
Generating New Knowledge with and in a Community Setting

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Abstract

In the last decade there has been a surge of urban development throughout the world. Urban areas continue to be planned through the formal approach; however informal settlements in South African cities are growing. These settlements play an important political role in determining the type of urban space cities become. Local governments are pressurised into providing more resources in order to prevent urban insecurity, violence and environmental deterioration. Human beings have needs that are complex and interconnected. Urban prosperity lies in the linking of all city-dwellers in their interdependence. During 2013 the Department of Town and Regional Planning (TRP) at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) took part in the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project. The first phase of this project was to assist the community with mapping and enumeration plans and schedules. The second phase was to prepare a conceptual layout of the community to facilitate re-blocking of structures. A strategic way of implementing academic-based community engagement is through the pedagogy of service-learning. Service-learning exposes students and academics to key development challenges facing the study area while the community gains knowledge and confidence to negotiate for better conditions. Through the act of community-led enumeration and mapping students and academics are introduced to community members, other professionals and service providers. This collaboration improves strategies, practice and knowledge in informal settlements and creates a foundation for an overall development framework that can respond to the broad development challenges facing the particular community. In response to the 1991 Education White Paper on the transformation of higher education the concept of community engagement as one of the main tasks of a university, along with teaching-and-learning and research has been widely embraced. The understanding of how universities should go about engaging with communities is being widely debated by academics. It is strongly believed that the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project has contributed to knowledge regarding academic-based community engagement and builds on the progress being made by CPUT in becoming an 'engaged' institution. The Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project has been recognised as an official World Design Capital Cape Town 2014 project - WDC#236.

Keywords: Informal settlements, community engagement, service-learning, re-blocking

1. INTRODUCTION

It is believed that a community's aspirations are entrenched within the context in which they live. The intrinsic worth of a community needs to be understood in order to build on existing capacity. Gaining wisdom by listening to stories is a meaningful approach to community engagement. The Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project provided a means to hear the community voice, look at how the community functions and prepare the community and TRP at CPUT for meaningful engagement. This research shows that the majority of Flamingo Crescent residents were in favour of having students in their community and that reciprocal learning in this endeavour was indeed achieved. Students gained a better understanding of course content in the context of the community and

in turn residents of Flamingo Crescent gained knowledge and confidence to negotiate for better conditions. The purpose of the Flamingo Crescent service-learning project was for the freshman planner to observe informal urban growth that defies the normative developmental sequence. The normative sequence to development is, planning, servicing, building and finally occupying, however the reverse occurs during informal development becoming occupy, build, service and then plan. This is a situation in which the much needed 'public participation' does not happen. The upgrading of informal settlements then becomes an ongoing process that requires continual engagement and dialogue with the community and public at large.

This paper reports on the nature, source and limits of knowledge gained by planning students and community members during this service-learning project. Partnerships in community engagement are built around common interests and reciprocal cooperation between parties. Equity within partnerships requires that each partner respect the other and is fully cognizant of varied expectations. It is important to recognise that each partner is likely to be at a different phase of development due to the availability of resources. Equity amounts to fairness, democracy, accountability and diversity which, as a rule, should be the grounds of a partnership agreement (CHE, 2006:103). Reciprocity is regarded as a key characteristic of the partnership relation. This presupposes that benefits are equally distributed amongst all stakeholders. Universities who seek community partners should not view communities as a liaison of convenience, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise (Jones, 2003:152).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (DoE, 1996) in South Africa emphasises that the system of higher education must be expanded and transformed so that anyone who has the capacity to succeed is not excluded. The tabling of the Higher Education Act, 1997 resulted in the establishment of the HEQC, being a permanent subcommittee of the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE). As a result academic-based community engagement has gained ground in the last decade. The early beginning of service-learning in HEIs was facilitated by the Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) initiative, which introduced theoretical frameworks and practical models for service-learning from the United States of America (Lazarus, 2007). Since then other versions of service-learning has emerged globally that connect to the context and cultures of particular countries, as is the case of South Africa (Le Grange, 2007). In South Africa CHESP has done extensive work to promote community engagement by supporting institutions in building their institutional capacity and integrating community engagement into their curricular program structures (Lazarus, 2007). Hollander et al (2002) identified certain criteria that should be fulfilled in order for a HEI to be recognised as an 'engaged' institution. These criteria include faculty/department support for pedagogy and epistemology of community engagement and service-learning, as well as campus structures that assist academics in establishing community partnerships. It is also imperative that academics choosing scholarship of engagement through service-learning be acknowledged and rewarded. Hollander et al (2002) points out that it would be advantageous for all faculties and disciplines in mainstream academics of the university to be involved in community-based education.

In response CPUT has included community engagement as one of the strategic directions of the university (Lazarus et al 2008:66). A way of implementing academic-based community engagement is through the pedagogy of service-learning. It is said that service-learning contextualises and provides new insights into knowledge production, and teaching-and-learning. Service-learning provides a pedagogical intervention that provides students with an opportunity to educate themselves in society's problems and gain knowledge of community issues first-hand. (Bringle, 2010:228 in CHE 2006). According to Bringle et al (2004:6) in CHE (2006:25), service-learning exposes students to tacit knowledge that allows them to develop new ways of thinking and acting that are integrated with their personal values. CPUT has established a centre (Centre for Community Engagement and Work Integrated Learning) to provide knowledge and infrastructure support for engaging in community service projects.

The concept of community engagement and service-learning at universities brings into question the definition of the terms ‘community’ and ‘engagement’. The debate is centred on the question of what exactly these terms mean. Quality assurance requires that an agreed meaning of ‘community’ be arrived at, however Slamati (2010:107) believes that a generalised definition of ‘community’ that will hold for all institutions, for the sake of quality assurance, is not desirable. Who exactly the community should be in the context of a university is not clear (Lang, 2008 in Hall 2010:5). According to Hustedde and Ganowitz (2002) and Bhattacharyya (2004) in Smith-Tolken (2010), a community is only identified once the engagement activity has been proposed and unpacked. Furthermore different faculties within a university engage practically with communities in dissimilar ways (Naidoo, 2008 cited in Hall 2010:23). Favish (2010:93) acknowledges the difficulty of identifying a single community for a university as a whole, given that its constituency can extend from local to provincial and national levels. Another issue is whether community comprises of all stakeholders in a university, such as industry, the labour market, provincial and local government and Non Profit Organisations (NPOs) (Lange in CHE, 2008). In terms of scale, Lang (2008) questions how far from a university the community can be. Rural areas have unique social problems that local universities are best suited to address. It would be unjust for universities from far afield to tackle these problems (Nongxa, 2010:57).

3. OBJECTIVES/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research reported in this paper is an analysis of the community perspective on the collaboration with CPUT students during the Flamingo Crescent re-blocking exercise and whether it was worthwhile. The community was asked about the re-blocking concept and what outcome they expected.

- Did the residents welcome the university’s initiative to engage with their community?
- During the engagement did the residents contribute to the project and help the students with the mapping process?
- Did the community learn something from the students?
- Did the community teach CPUT students anything during the process?
- Could residents understand the plans produced after the mapping exercise and recognise where their dwellings were?

4. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The research design and methodology was an empirical, mixed-method case study. The process thus required investigating the knowledge construction process to determine the extent to which the collaboration with CPUT students helped the community in the mapping and enumeration exercise. The purpose was to listen to the voices of community members in order to find compelling ways of convincing community members that the space they occupy is space that they have ownership of within the context of the community. This would encourage community members to demolish their dwellings with the knowledge that the space they occupy would be returned to them once a more organised layout had been agreed on. During the service-learning exercise a substantial amount of time was spent building trust and explaining the mapping and enumeration process to residents. Time was also spent in the community office where improved layouts were discussed and decided on (Figure 3). The aim of this study was to interview every household who had participated in the service-learning activities, but for various practical reasons the sample obtained consisted only of 41 out of 92 occupants of individual dwellings. This secured a sample of 45% of all dwellings on site. The sampling method can therefore be typified as non-probability and convenience sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:206). A short questionnaire was compiled for the study.

5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS / RESULTS

As a point of entry, TRP agreed to let five students volunteer for a baseline survey in the Monwabisi Park Informal Settlement in 2011. The Department had no formal agreement with the community or service provider and student participation was strictly voluntary, giving the Department no control over

proceedings. As a result the students became despondent and withdrew from the project. This experience was nevertheless beneficial for the students, who experienced civic mindedness and ways of contributing to society, particularly through volunteering (Bringle, 2010:430). Since then there has been more effort made in building sustainable partnerships with NPOs, development practitioners and communities. In 2012 Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Informal Settlement Network (ISN) and Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) approached the Department seeking student involvement in some of their community engagement projects. SDI is an NPO that links urban communities from the global south through mobilising, supporting and transferring development opportunities from one location, to other cities, regions and countries. ISN is a network of representatives of residents of informal settlements and backyards at metropolitan level in South Africa that is committed to partnering with government in the incremental improvement of informal settlements and backyard precincts and the improvement of livelihood opportunities for their residents. CORC is a NPO that deals with social development in South Africa. It was suggested by SDI, ISN and CORC that the Department participate in the preliminary mapping and enumeration of a selected informal settlement for an in situ upgrade project.

The Department agreed to participate in the re-blocking of Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement where a community-based in situ upgrading approach was envisaged. The curricular pedagogy of service-learning was identified as the means for students and academics to engage with the community. Service-learning provides a pedagogical intervention that provides students with an opportunity to educate themselves in society's problems and provide experiences so that they can understand community issues at first-hand (Bringle, 2010:228). It is important that community engagement integrate with the curricula of formal academic programmes. According to Bender (2007:128) this is sometimes referred to as community-engaged teaching and learning, with the emphasis on community service-learning. Semester modules that would provide service to communities and enhance student learning, were identified within the National Diploma of Town and Regional Planning. Curricula community engagement, by nature, cuts across the three pillars of higher education, being teaching-and-learning, research and service. Community engagement is thus not a separate add-on activity, or charitable work, but a particular approach to university-community collaboration (Bender, 2007:128). The community mobilisation and organisation phase of the Flamingo Crescent project was initiated by ISN. This was followed by community-led mapping and enumeration. This allowed residents to start labelling their space/shack and locate it on a community layout plan. In 2013 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was drawn up with ISN, CORC and TRP as signatories. The purpose of the partnership was to assist communities within informal settlements to achieve a community owned and driven development process. The partnership aim was to ensure a holistic and collaborative approach that will at all times, encourage community participation wherever possible and keep as its central focus that residents shall be responsible for their own development agenda. The nature of the partnership was on the basis that participants are equal partners who bring different and yet complementary strengths to the tasks - equally sharing risks and benefits associated with the project. The parties also committed themselves to the common goal of jointly delivering to the highest level of quality and establishing a working relationship that is underpinned by principles of transparency and trust (MoU, 2013). The partnership agreement between TRP, SDI and CORC was not intended to directly address the community needs. CPUT does not have the resources to do this and it is unrealistic to think that the Department can schedule or programs its timetable to attend to these needs. The emphasis was rather on supporting the assets and strengths of the community. In the case of Flamingo Crescent the core partnership was between the community and the service provider, being the City of Cape Town, with CPUT and other academic institutions operating in the background. This approach falls within operational plans of the universities and allows students and academics to participate in community engagement with little financial investment.

The community of Flamingo Crescent is located in Lansdowne Industrial, Cape Town. The Flamingo Crescent residents are homeless people that live in a neglected and abandoned environment. It is a place that strives for morality and human rights. The character of the settlement is dirty, disorganised and appears to be unsafe. The informal housing is typical in nature and sprawls onto the sidewalk within the road reserve of the adjoining busy industrial street on the outskirts of Lansdowne Industrial. The

residents include men, woman and young children, all involved with their respective daily activities. The children play on the sidewalk unattended. Houses are made of wood, plastic and corrugated iron and can only be reached on foot; there is no vehicle or motorcycle access. In these compounds the houses have multiple rooms to accommodate extended-family members allocated to specific rooms. The site is flat with no drainage. Access is via uneven, irregular pathways which also serve as shallow drainage channels for household waste water. In the harsh Western Cape winters houses often become waterlogged and damp. At first there is little evidence that this is a functional environment but it soon becomes obvious that the community has assets that can be developed (Pinfold, 2014).

The inaugural site visit to Flamingo Crescent took place in March 2013. This meeting was used for partnership building and strategizing. The community presented their mapping and enumeration plans and schedules while TRP suggested ways of improving the plans using technology. It was decided that a small pod of five students and the lecturer would go into the community at one time. This was a discrete measure to avoid creating the perception that the community space was being invaded. A problem-based method of engagement was used where students allowed the community to inform the process, thus participating in knowledge production and in response students advised on how the process could be improved, becoming co-producers of reliable knowledge. This grass-roots engagement created interesting results. After a fortnight of measuring/mapping the community embraced the collaboration with students and relaxed, generating trust which allowed for more interaction. It became evident that the first phase of the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project was not just about mapping and enumeration, but about evolving a strategy that builds social and human capital that empowers communities to have the capacity to negotiate with partners (Bender, 2006:97). An important aspect of social capital is the building of social bonds, networks and trust. Bridger and Luloff (2001) and Dale and Newman (2010) argue that developing social capital in a community is one of the priority factors that needs to be enhanced in the development of sustainable communities in the future.

The second phase of the Flamingo Crescent community engagement project was to prepare a conceptual layout of the community. Fieldwork commenced with the community participating in a layout design of the site to facilitate re-blocking of structures. Students were divided into groups and allocated areas on the site. Each group was accompanied by the community residents from the allocated area. Using a field plan and cardboard cut-outs of each shack footprint the residents advised students as to where they would like their structure moved to (Figure 1). The students in turn, advised residents on the best solution within the context of their learning. This process resulted in a collaborative layout that would facilitate improved service delivery negotiated by the community residents themselves (Pinfold and Moodley, 2013). The re-blocking exercise ultimately involves residents breaking down their own shacks and re-building them according to an agreed layout. This bottom-up approach to development depends on residents themselves agreeing to the upgrade process. Residents were asked if they supported their community leaders and if they felt that re-blocking is desirable. Residents were asked if they thought the government was helping them, whether they were positive about their future and if they would be happier in the coming years. A semi-structured interview schedule was set up in order to evaluate the attitude of residents towards the project. In order to evaluate the opinion of the residents regarding the outcomes, interviews were completed after the re-blocking layout was finalised (Figure 2). The researcher collected and analysed the quantitative and qualitative responses. Additional data was collected through participatory observation during the mapping exercise (Figure 3). The comparative analytical method described by Maykut and Morehouse (2005:127) was used and applied to the small social unit of Flamingo Crescent (Pinfold, 2014).



Figure 1: Residents advised students where they would like their structure moved to and the students in turn, advised residents on the best solution within the context of their learning



Figure 2: CPUT students interview local residents of Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement



Figure 3: Additional data was collected through participatory observation during the mapping exercise

The survey results are tabulated as follows:

Did the residents welcome the university's initiative to engage with their community?

The majority of residents (80%) welcomed the university's initiative to engage with their community. The remaining 20% indicated that they did not think students were necessary or useful and preferred them not to be there. The negative effects experienced were due to poor communication between the residents and the students. The bulk of residents (78%) said they understood what the CPUT students were doing and why they were in their community while 7% were not sure and 15% did not know why.

During the engagement did the residents contribute to the project and help the students with the mapping process?

During the engagement 68% of the residents said they happily contributed to the project and helped the students with the mapping process. Others did not, as they were either not at home or busy with household chores such as washing clothes, preparing food and looking after children. The community enumeration and mapping team enthusiastically contributed initially, but this enthusiasm diminished as the project progressed. The main reason for the loss of interest was the absence of monetary remuneration for work done.

Had the community learnt something from the students?

The community was not entirely convinced that they had learnt something from the students, 29% were sceptical and said they had not learnt anything, 12% were undecided, but 59% felt they had gained some knowledge from the students.

Did the community teach the students anything during the process?	• Sixty three percent of participants felt that the students had also learned something from them. • The majority of students agreed that they had gained some knowledge from the community that would enlighten their learning.
Could residents understand the plans produced after the mapping exercise and recognise where their dwellings were located?	The concern was that residents could not understand the plans; however the survey revealed that 68% of the residents could understand the plans.
Residents were asked if they supported their community leaders and if they felt re-blocking was desirable.	Residents indicated that they supported their community leaders (88%) and felt they were doing a good job, 2% were unsure and 10% did not. The vast majority of the residents (95%) indicated they wanted a new shack and 88% supported the re-blocking process, however 44% did not want to relocate their shack to accommodate the new layout. Furthermore, 73% felt that they should be given a house rather than a new shack and that government should provide this.
Residents were asked if they thought the government was helping them and if they were positive about their future and would they be happier in the coming years.	When asked if they thought government was helping them 76% believe government is helping them, 12% were sceptical, 5% did not think so and 7% did not know. One hundred percent of respondents were positive about their future and felt they would be happier in the coming years.

Table 1: Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement survey results

6. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The understanding of how universities should go about engaging with communities is being widely debated and researched by academics. It is strongly believed that the experience gained during the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project has contributed to the understanding of community engagement and builds on the progress being made by CPUT in becoming an 'engaged' institution.

Through the act of community-led mapping and enumeration of community assets participants are introduced to community members, site conditions, and various other professional disciplines, partners and service providers. This collaboration involving a common task forms the basis for building relationships among all involved in improving strategies, practice and knowledge in community development. A common mapping exercise by different disciplines will form the foundation of an overall development framework document that can respond to the broad development challenges facing a particular community. Through the pedagogy of service-learning students are exposed to key development challenges facing the study area, and can suggest an approach to respond to these challenges. This exercise provides a basis for developing a methodology for entrenching service-learning in the Department on which to build a model for 'vertical planning studios'. This model forms the conceptual basis for implementing the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) compliant diploma curriculum. The HEQSF compliant curriculum, together with Work Integrated Learning (WIL) defines the main character, teaching-and-learning strategy and pedagogy.

7. CONCLUSION

The Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project has provided an innovative way for teaching students within a community setting. Participation in a dynamic community environment has initiated action that has resulted in the community being able to exchange ideas and knowledge amongst themselves and to negotiate with partners, in particular the service provider. Through the acquisition of tacit knowledge, the status quo of conditions within the community has been revealed; this allows a better understanding of how the community works. This has benefited student and the community in their quest to generate new knowledge with, and in a community setting. The mapping and enumeration exercise at Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement has shown that building trust, awareness and motivation amongst community residents creates an environment that builds partnerships, enabling a favourable milieu for negotiation and cooperation. The lessons learnt during the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project will be transferred to the forthcoming Goedverwacht Mission Station community engagement project initiated by the Department. It is necessary for the Department, as an advocate of the service-learning movement, to document and publish service-learning best practice in order to support this academic form of community engagement.

8. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

In the context of a developing country such as South Africa, much more time and extensive longitudinal research is needed to determine how social capital building and social constructivism is stimulated through community engagement. This study reflects only on the community response during this particular collaboration; experience gained was restricted to course constraints, confining the study to a limited time frame.

9. FURTHER RESEARCH

TRP seeks to continue its activities in community engagement by involving academics in similar engagements. The question is how to create an enabling environment to attract partnerships that are sustainable. Various universities, locally and internationally, use different partnership models to engage with communities. These models need to be investigated, critiqued and benchmarked to embrace a future partnership model for TRP.

The Goedverwacht Mission Station community is a new community engagement project that was initiated by TRP in 2014. It builds on the experience and reflection gained during the Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement Community Engagement Project. This community engagement/service-learning venture is intended to be a participatory peer-learning experience, involving academics and students from various faculties at CPUT. This initiative supports the criteria for an engaged institution as identified by Holender et al (2002) who stated that community-based education should spread across all faculties and disciplines. This project begins with a community-led enumeration-and-mapping event that will form the foundation of an overall development framework document that responds to the broad challenges facing the Goedverwacht community. The intension is to induct students and academics to the site and build partnerships and social capital amongst students, academics and community. Thereafter different departments will apply their own service-learning modules under the administration/management of the Service-learning Centre and project leaders.

The overall goal of the community engagement project will be an informed development framework for the community that responds to challenges that link to the Bergriver Municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP), Spatial Development Plan (SDF), Local Economic Development (LED), Environmental Management Framework (EMF) and other relevant sector plans (TRP, 2014). This development framework document will be compiled jointly by academics and students from different departments and faculties within CPUT.

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