brown 2004). Similarly, Cornwall argues that ‘efforts to involve the public more directly in processes of governance are underpinned by the view that to do so makes for better citizens, better decisions and better government’ (Cornwall 2004:78).

To some degree this growing interest in, and need for, public participation
moulded the post-apartheid state in South Africa. In the early 1990s the South African government focused substantial efforts on redesigning local government to be more participatory (Barichievy et al 2005:372-4, also see Pieterse 2002:2-3). Unique structures like Ward Committees (WCs) were developed to facilitate more effective participation at the level of local government in our cities. As explained by Piper and Nadvi, invited spaces are initiated by the local state ‘to draw local communities into processes of consultation, deliberation and sometimes joint decision-making…’ (Piper and Nadvi 2010:213). In their article Barichievy et al note that the active engagement of communities is key to the new local government system (2005:374), and the authors investigate whether these democratic reforms have been significant by asking the key question: ‘does participatory governance actually deepen democracy?’ (2005:371). In part this article poses the same question in relation to WCs. In their article the authors come to the conclusion that in practice WCs do not allow residents to participate, and therefore these structures do not succeed in making local government more democratic. Their article concludes that

the importance of ‘local knowledge’ is a key component in delivery. Good decision-making about the location and building of roads, schools, clinics, appropriate water, electricity and sanitation arrangements and so forth depends on the participation of residents. It is not evident that ward committees are the most appropriate means to achieve this objective. (2005:391)

However, based on case study research this paper will build the argument that, despite the general finding that WCs lack the will or capacity to facilitate ‘meaningful participation’, there is more to these invited spaces which can be transformed into more participatory and engaging state structures if social movement organisations (SMOs) are mobilised and motivated to accept the challenge. To be clear, ‘meaningful participation’ here refers to when the public are actively involved in steering the decisions which impact on their lives. This can only happen if power is redistributed to the citizens and they are in control of decisions made. In this case municipal departments and urban planners need to negotiate with the citizens if they want to influence plans (Sinwell 2009a:63).

A wide range of literature in post-apartheid South Africa has assessed the impact of participatory governance and the effectiveness of state participatory structures (Oldfield 2008, Bénit-Gbaffou 2008, Piper and Deacon 2008). In their analyses academics have found that, generally, the state’s
An effective system in participatory structures is quite ineffective in representing the views of the public. In contrast, it appears that participatory structures created by residents (the grassroots) for themselves are generally (but not exclusively) more able to fulfill this role. In order to distinguish the state’s participatory spaces from those of the grassroots, scholars have labelled the former as ‘invited spaces’ for participation, and the latter as ‘invented spaces’. The theory of invited and invented spaces will make up the key theoretical concepts of this article.

While the distinction between invited and invented spaces is useful, some academics have begun to move away from the invited/invented dichotomy, criticising the theoretical framework for being too restrictive to fully capture the reality on the ground (Sinwell 2012, Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi 2015). The binary does not allow for an analysis of what is taking place at the interface of the invited and invented. It keeps the two spaces separate when in fact something of importance is occurring between them. This paper is attempting to fill this gap in the literature through reconsidering invited spaces by investigating how invented spaces can impact on them. This article will illustrate that indeed invited spaces are not effective in giving the public decision making power, and that invented spaces are. However, it is not helpful to simply do away with invited spaces; rather invented spaces need to purposefully insert themselves into invited spaces in order to change them.

The concept of contesting ‘invited space’ will be employed to help understand what can happen when the invited and invented meet. This paper argues that this new concept can be used to analyse more accurately what occurs when an invented space inserts itself into an invited space, and what the effects of this might be. Evidence will be provided to illustrate that a relationship between a local government WC – an invited space, and a grassroots social movement called the Thembelihle Crisis Committee (TCC) – an invented space, does exist and can bring about meaningful participation. The interaction between the two structures allows the social movement to insert itself into the WC, and apply enough pressure to steer the decisions which are made. An important development which has allowed for this interaction to be more effective is that, as of 2012, WCs were elected democratically. As a result of a number of factors (see Booysen 2011), in 2012 the City of Johannesburg decided to conduct the first democratic election of WC members, with the assistance of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Prior to 2012, the election of WC members was carried out in a very
Contesting ‘invited spaces’: where a ward committee and a social movement meet

disorganised and undemocratic fashion, where ward councillors would simply call a public meeting and members were voted for with a show of hands. It was generally known that ward councillors would only inform the people they wanted in the WC about these ‘election’ meetings (Interview Lachporia 2013, also see Smith 2008:53). As a result of this change in legislation, the WCs elected in Johannesburg in 2012 will be referred to as second generation WCs, and are suggested to be distinct from first generation WCs (those elected pre-2012).

The motivation for looking specifically at this local government participatory structure (WCs), was based on an initial personal interest in wanting to understand how this structure is intended to function in order to create a link between communities and the local government (the decision makers), and compare this intention to how it functions in reality. As the research developed, it became clear to me that something more was going on between invited and invented spaces, and within the WC arena, which I had not come across in the literature before. As Baiocchi et al have commented, ‘… ideas of participatory democracy are strong on theory and moral-philosophical grounding, but rather weak on evidence and empirical testing’ (2011:1). This case study will isolate one participatory context which has been created by the state, and provide evidence to suggest that a mobilised SMO can contest an invited space to make it more participatory. This article emanates from a larger case-study dissertation that was done on the Thembelihle informal settlement, the local WC and the City of Johannesburg more generally (Le Roux 2013).

The larger study employed a number of research methods which included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, surveys, informal communication and extensive literature analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with key members of the TCC, the ward councillor, the OKM (Operation Khanyisa Movement) councillor, members of the WC, and officials of the Johannesburg municipality. All the data presented here is based on field research conducted in 2013. In the sections which follow I provide a brief overview of the theory around participatory institutions. I look at the role of participation in SA, and then discuss the recent theoretical literature on invited and invented participatory spaces and explain the need for a different concept to understand the interaction between them. The paper then deals in more detail with the case study by providing a better understanding of the context of Thembelihle, the TCC and the WC. Key evidence to support the concept of contesting ‘invited space’ is presented
and discussed. The paper finally concludes with an overview of the study and the main argument presented.

Theorising participatory institutions

The concept of participation carries a huge amount of weight within the field of development globally. Defining this concept is important for the purpose of the paper, as well as for understanding the motivation behind creating participatory structures – in particular WCs – in order to foster sustainable development plans. One normative concept of ‘participation’, as put forward in *The Participation Reader* edited by Andrea Cornwall, is that:

> Participation should include the notions of contribution, influencing, sharing, or redistributing power and of control, resources, benefits, knowledge, and skills to be gained through beneficiary involvement in decision-making. Participation is a voluntary process by which people, including the disadvantaged (in income, gender, caste, or education), influence or control the decisions that affect them. The essence of participation is exercising voice and choice and developing the human, organisational and management capacity to solve problems as they arise in order to sustain the improvements. (Saxena 2011: 31)

Academics have highlighted two important factors which enable real public engagement within governance. The one is to strengthen citizen participation, and the other is to improve the accountability and responsiveness of state institutions. Gaventa, McGee and Zipfel argue that both aspects need to be strengthened when they explain that ‘there is growing consensus that the way forward is found in working on both sides of the equation – that is, focusing on both a more active and engaged citizenry and a more responsive and effective state which can deliver needed public services’ (my emphasis, Gaventa et al 2007: 3). Laurence Piper hits the nail on the head when he explains that,

> the extent to which these [new participatory institutions] actually deepen democracy relies on meeting a number of conditions including the political will of government to make the ‘invited spaces’ work, the empowerment of these spaces to have some real impact, and the popular mobilisation of marginalised groups into these spaces. (Piper 2014:52)

While academics have evidently spent much time debating the virtues and importance of participatory institutions, they have focused less on empirically testing the theory. The authors of *Bootstrapping Democracy* explain that empirical evidence testing the effectiveness of participatory democracy has been ‘fragmented and thin’ for two reasons:
First, it has been difficult to actually isolate the impact of participation and to determine how and why participation makes a difference. Second, because much of the literature is still preoccupied with making a normative argument and with contesting the dominant focus on representative institutions, it has largely failed to examine the relationship between participatory practices and state institutions. (Baiocchi et al 2011:1)

Similarly, Piper states that research which investigates the impact of these institutions is quite new, and ‘the results so far suggest mostly modest outcomes’ (Piper 2014:52). This article will respond to the need for more empirical evidence questioning whether ‘invited’ participatory institutions are in fact participatory in a meaningful way. From the evidence provided I will draw the conclusion that doing away with WCs is not useful – this has been argued by academics such as Sinwell (2009b: 192). There is something of importance occurring as a result of the interactions within the WC under study. Instead, Piper’s suggestion that participatory institutions must be reformed ‘in a pro-poor direction’ (Piper 2014:52) is more useful than transforming them into something different. The argument being made here is that by allowing marginalised groups to actually enter participatory institutions, they are able to impact on them.

While the idea of mobilising the masses to breathe life into weak or dormant participatory institutions is not a new one, the purpose of this article is to strengthen this claim by contributing to the evidently limited empirical evidence on how participatory structures can be used to bring about ‘meaningful participation’. The paper will employ a case study to analyse and show that although WCs are rife with internal design flaws, through the political will and mobilisation of the public meaningful participation is possible by making use of this state participatory structure. I will also present a new concept which can be used to identify when an invented space inserts itself into an invited space and challenges it – contesting ‘invited space’.

**Participation and the rise of social movements in South Africa**

As alluded to in the introduction, the South African state has, since the late 1990s, placed a substantial focus on the restructuring of local government in order to bring the government closer to the people. Major emphasis has been placed on the creation of participatory structures and the decentralisation of power, so as to allow the residents of the country to become involved in the decision-making process of development. Local government participatory
structures known as WCs were first elected and became active in 2001. These structures are intended to play a key role in bringing about this public involvement. Barichievy et al accurately explain that although not compulsory, the new system provides for committees to be established in each ward of a municipality. These are chaired by the ward councillor, and ten members are elected from the local community. They are intended to reflect a ‘diversity of interests in the ward’, and women have to be ‘equitably represented’. (2005: 375)

The City of Johannesburg is made up of 130 wards, each with one ward councillor and a ten-member WC. Ward councillors and WCs are the closest municipal body to the general public, and as such they are intended to be a bridge between the two. WCs are structures which are expected to communicate to residents what the City of Johannesburg wants to implement across the municipality, as well as communicate to Council what the residents’ views on these decisions are. In this way they are intended to facilitate a constant dialogue between the City of Johannesburg and its residents, but more importantly to facilitate the participation of residents in the decisions which are made within the municipality.

Most democratic governments praise the use of participation in fostering more inclusive decision-making and hence bringing about more sustainable development outcomes. In SA a number of documents have been created to explain the need for public participation in decision-making, as well as how the state intends to realise this level of participation – which is largely through decentralisation and the use of participatory platforms. These documents include: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Municipal Structures Act (1998), and the Municipal Systems Act (2000) (Sinwell 2009a:18). Despite this emphasis (on paper) which the South African state and the City of Johannesburg have placed on participation in decision-making, many academics have illustrated that meaningful participation essentially does not exist within local government structures in SA (Sinwell 2009a, Bénit-Gbaffou 2008). One could argue that this desire from the public to be heard has resulted in the relatively rapid growth of new social movements in SA since the late 1990s. It has been argued that social movements arose in the late 1990s and early 2000s because communities needed a voice that would be critical of the state in post-apartheid SA. Civil society organisations such as the civics movement which had fulfilled this critical role pre-1994 died along with the end of apartheid (Gibson 2006:19, also see Ballard et al 2006:15,
Contesting ‘invited spaces’: where a ward committee and a social movement meet

Zuern 2011, Dawson and Sinwell 2012). As such, new social movements provided a ‘non-institutional space in which activists could contest the legitimacy of the ANC and fight against the effects of neoliberalism’ (Dawson and Sinwell 2012:3). The impact which these organisations are having cannot be ignored. Therefore this paper is interested in analysing both the government participatory structure of WCs, as well as the social movement operating in the Thembelihle informal settlement – the TCC.

Invited and invented participatory spaces

Recent literature on participation has begun to analyse participatory spaces within the binary of invited and invented spaces (Cornwall 2002, Miraftab and Wills 2005, Sinwell 2009a). Before addressing the concept of ‘space’ it is important to understand what invited and invented spaces are. In this article invited spaces will be defined as social spaces generated from above by governments or international agencies to encourage community members at the grassroots to participate (Sinwell 2010:24, also see Miraftab 2004). The invited space referred to in this paper will be the local government institution of WCs. Alternatively, invented spaces will be based on Miraftab’s definition. She states: ‘Invented spaces are those, also occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, but directly confronting the authorities and the status quo’ (Miraftab 2004:1). These spaces are formed organically from below, by the people for themselves (Cornwall 2002:ii). Within this research the TCC is presented as an invented space.

To address the concept of space, Luke Sinwell looks to Lefebvre for a definition and defines the concept as ‘a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power’ (in Sinwell 2009a:82). With this definition for space we need to understand the concept in relation to participation. Following Cornwall, the concept of participatory space will be theorised here as:

the situated nature of participation, the bounded yet permeable arenas in which participation is invited, and the domains from within which new intermediary institutions and new opportunities for citizen involvement have been fashioned. It also allows us to think about ways in which particular sites come to be populated, appropriated or designated by particular actors for particular kinds of purposes… (2004: 75)

A very important point made by Cornwall, and one which applies to both invited and invented spaces, as well as all the areas where they overlap, is
that space is never unbiased, nor bounded. Spaces constantly overlap and the actors within them continuously manoeuver their way in and out of these spaces, allowing their experiences and actions to influence what happens within them, and hence to alter the outcomes (2004:81).

Following from this concept we begin to see the fluidity of space. What is important is that the invited and invented ‘spaces’ in this paper do not refer to the physical space where interactions occur; space is much more intangible than its physical location or who is hosting the engagement. The biased nature of different actors influences the power relations which operate within any given arena. In addition these relations are constantly shifting, not only within one arena but between many, as spaces are not bounded but rather constantly overlap. This concept of space brings us to a discussion of the existing literature on the theoretical framework of invited and invented spaces.

Academic literature has argued that the invited participatory spaces created from above to ‘invite people in’ are inadequate, lack capacity, are unresponsive and superficial, and in essence are simply used as a rubber stamp for participation and democracy (Ballard 2008:180, also see Sinwell 2009a:95 and 2010a, Oldfield 2008:49, Cornwall 2004:79 and 2002). In comparison, academics have identified the criminalisation of invented spaces of participation. Miraftab and Wills explain how ‘[w]hen formal channels fail, the poor use extremely innovative strategies, which create alternative channels and spaces to assert their rights to the city, negotiate their wants, and actively practice their citizenship’ (Miraftab and Wills 2005:207). For example, when the actions of those situated within invented spaces such as civil society organisations or SMOs culminate in large protests which disturb everyday life, the state and media delegitimise and criminalise the invented spaces created by grassroots communities by portraying them as ‘ultra left and free riders embedded in a culture of nonpayment’ (2005:209). The relatively vast literature on the subject, provides strong evidence which suggests that invented spaces are far more effective in representing the views of the marginalised poor, and potentially bringing about meaningful participation, when compared to the invited spaces formed by the state (Miraftab and Wills 2005, also see Cornwall 2004, Sinwell 2010a). The conclusion among academics in the main is essentially that invented spaces are criminalised whereas invited spaces amount to pseudo-democratic participation.
Many scholars (Cornwall 2004, Miraftab and Wills 2005, Ballard 2008, Sinwell 2010) have critically assessed how invented spaces are delegitimised and repressed by the state. Some argue that the state attempts to impose an invited form of participation onto the public, in order to legitimise already-taken development decisions (Cornwall 2004). Regarding invited spaces, Cornwall argues that these may be pseudo-democratic in that they suppress certain voices while serving the interests of those in power: ‘far from providing an arena in which all voices can be equally raised and heard, deliberative [invited] spaces are discursively constituted in ways that permit only particular voices and versions to enter into debate’ (Cornwall 2004:79, also see Cornwall 2002, Sinwell 2010).

Since the inception of WCs, these structures have managed to accumulate a vast amount of negative perceptions around their effectiveness as participatory structures which the public can use to communicate with their municipality. WCs have been labelled as rife with personal and party politics (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008:11), as spaces which allow little room for a community voice which is alternative to the dominant WC party agenda (Piper and Deacon 2008:61), as arenas which are ‘highly contested: in form, content, limit, extent, politics, and ideology’ (Oldfield 2008:487), and as co-optive structures which silence the voice of the community (Smith and de Visser 2009). In a case study review of two municipalities in SA, Barichievy et al note that:

In both the municipalities, ward committees performed poorly, partly because of what we believe is an inherent design flaw, partly because of the failure to integrate them meaningfully into council decision-making processes, and partly because of the party politicisation of many ward committees. (2005:380)

While individuals making up first generation WCs were arguably often politically uniform and/or personally connected to the ward councillor, second generation WCs have a very different dynamic. As a result of the first democratically run WC election in 2012, ward councillors had far less control over those who would enter the WC structure. Hence it is argued here that second generation WCs are more diversified, less uniform, and made up of active community representatives who are popular among communities on the ground. This change to the WC system in Johannesburg is a key factor to the argument that invented spaces can now insert themselves into invited spaces. Prior to the 2012 WC election this was far less possible.
Reassessing the binary

While the theoretical concepts of invited and invented spaces are useful, academics have begun to reassess our understanding of invited spaces, and hence lead us to question the validity of the invited/invented binary. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, arguably the leading scholar working in the field of participation, local government and WCs in SA, has also begun to re-question the role of invited spaces of participation more generally (also see Sinwell 2012:197). In a chapter from the book entitled *Popular Politics in South African cities – unpacking community participation* (2015) Claire Bénit-Gbaffou and Eulenda Mkwanazi make important statements regarding invited spaces. The authors urge scholars to look within invited spaces, in order to accurately understand them. In turn their claim serves to debunk what academics have previously labelled as spaces which do not work and should possibly be abandoned (Sinwell 2009b). In this chapter, the authors pose the question: can invited spaces be re-invented and usurped by those participants who are invited to take part in them? Of course this claim is not directed specifically to the invited space of WCs, but I would like to frame my argument in relation to this analysis of a WC in the City of Johannesburg.

The authors argue that invited spaces may not be effective in fulfilling their intended role as a communication channel to influence decision-making. But, this does not mean that nothing is going on within these spaces, in fact they claim that important things are happening and hence we need to look more closely at them. As the authors explain:

> In South Africa and elsewhere, not only have invited spaces been analysed as ‘useless’ or ‘inefficient’, they often have been criticized as sedative… preventing social change by silencing or corrupting civil society leaders and working towards the reproduction of existing power structures… However, academia is currently reconsidering invited spaces of participation. (Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi 2015:114)

The authors go on to claim that:

> In that sense, invited spaces of participation are no longer to be observed in isolation – they are more and more to be studied as caught in a web of social and political networks and in a range of participatory spaces, more or less invited, more or less invented, but all interdependent. (115).

The section which follows will present evidence from the case study to propose that using the concept of contesting ‘invited space’ is a way to analyse this interface between invited and invented spaces, and illustrate how an SMO can insert itself into WC, more efficiently.
Contesting ‘invited spaces’: where a ward committee and a social movement meet

The concept of contesting ‘invited space’
While it seems clear that WCs on the whole do not fulfil their role of representing the views of City of Johannesburg residents and in no substantial way influence decision-making in the City, there is certainly substance to Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi’s (2015) claim that we cannot simply ignore these spaces and say that nothing is happening within them. Thus far there has been no in-depth analysis of what have been labelled in this article as second generation WCs in the City of Johannesburg, and how the democratic election of WC members since 2012 has impacted on this invited space. Therefore, this paper is attempting to analyse what happens when a powerful social movement inserts itself into a second generation WC. The next section of the paper will deal with the fieldwork element of the research, and will indicate whether the argument presented here holds any validity.

The case study
The Thembelihle informal settlement is located within Ward 8 of Region G, in the south-west of the City of Johannesburg. The settlement has been in existence for about 24 years, and has an approximate population of 16,000 – 17,000 people (Pingo 2013:14, also The New Age, September 9, 2011); it is estimated to contain roughly 7,000 – 8,000 shacks (City of Johannesburg 2010/11, Dugard and Tselapedi 2013:57-58). The settlement is made up predominantly of shacks built out of zinc and plastic sheets, wooden boards and other materials. The residents are almost entirely of African descent, whereas the surrounding middle-class suburbs are filled mostly with Indian residents – the land was allocated to Indians under the 1950 Group Areas Act. Ward 8 contains three informal settlements: Thembelihle, Lawley, and Precast; this paper will only focus on the Thembelihle settlement.

There are two focal points. The first is the most active social movement in Thembelihle – the TCC. The TCC is a social movement which has been in operation within Thembelihle since the early 2000s. Over time it has become a prominent structure within the settlement, its main objectives being to fight for the attainment of basic services for the residents. The TCC is the strongest community representative structure within the settlement and has been the main mobilising agent within the community over the last decade. The organisation holds weekly general meetings at the same time and venue, allowing residents the opportunity to engage with the organisation regularly. In addition, whenever necessary, the TCC calls much larger mass meetings
in order to engage the whole community. These meetings are conducted transparently and residents are allowed a sufficient amount of time to engage with the TCC organisers on the matters being discussed. The social movement employs any and all tactics it can to get relevant City of Johannesburg officials to attend mass meetings and provide necessary information and feedback on the community’s questions. A man, Moses ‘Bhayzer’ Miya, who is a key member of the TCC as well as a recently elected WC member, is crucial to this study.

The WC of Ward 8 (in which Thembelihle is situated) is the second focal area of the study. The WC is made up of the councillor and her 10-member WC. In the City of Johannesburg a ward councillor earns a salary of approximately R15,000 pm and WC members earn a ‘stipend’ of R500 pm. As of the June 2011 local government elections, the ward councillor has been a 34-year-old woman, Janice Ndarala. The rest of the WC was subsequently elected in the May 2012 WC elections, nearly a year later. It should however be emphasised that the councillor and WC represent a much larger area than the Thembelihle settlement. Ward 8 contains a population of 40,109 people (Stats SA 2012), whereas, as stated, Thembelihle’s population stands at approximately 16,000 – 17,000 people. Therefore, while Thembelihle’s population comprises a substantial portion of the population of the entire ward, it is certainly not the only focus of the WC and councillor.

**Thembelihle informal settlement**

During the months of fieldwork conducted I began to understand the main concerns of the residents who live within Thembelihle. As is generally the case in South African informal settlements, these concerns revolve around a lack of basic services including housing, electricity, sanitation, secure tenure (Interview: Miya 2013) and, in the case of Thembelihle, a general acknowledgement of the residents’ existence by the state. These were the key complaints of the residents during a large 2011 protest with attracted substantial media attention (*Mail & Guardian*, September 9, 2011, also see *News24*, September 7, 2011, *The Star (IOL)*, September 7, 2011, *The New Age*, September 9, 2011). It appears not much has changed in Thembelihle.

The TCC is the strongest, if not the only, civil society organisation currently operating in Thembelihle. The organisation is not a political party, but rather an organisation that represents the people of Thembelihle. It has had a presence in every major social upheaval to take place in the settlement, the first of which was the forced removal to Vlakfontein by the City of
Johannesburg in 2002. One important point of contention and debate regarding Thembelihle is the question of whether dolomite is present in the settlement. In 1992 a geo-technical study of the area was carried out by the apartheid state (Dugard and Tselapedi 2013) and it was found that the area was situated on dolomitic rock, ‘and therefore unsafe for human habitation’ (City of Johannesburg 2010). For this reason the state wanted to discourage people from living on the land: ‘Allowing continued settlement there would be irresponsible, and connecting people to the grid would encourage them to stay’ (*Daily Maverick*, September 16, 2011). For this reason the government does not want to supply the settlement with electricity. Subsequently the City of Johannesburg refused to formalise the settlement, and in 2002 took the decision instead to relocate its residents.

According to Thembelihle resident and long-standing TCC member, Siphiwe Segodi, who has been involved with the TCC since its inception in 2001 and has been a strong organiser for it ever since, there were some people who wanted to move to Vlakfontein, but they were in the minority.

In 2002 we were surprised by the attack from the COJ [City of Johannesburg], which sent the security which later became known as the ‘red ants’ to demolish our shacks. This was the forced removal to Vlakfontein in the winter of 2002 [June]. While there were people who had no problem with relocating, there were some of us who were saying we would not move an inch until it is justified why we must be relocated from Thembelihle, because currently as things stand there are contradictions with regards to the scientific arguments that they [the City of Johannesburg /officials] are trying to put forward, regarding the dolomite issue. (Interview: Segodi 2013)

Generally most of the residents of Thembelihle are highly sceptical of the City of Johannesburg’s insistence that dolomite exists in the area. As one journalist puts it:

Residents in Thembelihle… tend to be deeply suspicious about geology. As far as they can see it holds unseen danger only for people who live in shacks, while those with the money to build double-storey houses or shopping centres are, magically, unaffected… This, they say, is political dolomite, dolomite that discriminates based on race or class. Apartheid dolomite. (*Daily Maverick*, September 16, 2011)

The argument made by the Thembelihle community is that the dolomite study which was done by the state is incomplete, and hence cannot sufficiently verify the facts regarding the geology of the area. As stated, the
TCC was formed in 2001 however the threat of relocation in 2002 is what really spurred the organisation on, and its heavy involvement with the community at the time is what gave the organisation real legitimacy within Thembelihle. The TCC has not only been instrumental in the community’s battle against relocation, it has also been crucial in providing the residents with access to electricity through illegal connections, fighting for the residents’ rights to access RDP housing, and in being a body which represents the needs of the community to city officials such as the ward councillor and the MMC of Housing, Dan Bovu. The TCC represents the community by holding open meetings every Saturday in the community centre (known as SA Block). Residents are given time to voice their concerns and the organisation strategises ways to solve the most urgent and widespread problems. While the organisation is by no means perfect, it aims to be democratic and representative of the majority. Currently the community is battling with the City of Johannesburg which in October 2012 promised to relocate 1,000 households to the new RDP housing site in Lehae, located about 5km from Thembelihle. The promise was to move 100 households every month until all 1,000 had been moved. In the 10 months between November 2012 and September 2013 approximately 290 households in total were relocated to Lehae.

The ward committee
The WC of Ward 8 is made up of 11 members, the councillor – Janice Ndarala – who is automatically the chairperson, and ten additional members who each oversee a portfolio. The WC is made up entirely of people who come from either the Thembelihle or Lawley informal settlements in the ward: the councillor comes from Thembelihle and is an ANC member. In addition, four more of the WC members are also from Thembelihle, two of whom are ANC members, one a Democratic Alliance (DA) member, and one an Operation Khanyisa Movement (OKM) member. The TCC forms part of the OKM, which is an independent party represented with one seat in the Johannesburg City Council. The OKM is the only independent political party represented in Council, and is known for its pro-poor stance. The seat in Council is held by a proportional representation (PR) councillor – a woman named Simphiwe Zwane who lives in Thembelihle and is closely linked to the TCC. The TCC/OKM member of the WC is Bhayzer Miya – he played a key role in the research conducted. The other six WC members come from Lawley informal settlement and all of them are ANC members. The WC should meet on a
monthly basis to discuss issues and developments pertaining to the entire Ward. From January to October 2013 the WC held five out of the ten WC meetings it should have held. When the WC does meet, it is to discuss what developments there have been in the ward and what needs to be done. In general the majority of the committee attends the meetings.

Moses ‘Bhayzer’ Miya became one of my key informants throughout the fieldwork process. He is the only member of the TCC who also sits on the WC; he heads the WC housing portfolio. Bhayzer is a very interesting character due to the fact that he is a member of both these structures, and hence he is able to clarify the relationship and tensions between the WC and the TCC well. Bhayzer provided me with a clear account of the milieu in Thembelihle, substantiated throughout later meetings attended and conversations held. He is a 45 year old, black, Muslim male who has been living in Thembelihle since 1997. He used to be a member of the ANC, but in 2001/2002 he shifted his support to the TCC. Bhayzer was elected as WC member for the first time in the 2012 WC elections. Party political, as well as personal, dynamics within the WC reveal themselves easily and very often throughout this case study. These dynamics come to light through the exclusionary tactics by the dominant ANC, through favouritism which plays out between the councillor and a small number of ANC WC members, as well as through alliances which form across party lines. In many ways the WC under investigation is as dysfunctional as scholars have proposed (Piper and Deacon 2008:79, also see Oldfield 2008:494). In addition, authors have claimed that once civil society leaders enter the WCs they are easily co-opted, silenced or corrupted (see Smith and de Visser 2009). However, there is evidence from the case study which reveals that something else is taking place within it. Evidence has shown that certain key WC members directly criticise the councillor and other WC members, and they succeed in remaining representative of the majority in the community. In essence this invited space is being contested because a highly critical TCC member has been given access to it through a democratic election process. His first act of defiance against the WC structure and the rules which accompany it was that he refused to sign the Code of Conduct for Ward Committee Member document, his reason being that he does not believe in its tenets, which he spoke about with stern irritation in his voice: ‘I’ve read this document. Do you know what it says? It says I must support the councillor, whether she is wrong or right, I must be on the same platform as the councillor!’ (Interview: Miya 2013).
Contesting space: where the invited and the invented meet

During the research conducted there was one specific occasion where the phenomenon of ‘contesting space’ revealed itself most strongly. This was during a WC meeting on May 27, 2013. Before going into detail about the meeting it is important that I introduce the key role players in the committee. Firstly there is Bhayzer and councillor Ndarala who have already been introduced. Secondly there is Mzwake Ngcobo, the WC member for the safety portfolio and an ANC member. Ngcobo is in his early thirties and lives in Thembelihle. He is one of the more vocal WC members during meetings. During this meeting the relocation to Lehae was discussed once again. Six months had gone by since the relocation was meant to begin, and Thembelihle residents were becoming increasingly frustrated – and they were communicating this to the TCC. At the start of the meeting Bhayzer announced to the WC that the community had decided it would march to Lehae on June 3, 2013 (in a week’s time), to occupy the RDP houses which are complete and standing empty. In addition Bhayzer stated that he was going to support the community in this act. Tensions rose and fingers were pointed claiming that Person A had not communicated properly with Person B, etc, etc. The arguments continued until the end of the meeting, until Mzwake Ngcobo (an ANC member) made a final statement regarding the planned land occupation in Lehae. He openly declaring that he too was going to support this action, for his own sake and for the sake of the community more widely:

We qualified for houses a long time ago, and now other areas are being allocated [to Lehae], and we don’t know what is going on. So I just want to come out and say that I am supporting this invasion… Just because I am a ward committee member doesn’t mean I am going to be quiet, I am going to stand up and fight! (Ngcobo: WC meeting [Ward 8]: May 27, 2013)

Both Bhayzer and Ngcobo’s assertion that they are going to support the community and not be controlled by the rules of the WC is a clear indication of their overarching commitment to representing the community. These two WC members openly stated that they are going to support the Thembelihle residents in an activity that will directly challenge the rules of City of Johannesburg which state that WC members ‘must refrain from participating in activities that are aimed at or that may instigate the members of the community against the [City of Johannesburg] Council’ (Code of Conduct for Ward Committee Members: 4). This act of defiance provides evidence for viewing the WC as an invited space which has become contested. As argued,
second generation WCs, which have allowed strong community representatives to insert themselves into this arena through democratic election, have resulted in the space becoming criticised and contested in a way the literature has not yet recorded. In addition the strength of the TCC motivates Bhayzer to continue his challenges to the councillor, because he knows that she cannot ignore the TCC’s influence and authority within the community.

Another example of contesting ‘invited space’ was illustrated by the events at a community mass meeting. This meeting was called by the TCC, and Dan Bovu (MMC for housing) was asked to attend it. Although this meeting would not be labelled as an invited space, largely because it was arranged by the TCC which invited the state to take part as opposed to the other way around, it is important to consider all interactions between the invited and invented. After all, following from the definition of space employed in this article, spaces and the individuals who move within and between them are fluid. In this case there is no clear separation between which spaces are invited or invented, and when interactions between these seemingly fluid arenas occur it is important to take note of them as they are informed by, and subsequently inform, the interactions within the invited space of the WC.

It was in this mass meeting on June 2, 2013 that the interaction between the community (the invented) and the state (the invited) was the most revealing, and demonstrated the concept of contesting ‘invited space’. Before explaining the details of the meeting, text from the Code of Conduct for Councillors should be highlighted:

Section 11 of the Code of Conduct for Councillors document states that:

A councillor may not, except as provided by law –

(c) obstruct or attempt to obstruct the implementation of any decision of the council or a committee by an employee of the council; or

(d) encourage or participate in any conduct which would cause or contribute to maladministration in the council (SA 2000: Schedule 1).

Despite these rules which OKM councillor Simphiwe Zwane is bound by, she refuses to be silenced by what can be viewed as intimidation from the City of Johannesburg. The potential threat that she could lose her position as councillor did not stop her from challenging the state. At the mass meeting she spoke directly to MMC Bovu when she stated that:
We voted for a better life. But the government lied to us and gave us empty promises. Dan [Bovu] has been running away from the meeting about dolomite, he always says ‘I’m busy, I’m busy, I’m busy’. We want something tangible from him…. Dan is always telling us about these ‘processes’ and that he is busy. He must not give us a run around, if there is dolomite here the City should look at it…. We don’t like going to the streets [to protest], but it’s how we show our anger. So don’t treat us like we are crazy! Why do we have to fight for everything? Why is the councillor [Ndarala] not here? Whenever the community wants to speak to her she is not here! (Zwane: TCC Mass Meeting: June 2, 2013)

I argue that the evidence presented here is indicative of the concept presented in this paper. These direct attacks on the MMC, the ward councillor and the state more generally, illustrates the effects of what can happen when the invited and the invented interact. The critical and extremely mobilised character of the TCC, and in turn the community, which is constantly encouraged by the TCC to challenge the state to follow through on promises made, has been illustrated here. The invented space (the community and the TCC) is using its weight to contest the invited space (the state and its representatives), in order to achieve better services and a more proactive state.

Within one month, October 2013, the relocation of 190 households to Lehae took place. I argue that the consistent challenges from the invented space of the TCC towards the invited space of the state (the WC), resulted in a positive progression towards the realisation of the TCC and community’s goals. In essence this is why the contesting ‘invited space’ concept is important: with it, marginalised groups are able to speak, albeit loudly, and be heard by the state’s decision-makers whose inactivity has such a massive effect poor residents in SA.

**Conclusion**

This paper has analysed the relationship between a WC and a SMO as invited and invented participatory spaces in the context of the Thembelihle informal settlement. The case study investigation has been into the historical and current context of the Thembelihle informal settlement from which the TCC originates and operates, as well as into the local WC of Ward 8 within the City of Johannesburg. Theories on participation, state participatory institutions, and invited and invented spaces have been discussed briefly. The case study was then presented and analysed, and the concept of contesting ‘invited spaces’ was assessed. It is clear that ‘meaningful
participation’ deepens democracy, but a government calling itself participatory and actually being participatory are two very different things. As such, academics have begun to question the relationship between participation and the state (Baiocchi et al 2011), how effective participatory institutions really are in fulfilling their role (Oldfield 2008, Bénit-Gbbaffou 2008, Piper and Deacon 2008), and how they could be made more accountable and responsive (Gaventa et al 2007, Piper 2014).

This article contributes to the much needed empirical evidence which investigates Piper’s claim, and provides insight into how WCs can be used by SMOs to actually become participatory in a meaningful way. Indeed, the case study has shown that marginalised groups certainly do need to be mobilised into invited spaces (WCs in this case) for them to be more effective. However, the political will of government and the empowerment of WCs is lagging behind. It would seem that until the state accepts the importance of participation in deepening democracy and truly wants to see this materialise into a more satisfied citizenry, the battle to ‘contest the invited’ will continue. Of course far more research would need to be done to show that the presented concept is legitimate. However the research contributes to the existing literature, and nuances our understanding of the relationship between invited and invented spaces more generally, as well as our perception of WCs in particular.

It has been argued that we need to debunk the general perception by scholars that WCs are ineffective, demobilising, co-optive and useless arenas of participation (Bénit-Gbbaffou 2008, Piper and Deacon 2008, Sinwell 2012). I suggest that we need to do this by analysing how invited spaces can be utilised by invented spaces to contest them. In this case study the WC has become a contested space due to the interaction of both the invited and invented. The argument has been made that the binary of invited and invented participatory spaces is too simplistic to analyse the interaction occurring between these two arenas, and hence a different concept is needed to study this relationship and fill the gap in the literature. The concept which has been employed here is referred to as contesting ‘invited space’. How this very contestation plays out in the context of the local WC has been unpacked in this paper.

I have argued that with the inception of democratically elected second generation WCs in 2012, the WC dynamic has significantly changed. More diversified and active WC members, I argue, have been allowed access to this local government structure, hence transforming the WC into a more critical,
challenging and contested space. The fact that the TCC occupies one position in the WC, through Bhayzer, is of great importance for the effectiveness of the organisation. Bhayzer’s election onto the WC has allowed this social movement to insert itself into a local government structure. More importantly, because Bhayzer is supported by the TCC, he is in a strong position to consistently challenge the ward councillor regarding the key issues of relocation and development in Thembelihle.

Drawing from the work of Sinwell (2012) and Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi (2015) which states that we need to look more closely at invited spaces, this concept of contesting ‘invited space’ allows for a renewed discussion on what is in fact taking place within this interface of the invited and the invented, and how an invented space can utilise an invited space to achieve its goals. While it is clear that WCs are still rife with personal and party politics, what has been presented here regarding the WC illustrates that it is not a participatory structure which has no use and should be abandoned. For example, Bhayzer continues to support the community and the TCC as strongly as he did before he joined the WC – it does not appear that he has been co-opted or silenced by it in any way. Hence, the WC is not simply an empty space which has no value and is dominated by the ruling party (as many academics have suggested in recent years). The dynamics which are developing as a result of this interaction between the invited and the invented cannot be ignored. My argument is therefore that this second generation WC has become a highly contested space due to the presence of a strong social movement within it, and this dynamic has the potential to deepen democracy within South Africa’s local government.

Notes
1. The TCC and OKM are so closely linked within this study that these two structures will be presented as synonymous with one another in this paper.
2. The Code of Conduct for Ward Committee Members is an official state document (produced by SALGA) and all WC members are obliged to sign this document when they become WC members. In essence the document serves as a contract between the individual and the City of Johannesburg. Precisely how binding the document is in reality is unclear, but it is certainly viewed as a tool with which to constrain the actions of WC members.

References


Code of Conduct for Ward Committee Members (no date) SALGA.


Contesting ‘invited spaces’: where a ward committee and a social movement meet


——— (2012) ‘Transformative left-wing parties’ and grassroots organizations: unpacking the politics of “top-down” and “bottom-up” development’, *Geoforum* 43.

Smith, T (2008) ‘The role of ward committees in enhancing participatory local governance and development in South Africa: evidence from six ward committee case studies’. Community Law Centre (University of the Western Cape).

Smith, T and J de Visser (2009) ‘Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies’. Community Law Centre (University of the Western Cape).


**Interviews**

Lachporia, Y. Manager of the Student and Children Council, in the Office of the Speaker, City of Johannesburg. (Interview February 15, 2013)

Miya, MB. WC member for housing (Ward 8) and a key member of the TCC. (Interview March 6, 2013)

Segodi, S. Spokesperson for the TCC. (Interview May 9, 2013)

**Meetings**

WC meeting [Ward 8], Corobrick Municipal building, Lenasia. (May 27, 2013) TCC mass meeting, Park Station, Thembelihle. (June 2, 2013)