# 'Contrasting participants' realities regarding democratic planning: Comparing cases from Australia and Bangladesh'

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## INTRODUCTION

'Community participation' is one of the most overused concepts in today's world (Botes and Rensburg, 2000). For the past few decades, it has featured as the core of development initiatives in almost every country and has become a prominent method in shaping sustainable development on space (Marfo, 2007). In the literature as well as in development practice, the term is also introduced as community engagement, public or citizen participation, democratic decision-making and participatory development. In general, community participation refers to almost everything that signifies peoples' involvement in a democratic way (Cornwall, 2008). More precisely, it provides opportunities to the community to take part in governmental decisions and planning processes while increasing their levels of social and political empowerment (Glass, 1979; Mohammadi, 2010). In this paper, we focus our discussion on the participatory practices followed in urban planning. In urban planning, participation is conceptualized and practiced within the framework of the 'efficiency of sustainable planning process' through a concentrated understanding of communities' demand and transformation of commitments with stakeholders into planning actions (Amado et al., 2009 p.597).

The participatory approach to planning evolved from the dominant philosophy of development of the time and place. The concept and practice of effective participation took substantial theoretical direction from development models that promoted direct democracy and sustainable development concepts worldwide. In early 1990s, there was a global attempt to incorporate sustainable development concepts into every aspect of development. Under the broader umbrella of Local Agenda 21 (LA21), the United Nations emphasized democratic planning through participatory urban development and improved urban governance (Freeman, 1996). It also called for investment in capacity development of local urban agencies.

Participation, in practice, ranges from simply informing people about the plan to ensuring that the plan is made by the people (Arnstein, 1969). Leading scholars such as Forester (1989), Healey (1992), Sandercock (1998) and others have emphasized the need for participatory, need based and socially accepted planning in place of the traditional top-down expert-driven approaches. Campbell and Marshall (2000 pp.324-327) identified five key rationales for community engagement in the planning process. They are: (i) Participation enables individuals to express and pursue their own self-interests; (ii) It builds up a sense of community helping to secure collective well-being; (iii) Participatory planning puts emphasis on expressing individual's preferences and establishing freedom of choice; (iv) It safeguards the interests of all stakeholders including marginal groups; and finally (v) Participation materialises deliberative democracy through promoting open dialogue, shared solutions and by uncovering of new forms of knowledge.

Realizing these needs for democratic planning, western countries began their journey to involve citizens in planning during 1970s as the political ideology shifted with the breakdown of paradigms. The Skeffington Report published around that period set a precedent for public participation in planning at the local government level in the United Kingdom (Williams, 2002). This inspired other developed countries to take up major planning reforms to effect legitimate democratic planning (Mahjabeen and Shrestha, 2011). Developed countries have thus moved from traditional urban planning and management, towards approaches which combine technological innovation in planning administration with the experiences, knowledge and understanding of various groups and citizens (Mitchell, 1997). The paradigm shift in metropolitan planning rooted in the 1970s came to be materialised in developing countries with a time lag during early 1990s when a new phase of spatial planning was reinforced by the sustainable development agenda of UN. It is widely documented that true democratization of planning in those countries has largely remained unsuccessful. Despite entrenched democratic traditions, unlike western countries, cities in the developing world are prone to a wide range of factors that underscore the need to integrate the citizen into the planning process (Rahman, 2008). These factors range from socio-cultural to political, technological, and logistical and "are spread over a seemingly endless spectrum" (Botes and Rensburg, 2000 p.42). Factors that shape individual's attitude (tendency to participate) and subsequent participatory actions are referred to as "participants' realities". Lise (2000) argues that the absence of a proper understanding of participants' realities wasted most participatory efforts in developing countries and the policy remained as an inappropriate prescription for sustainable urban development. Determining participant realities affecting the attitude towards participatory actions is, however, not well operationalised in urban planning research.

Broadly, this paper investigates issues relating to the community's trust in the city administration and government agencies dealing with planning participants' realities and how they affect participation. It seeks to focus on the perceptions of practicing planning professionals about the community as participants. It is argued that the degree of synchronism between the views of practitioners and the community about planning issues and community aspirations is critical to the level of participation that prevails. It is important to analyse practitioners' view as it allows an insight into the considerations that go into decision-making, plan formulation and the organising of implementation process. Equally importantly, it allows us to understand how theories are translated into practice within the influences of the local context. To get an insight into the tension between representative democracy and participants' realities, we have chosen two contrasting contexts, a developed country (Australia) and a developing country (Bangladesh) that share common colonial legacy but contrasting socio-economic development and political situation.

This paper draws upon the authors' experience of conducting community forums in an Australian city and a field study carried out in Bangladesh. In the former case, it reports on the results of a community forum conducted as part of a series of eight forums carried out in 2010. This forum was specifically designed to compare local councils' technical staff's perception of their community's aspiration about a particular planning issue to that of the community view as recorded directly. In the latter case, staged semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of planning professionals to rank the importance of a range of factors that are assumed to influence the participants' reality and hence their tendency to undertake participation. One of the factors the practitioners were asked to rank was the community trust in city administration. This was compared to media reports on the issue of trust of the community in the city administration.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ATTITUDE AND PARTICIPATORY ACTIONS

This paper studies community attitudes towards participation and subsequent actions or inaction, it refers to major paradigms to build the theoretical framework within which to define the relationship between attitude and behaviour of individuals. Such theories are prevalent in the field of environmental psychology and landscape research in order to investigate environmental attitude towards ecological behaviour (Balram and Dragicevic, 2005). According to Kaiser et al. (1999), "... attitude is formed and affected by socio-economic, cultural and biophysical interactions. Attitude is also a powerful predictor of behaviour and thus an important tool in determining human response to policies and planning decisions" (Balram and Dragicevic, 2005 p.148). This research framework refers to the theory of reasoned action and its developed version, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1985; Kaiser et al., 1999; Balram and Dragicevic, 2005).

**Figure 1: The Theory of Reasoned Action (Kaiser et al., 1999 p.3)**

According to the theory of reasoned action (Fig. 1), behaviour intention is seen as a function of one's attitude towards performing certain act and his/her subjective norms. Attitude can be formed from individual's access to information and experiences (factual knowledge) where as subjective norms largely depend on person's own social values and beliefs. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980 p.5) argue that "barring unforeseen events, a person will usually act in accordance with his or her intention". The resultant intention derived from attitude and subjective norms might be in favour or against performing certain behaviour or action. Conceptualizing the framework of the theory of reasoned action into the domain of urban planning, this study considers attitude as a summary evaluation based on socio-political factors (participants' realities) that influences one's thoughts (attitude) and actions (behaviour) towards participation. Participants' realities are structured around the relevant knowledge, trust, social values and moral principles of the citizen that construct one's attitude. These are the internal factors or internal realities that are within the control of the participants. A narrower view of the theory demonstrates that attitude determines whether a person is in favour or against participating in the planning process providing that other externalities remain constant. Participants' realities vary according to the socio-economic context of the studied community. A general hypothesis is that citizens

in developed countries have better socio-economic condition than that of in developing context which means they possess high tendency to participate. On the other hand, poor economic condition as well as lower social capital is largely responsible for diminishing participation level developing countries. Unlike developing countries, citizens in a developed context are likely to participate as they mostly bear positive attitude towards participation.

The theoretical framework adopted is particularly effective in systematically examining internal participants' realities and their impact upon peoples' action or inaction towards participation. It facilitates categorisation of the influencing factors by recognising their preconditions and inter-relationships found in practice. While this study does not attempt to measure the attitude and behaviour of the community towards participation in the planning process, it seeks to determine the realities within a local context that influence the formation of their attitude in favour or against the decision to participate.

## STUDY CONTEXT

Australia represents a functioning democracy with well-defined tiers of government and elaborately defined statutory community participation requirements (Hopkins, 2007). The country is a signatory of a number of international treaties, conventions and agreements which have implications on urban planning reforms towards community participation. A significant restructuring was materialised as an outcome of implementing LA21 at local context (Bajracharya and Khan, 2004). The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979 (section 5), for example, includes providing ".......increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment" (reported in Mahjabeen and Shrestha, 2011) as one of its major objectives.

There are three tiers of government in Australia. The Federal government is mainly responsible for foreign relations and income tax. The State governments are charged with most other functions, include land use and transport strategies. The Local government prepares local area plans and regulates development. Being the lowest level of government, it is closest to the community and regarded as being the best informed about the Australian system is described informally as one where the Federal government controls the purse strings, the State government has the power while the local government has the all the problems. In reality, locally elected councillors are more accessible to the constituents of the local government areas. There is political pressure on them to respond to community needs (Mahjabeen and Shrestha, 2011). However, local government in Australia is referred to as the creature of the State. This points to the fact that while the constitution recognises their existence it doesn't accord them any rights. It borrows the rights of local governance and planning from the State government's powers. An important implication of this situation is that local government has to tow the line of the State government strategies. While there are often political tensions and differences between the local and State level policies, the State can and does, albeit rarely, exercise its power to sack or dismiss the local government that defies its policies. This may sometimes create dissatisfaction between the local government and the communities they serve (Piracha et. al., 2011).

Bangladesh was a British colony for around two centuries and later a part of Pakistan until 1971 when it finally gained national independence. In the mid-fifties, the Pakistani autocratic government introduced the conventional British master plan approach to promote organized development in cities, including capital city Dhaka by the capital development authority (later known as RAJUK). Subsequently, the first master plan project for Dhaka city was undertaken in 1959 (RAJUK, 2004; Islam et al., 2009). The project, executed with British technical assistance under the Colombo Plan Agreement, was designed by a team of foreign experts from a British consulting firm (Chaudhury, 2010). Similarly, attempts were made to accelerate and guide the pace of urban development in other cities resulting in the establishment of Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) and Khulna Development Authority (KDA) in 1959 and 1961 respectively (Elahi and Rumi, 2005). The power and functions of KDA and CDA were modelled on DIT, disregarding the variations of local contexts. Thereafter, both organisations prepared master plans following similar pattern of guidelines as prescribed for Dhaka city.

A review of these plans reveals the following key features (Khan and Swapan, 2010):
- These were foreign expert driven, long term (20 years), rigid plans proposing various urban services and development projects. The failure of these plans could be largely attributed to wrong forecasting, non-anticipation of major political events and a misunderstanding of local contexts.
- As the planning process recommended by the master plan did not establish any legal basis of citizen participation, it made no provision for integrating local input in plan preparation. Local problems and demands could thus not be conceptualised or accommodated.
- The plans were generic in nature and made no attempt to incorporate local knowledge of the context or local colour. They also did not take into consideration local institutional capacities or lack thereof, because they had been imported and implanted rather than locally evolved.

A paradigm shift in metropolitan planning took place when a new phase of spatial planning was reinforced by the new generation plans in the early 1990s. This represents a more away from master plans replacing it with a three-tier plan package, comprising of the Structure Plan, the Urban Area Plan and Detailed Area Plans (DAP). The Structure Plan and Urban Area Plan were prepared by the RAJUK technical staff jointly funded by Bangladesh Government and international aid agencies.

Despite this, urban planning systems in Bangladesh could be seen as representing the orthodox style of planning, characterized by a top down planning approach influenced by politicized patron-client networks, development experts, and large corporations (Hamdi & Goethert, 1997). It's planning and development processes are highly aid dependent and donors are concerned about its poor governance and weak institutions contributing to significant constraints on development. Despite being a democratic country, it is widely reported that Bangladesh suffers from poor governance that could be attributed to its traditional administrative system developed around the colonial heritage, a highly politicized bureaucracy, entrenched corruption and non-participatory planning approach (Khan and Swapan, 2011). Corruption has also eroded the vitals of democratic institutions all over the country. As a result, the 'good governance' agenda enforced by international aid agencies has been undermined by deep rooted corruption and lack of transparency, accountability and responsibility in the government system, planning practice and decision-making process.

**Legislative Framework**

The legislative framework in Bangladesh and Australia share the same British colonial roots.  However in Australia, as indeed in the United Kingdom, there have been a series of legislative reforms and the passage of new acts to replace old, reflecting changes in social trends, technology and community values. In Bangladesh, many dated acts still remain prevalent. For example, Town Improvement Act (TIA) 1953 is the key legal document that promotes formal urban planning in Bangladesh (Khan and Swapan, 2010).  Being an old Act, it does not make any provision for consultation with citizens during plan preparation and need assessment. Other legal documents (e.g. city corporations' ordinances) are also designed along the structure of TIA and also do not provide citizens any explicit mechanisms to access the planning processes or planning administration.

A review of more recent plans for other metropolitan cities in Bangladesh (e.g., Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi) adopted during 1990s also reveals a lack of emphasis of the legal basis for participatory decision-making. However, the Terms of Reference (ToR) provided to consultants engaged for the preparation of master plan in the cities does include a few clauses encouraging participation (see Table 1). The ToR are not legally binding, nor are the standards.

**Table 1: Nature of Participation recommended by recent master plans**

| Phases | Task | Nature of participation proposed |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Communication Plan (First Consultation) | According to the ordinances of city development authorities, consultation has to be carried out (separate from communication) with the communities/ beneficiaries, agencies and interest groups, at every planning process, base map preparation, action program and legislation process. Consultation with communities/ community leaders about problems/wishes and government support is also suggested. |
| 2 | Formulation of Planning Principles/Standards (Second Consultation) | At the second phase, consulting firms are advised to conduct consultation with the mass people regarding building design, public space, willingness of local people to participate and adopt prescribed principles and standards. |
| 3 | Community based Development Approach (Third Consultation) | In this phase, consultation is required not only with community leaders but also with the community as a whole (on some selected pilot areas). The following steps are to be followed in community consultation process: <br>• Identification of local communities <br>• Holding community meetings <br>• Ascertaining any intervention by public agency requested by the community to address their planning problems. |

Source: Khan and Swapan, 2010

**Political Systems and the Role of Planners**

In contrast to the very stable political system in place in Australia, Bangladesh has long suffered from volatile political situation that impacts the efficiency of development agencies. Since 1991, Bangladesh has been dominated by two major political parties with a number of basic conflicting positions over the definitions of Bangladeshi identity, national heroes and liberation war symbols (Kochanek, 1997). Absence of political consensus among the major political parties greatly affects the overall development process of the country. Political unrest and lack of consensus seriously hinder the implementation process of city development projects. According to an estimate the implementation rate of major master plan proposals for Khulna city in Bangladesh was only 25% until 2000 (Chaudhury, 2010 p.8).

As a result, planning context in Bangladesh is highly bureaucratic and influenced by political decision-makers. Unlike the case in Australia, the enabling role of planners to ensure community engagement is still not in vogue. The participants of the interview admitted that planners have very little opportunity to act as facilitators and tend to be viewed as technocrats by the administration itself. This could reflect a bias towards technical expertise which in turn is seen as a source of authority. With planning being a newly recognised profession in Bangladesh, planning tasks and consultancies are mostly vested upon engineers and geographers. Due to these factors, citizens' participation is often ignored or downplayed.

**Donor Agencies' Emphasize on Good Governance**

Urban development and infrastructure projects in economically disadvantaged countries like Bangladesh are highly foreign aid dependent. The donor-driven planning agenda operating in an orthodox planning context could cause environmental or social damage. Currently all development projects in Bangladeshi cities (including master plans) are either partially or fully funded by international donor agencies such as the World Bank (Rahman, 2008). Hamdi and Goethert (1997) point out several disadvantages of aid-dependency and argue that external financial assistance may not be suitable for recipient country's planning context.

Bangladesh suffers from poor governance that could be attributed to its traditional administrative system developed around the colonial heritage, a highly politicized bureaucracy, entrenched corruption and non-participatory planning approach (Rahman, 2008; Khan and Swapan, 2011). Traditional blueprint planning and administration such as that practiced in Bangladesh, have been blamed for inefficient urban planning, non-participatory decision-making, underestimating stakeholders' demand, under-performing development authorities, and non-cooperative service provision (Devas and Rakodi, 1993). Neo-liberal economic thinking leads to macro-economic policies that reduce the role of the state in encouraging bottom-up approaches to decision-making process (Rakodi, 2003; Khan & Piracha, 2009). Limited attempts at installing e-Governance in Bangladesh have had minimal outcome. As Khan & Piracha (2009) maintain, technological innovation within the planning system mostly focuses on economic objectives rather than a quest for improved effectiveness in terms of community satisfaction and achievement of sustainability targets.

However, recent donor-driven projects tend to require indicators of good governance, setting targets to be achieved with respect to accountability, transparency and public participation during project implementation. City development authorities, however, often showcase false or ineffective participatory mechanisms as part of planning practices, seeking out ways to satisfy the donor demands without undertaking any reforms.

**METHOD – CASE STUDIES FROM DIFFERENT CONTEXTS**

**The Australian Case**

The East Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC), in partnership with Curtin University, initiated a community engagement exercise through a series of community forums on public transport held across Perth's Eastern Region during October and November 2010. Over two hundred people from the local government areas of its six member Councils attended seven community forums that were open to all.

Within the broader goal of promoting sustainability and research advocacy, the aim of these forums was to identify the community's aspirations for an effective public transport service in the Region. The series of forums was aligned to the launch of EMRC's Regional Integrated Transport Strategy (RITS) Action Plan.

In addition to capturing relevant local knowledge about the opportunities and constraints in the area, the forums were seen as a means of documenting the values and aspirations of the community. This was closely

aligned to EMRC's role of regional development advocacy for the region. The forums were also designed to provide an opportunity to State governments to break away from the conventional 'release and defend' approach to planning by informing the planning process of community preferences and opinions for consideration beforehand. For Curtin University, similarly, these community forums served the purpose of its research-based advocacy.

The documentation of the series of community forums aimed at the creation of an advocacy tool to push for a community preferred public transport solution. Another aim was to encourage relevant government agencies to avail these findings and incorporate them into their plan making before committing to a firm plan.

Participants at the forum took part in a series of structured and carefully facilitated exercises that required them to consider various options for a public transport system for the region. They were asked to map significant regional linkages by identifying popular destinations outside their region, identify major locations within the region and the preferred ways of incorporating them into a public transport network. The final exercises required them to consider their preference for the mode of public transport and refine their preferred route alignments and the placement of major and minor stops. To minimise influencing decision-making by the participants, facilitators provided only basic standardised information about critical factors, such as the strengths and weaknesses of a range of modes of public transport. At each forum, outcomes from the exercises were recorded and were graphically presented to participants for verification. The major output at the end of the community forums was the identification of an overall public transport service configuration resulting from the superimposition of the routes mapped by each group of six to eight members across all forums.

In order to test the degree to which the technical staff of local councils could read community preferences and aspirations for a public transport system for the Region, an eighth forum, specifically designed for local government, technical staff was convened. This forum was attended by twenty-four technical officers including planners and community development officers. The officers were grouped around six tables according to the local council they represented. The forum structure as well as facilitation strictly followed that adopted for all community forums. At the end of the forum the route configuration reported by each group comprised of technical staff from a particular council was recorded and displayed. All six routes were then superimposed and the resulting configuration was compared to that extracted from the superimposition of the community group proposals.

Upon comparing the configuration of the overall routes yielded from the community groups and that from local council staff, significant similarities were found. The degree to which the two configurations are similar clearly suggests that the local council staff are well aware of their community's needs and desires. On the other hand, this also suggests that the members of the community make reasonable demands, overcoming the NIMBYism or other highly individualistic interests.

**The Bangladesh Case**

To determine the factors affecting one's tendency or lack of tendency to participate in the planning process, practitioners and key players who were actively involved in preparing master plans for mega city Dhaka, three metropolitan cities (Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi) and small towns in Bangladesh were interviewed in February 2011. The principle data collection techniques used included semi-structured interviews, informal conversation with key informants and desktop study. Fifty key informants were selected using snowballing sampling method for the interview (Table 2). The respondents were planners of city development authorities and consulting firms, mayors of the municipalities and academics teaching in urban planning programs. In line with Marfo's (2007) guidelines, selection of the respondents was vested upon their direct involvement in preparing master plans, long professional experience within the local context and familiarity with community interests.

**Table 2: Summary of Selected Respondents Interviewed**

| Type of respondents | No. |
|---|---|
| Planners from city development authorities | 12 |
| Planners from local government and municipalities | 16 |
| Planners from consulting firms involved in Dhaka master plans | 8 |
| Mayors of Municipality | 9 |
| Planning Academics | 5 |

A review of literature yielded the following internal factors that shape the participant's reality and influence their tendency to participate in planning: traditional beliefs, planning knowledge and education, poverty, personal vs. community benefits, trust in local city development authorities, trust in local representatives, informal governance and involvement in patron-client network.

Out of these some indicate the practitioners' view point more. We compare this with situations in Australia and BD. The biases that shape practitioners' perception of the community are compared. Not identical set of comparisons. In Aus check how practitioners interpret community aspirations. In BD how they view community's stance towards practitioners' – how they rate the imp of community's trust in the city administration in comparison to arrange of factors identified by them/ with ref to literature.

Survey participants were interviewed to determine their perception of the factors that affect community attitudes towards participatory actions in Bangladeshi context. They were asked to list the internal factors that determine participants' reality i.e., factors that influence the rate of community participation in the planning process. Based on their response, a draft list of significant factors was developed, presented under 'internal factors'. Within the internal factors, 'trust in the city administration' was also included. Practitioners were asked to rank the factors listed. The discussion was focused on the justification of their ranking of factors and explanation of the different dimensions of each factor. The data analysis was predominantly qualitative in nature with qualitative coding for the purposes of graphical presentation and categorisation of the participants' realities. To reduce the subjectivity, an independent coding and rank-order analysis were conducted. Rank-order analysis was performed in line with Malhotra (2008) approach, with a view to prioritise participants' realities affecting peoples' actions towards participation.

**RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

**Australia Case**

Fig. 2 (a) shows the result of combining the proposed public transport routes identified by all seven community forums through superimposition. This is based on combining/ superimposing the routes selected by all table groups. Each table group comprised of six to eight community members. The intensity (thickness) of the lines suggests the number of times a route was chosen by a group in any one of the forums. The number of red dots represent the frequency of selection of a location by the groups at all forums. Fig. 2 (b) similarly shows the configuration of the preferred transport route for the region based on the outcomes of the councils' technical staff forum.
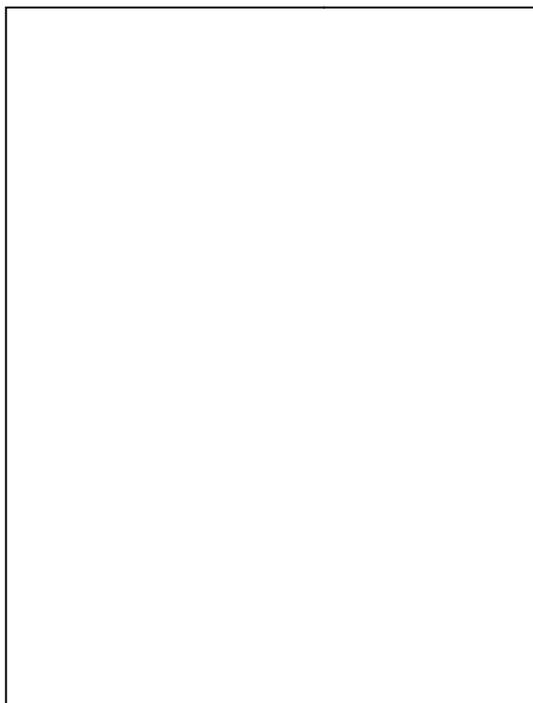
| 2(a) Proposed Public Transport Route: All Community Forums Combined Map | 2 (b) Proposed Public Transport Route: Technical Staff Forum – All Table Groups Combined Map |
|---|---|

**Figure 2: Comparison of Community and Local Council Staff's Views: Preferred Public Transport Route Configuration for the Region**

The map superimposes all six maps produced by each table group comprising of one of the six local council's technical staff. The two maps are quite comparable in terms of their configuration that specifies the major alignment of major routes and the location of significant places chosen as preferred transit stops. The relative thickness of the main segments of the route within each map suggests significant conformity.

A comparison of the two maps clearly demonstrates that the technical staff of the six local councils in the region has a clear understanding of what the overall community in the region aspires for in terms of a regional public transport service.

**Bangladesh Case**

Referring to the theory of reasoned action, factors that are derived from factual knowledge and social capital and values of the citizen can be defined as the internal realities related to participation. The respondents (professionals) revealed eight internal realities during the interviews: traditional beliefs, planning knowledge and education, poverty, personal vs. community benefits, trust in city development authorities, trust in local representatives, informal governance and involvement in patron-client network. The respondents were then asked to rank the indicated factors, including 'trust in the city administration' according to their comparative importance in attitude building and further policy implications where higher value carried greater importance. The responses were put into a rank-order model (Fig.3) to get a quantifiable average rank value (R) to demonstrate the relative importance of the factor 'trust in the city administration' in comparison to all other factors in graphical presentation. Rank value was calculated from the individual rank based on a score of importance (8 being the highest and 1 the lowest) given to each factor by all respondents.

Participants' (practitioners') views towards the range of factors are shown as survey results in Fig. 4. Basic education and planning knowledge of community members, as well as their tendency to pursue personal benefits over community benefits and their involvement in patron client networks were seen as important by over 50% of the respondents. Other factors such as traditional beliefs, informal governance and trust in city administration and community representatives were considered unimportant.

**Figure 3: Model Applied for Rank-Order Analysis of Participant Realities towards Participation (Malhotra, 2008)**
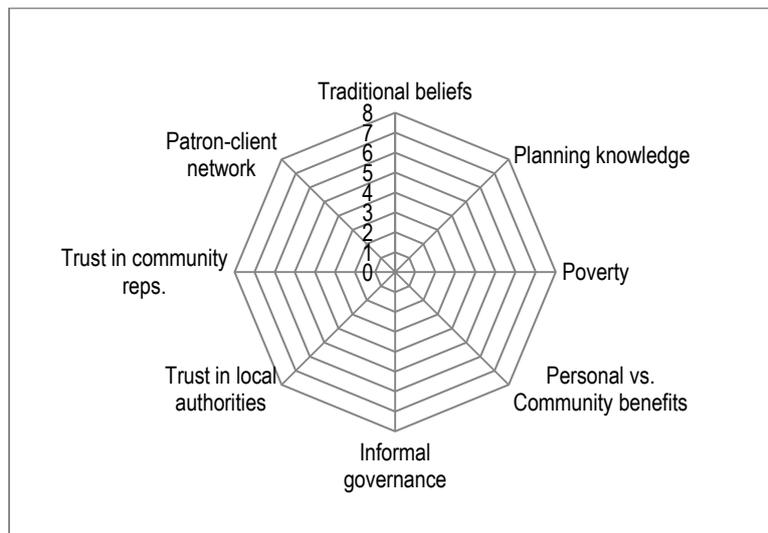
**Figure 4: Comparative Importance of Internal Participants' Realities According to the Respondent**

The final ranking indicates that the top three factors are the planning knowledge of individuals in the community, the issue of prioritising personal benefits over community benefits including. NIMBYism and the existence of patron-client networks that tend to provide an alternative to directly participating with the local authorities.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Trust in Local City Development Authorities

The scoring of this factor is discussed against the information previously obtained on the issue from other sources. Gaining the trust of the community is a central concern of planning practice as the profession stands at the nexus of public and private interests. Democratic planning is rarely entirely successful without proper attention to trust in the city administration by the individuals (Laurian, 2009).

The low score awarded to 'trust in local authorities' suggests, compared to other factors, respondents did not regard this factor as significant in influencing individual's tendency for participation. Perhaps this could be explained by the fact that most respondents were aligned to the city administration in their professional capacities. One could assume this to be a deliberate attempt to down play the significance of the factor to deflect any possible criticism of their performance in explaining the situation. It is more likely, however, that practitioners hold a positive understanding of their own performance which they judge in the light of better knowledge of operational difficulties and other limitations that force compromises in carrying out their jobs due to a host of contextual factors.

When their attention was drawn to media reports about violent protests by certain community groups against the implementation of DAP in Dhaka, all respondents acknowledged being aware that certain initiatives taken by local authorities (like land acquisition for new suburb development and allocation of serviced plots) had caused conflicts. They also confirmed reports of poor participation rates from those communities when they were revisited. The practitioners, however, generally understood that such conflicts did not represent the general attitude of the community towards the local authorities – but were deliberate, politically motivated events.

Evidence from other sources, however, tends to suggest that lack of trust in local authorities is a significant factor. Referring to the wide community conflicts in 2010 around the implementation of Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of the capital city, Dhaka, the following excerpt from the local media suggests there was much concern about trusting the intentions of the capital development authority (RAJUK):

> "Acting on a rumour that RAJUK was acquiring land for the purposes of constructing a satellite town in the region, hundreds of local people went on a rampage. In the process, they ended up vandalizing as many as 200 vehicles, torching a garments factory and laying siege to a public highway for hours together. The difficulties which such mob action can put citizens into can only be imagined" (The Daily Star, 2010).

> "We protested the plan as the government is trying to take our land," said Giasuddin (a citizen of Gazipur), referring to Saturday's protest against the RAJUK. (...) Interviews with about 100 people including a local

lawmaker, a chairman and members of Union Parishad, businessmen, teachers, students and farmers in Gazipur made it clear that the locals were motivated by propaganda from a vested quarter against the DAP of RAJUK. A campaign against the DAP and RAJUK's satellite town was initiated from June 22 through reports by three Bangla dailies owned by two well known land developers" (Roy, 2010).

Whether or not the incident reported above is seen to be the result of deliberate manipulation by external political forces, it suggests the prevalence of low levels of trust of local authorities. Even when seen as a political conspiracy, it suggests that the manipulators capitalised on their knowledge of the prevalence of low levels of trust for the city development authorities. In such a context, the existence of trust or its absence could indeed influence the tendency of an individual to participate based on the experience of past interactions or even rumours.

The Australian case, meanwhile, suggests that there is a good understanding among local government technical staff including planners about community aspirations over planning issues. The fact that the community and the technical staff could come up with largely similar visions not only suggests that the local councils have a good grasp of the reality and the community aspirations, but it also suggests that the community could think beyond NIMBYism and putting personal interests over community benefits. This points to a situation conducive to interaction between the two based on mutual trust. Community dissatisfaction with local government in this context could be largely attributed to the constraints that local councils operate within. These constraints could stem from factors such as the compulsion to follow policy guidelines decided at the State level and a lack of power to act independently. A clear alignment of thoughts between the local council's technical staff and the community over what the community aspires for clearly indicates that there is potentially healthy community engagement and the settings for effective community participation. It could be concluded that the internal factors relating to participants' realities in the Australian context are positive which is reflected in the similarity of views between the community and the local administration.

## CONCLUSION

The Australian case suggests a considerable similarity of views between the practitioners and the community about community aspirations. This suggests the prevalence of a set of factors defining the participant's reality that is conducive and which encourages community participation in planning. The empirical study from Bangladesh, however, presents a context where practitioners tend to view the community perceptions of the local authorities quite differently. The practitioners seem to perceive the limitations of the community as the main internal factors that shape participants' reality and, consequently, their tendency to participate. They tend to emphasise the community's lack of orientation to planning and development issues, NIMBYism and reliance on traditional client-patron networks offering an inferior alternative to the local authorities and planning systems as reasons for the community's limited participation in planning. While these observations largely tend to confirm findings and observations from other sources, there is a clear conflict of the practitioners' perception of the significance of the community's trust (or its absence) in the local authorities.

The perceptions of the planning practitioners could, among other factors, explain the reluctance within the community to participate in the planning process in the case of Bangladesh. This suggests that there could be significant improvement in the extent and effectiveness of community participation by motivating practitioners to the need to be more critical of and accountable for their dealings with the community.

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