RETHINKING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING: THE ROLE OF DISADVANTAGED GROUPS IN SYDNEY METROPOLITAN STRATEGY[1]

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ABSTRACT: Community participation is considered fundamental to fair and representative decision making in contemporary urban planning practice. It is often argued that the voices of the traditionally voiceless (e.g. poor and minority groups) are critical if plans are to succeed in achieving equity, efficiency and sustainability. However the participation of poor and disadvantaged groups in planning processes is difficult to achieve particularly where programs are located in powerful political and bureaucratic structures. In these situations community inputs are often ignored and the decisions are made through an elite culture of political and bureaucratic control. An important question to emerge is: Is it possible to achieve effective participation which includes poor and minority groups in programs that are controlled by political and bureaucratic elites?
This study critically investigates the opportunity for participation involving disadvantaged groups[2] (aboriginal groups and groups from a non-English speaking background) in the making of the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy (SMS) – a major plan initiated by the NSW government to guide the future of Australia's largest and most socio-economically and culturally diverse city, over the next 25 years (from 2005 to 2030). The results of this study show that the SMS created opportunities for stakeholders to provide inputs into the decision making process through expert working groups, local government level forums and public submissions. These participation platforms were organised and exclusively managed by government bureaucrats where the interests of socio-economic elites ― educated individuals, government employees and business groups ― were dominant in the process at the expense of community and disadvantaged group interests. The opportunity for aboriginal and non-English speaking groups to participate in a meaningful

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[2] We acknowledge that disadvantaged groups can be defined differently in different contexts. Here, we use the term specifically referring to groups of people that are socio-economically, culturally and linguistically in minority in Australian society.

way was almost non-existent thereby leaving them without a voice in the process. Hence the final decisions were made by bureaucrats and politicians with little to no inputs from these groups. The principal implication of this study is that since there was no effective participation of poor and minorities groups in the plan-making process, specifically targeted platforms organised under a new independent body that is downwardly accountable to these groups are needed to initiate, institutionalise and sustain effective and fair participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In a global movement promoting democracy, justice and sustainability, community participation is now central to planning and policy reforms around the world. Community participation is considered fundamental to fair and representative decision-making in modern-day urban planning and is also a key element in achieving sustainable development (Ribot, 2003; Redcliff, 2005; Shrestha and McManus, 2008). When community groups are actively engaged in planning and implementation processes, plans are likely to be more closely matched with stakeholders' needs, interests and expectations, motivating them to help achieve socially and ecologically beneficial outcomes (Healey, 1998; Shrestha and McManus, 2005; Sarker et al., 2008). In addition, it is often argued that the voices of the traditionally voiceless groups (e.g. the poor and minorities) are critical for plans to succeed in terms of achieving equity, efficiency and sustainability. However, the participation of poor and disadvantaged groups (and other community groups) is usually submerged in a culture of powerful political structures and institutions where community inputs can all too often amount to little more than tokenism. Hence, the important question to emerge is: Is it possible to achieve effective participation of poor and minority groups in programs that emerge from centrally controlled bureaucratic and political structures?

There is a growing body of literature showing that community participation in urban planning will help to bring together information, knowledge and skills from various backgrounds in a way that will improve the outcomes (Margerum, 2002), achieve mutual learning and the personal growth of participants (Sager, 1994; Healey, 1997), create a sense of ownership over outcomes (Healey, 1997), and generate agreement over solutions and increase support for implementation (ibid). The participation of relevant stakeholders can also be considered as a vehicle to bring about increased democratisation of the decision making process (Sager 1994; Healey 1997) and a beacon of hope in solving a range of planning and implementation problems (Jenkins, 2001). There are, however, increasing concerns among community groups and scholars that the current plan-making process, particularly in developed countries such as Australia, is dominated by powerful politicians, senior bureaucrats and professional planners who are principally concerned with pre-determined standards, targets, time-frames and economic imperatives. Community groups are encouraged to participate with little or no consideration of the individual stakeholder's socio-economic background, needs and expectations.

The principal aim of this paper is to investigate critically the opportunity for

participation by disadvantaged groups (aboriginal groups and groups from non-English speaking backgrounds) using the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy (SMS) as a case. Specifically, the paper will explore the following three interconnected sub-questions:

1. What opportunities are provided to different stakeholder groups, particularly for disadvantaged groups to participate in the making of Sydney Metropolitan Strategy (SMS)?

2. Are community inputs appropriately reflected into the final decisions (or programs) in the SMS?

3. Is there any program in the SMS directed at disadvantaged groups? If there is, does such a program reflect the need and interests of disadvantaged groups?

The paper is structured as follows. First the concept of participation is described in relation to relevant urban planning theories as well as stakeholder issues concerning participation in urban planning. Next a brief review of the planning policy in NSW as expressed in the SMS is presented describing its purpose and the major forums employed to receive stakeholder participation and inputs. This is followed by an analysis of the strengths and opportunities of these forums to address issues regarding disadvantaged groups in relation to inputs in the making of the SMS. The paper concludes by highlighting some of the pitfalls of bureaucratic plan-making in its attempt to understand and account for the legitimate interests and expectations of disadvantaged groups.

1.1 Participation: A conceptual overview

According to Agenda 21, one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making - "… decisions, particularly those which potentially affect the communities in which they live and work" (UNCED, 1992, p.23.2). The Brundtland Report, 'Our Common Future', places participation at the heart of sustainable development, viz:

> *…the recognition of traditional rights must go hand in hand with measures to protect the local institutions that enforce responsibility in resource use. And this recognition must also give local communities a decisive voice in the decisions about resource use in their area (WCED, 1987, p.115-116).*

Ribot (1996, p.40) defines participation as:

> *Community or popular participation is about communities having decision-making powers or control over resources that affect the community as a whole, such as forests and grazing commons or community development. But, for such decisions to internalise social and ecological costs or to assure equitable decision-making and use, they must be devolved to a body representing and accountable to the community.*

Arnstein (1969) produced a seminal work which critiqued and defined participation in terms of power relationships.[3] She developed a "ladder of

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[3] Power is described "as how people stand in relation to each other in the system" (Nelson and Wright, 1995, p.7-8).

participation" which defined different degrees of involvement of participants in relation to the delegation of decision-making power (Arnstein 1969). While Arnstein herself admits that the ladder is a simplified model of participation, it precisely captures an important point that many people can be disempowered in decision-making processes. The ladder is outlined in Table 1.

Table1. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation.

Degrees of Citizen Power	**8. Citizen Control**	Citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power.
	7. Delegated Power	Some power is delegated to agency decision-makers as well as to citizens.
	6. Partnership	Citizens are enabled to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders.
Degrees of Tokenism	**5. Placation**	A high level of tokenism. Citizens have the right to advise, but no decision making right or power.
	4. Consultation	Citizens may hear and be heard, but they have no power to ensure that their views will be considered by decision-makers.
	3. Informing	Citizens may voice opinions, but have no influence to ensure follow-through or assurance of changing the decision
No Participation	**2. Therapy**	Non-participation where power holders attempt to educate or "cure" citizens of their ignorance on a particular issue.
	1. Manipulation	Highest level of non-participation, where power holders do not enable people to actively participate.

Source: Arnstein, 1969, p. 217 – modified.

Nelson and Wright (1995, p. 7-8) identify two types of participation: 'participation as a means' — i.e. a process of achieving the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply, and 'participation as ends'— i.e. a process of giving some degree of control of a development agenda to a community or a group. In an ideal participatory planning process, participation can be considered as an end. In practice, however, it is generally seen as a means to achieve certain prescribed outcomes.

1.2 Participation and urban planning

Stakeholder participation in urban planning has a long history. According to Roberts (2004), citizen participation was found in written form in the Greek City States, in Ecclesia of Athens. In the Middle Ages, artisans of the city formed organisations to fulfil their purpose of controlling public matters in favour of their work interests. Town meetings as public participation forums, although dominated by the elite groups, were held in the New England Colonies in

America. And in the 19th Century, various groups were invited to comment on state and local level projects. It was the first three decades of 20th Century, however, that saw social groups formally participate in government planning and implementation processes (Roberts, 2004).

In terms of legislation, community participation first appeared as a requirement in urban renewal programs in the Housing Act of 1954 (United Kingdom). In the early post World War II years of the 1950s, it was a case of 'tell and sell' where governments around the world introduced modernisation agendas and cyclical economic development plans. Hence it is a truism to say that planning theory has experienced a tortured history in its attempt to establish a firm basis in practice for stakeholder participation.

The master/blueprint planning approach, also known as the comprehensive rational model, in the first two decades after World War II became the standard urban planning model. According to this model, professional experts, usually employed by government were charged with identifying a comprehensive range of problems (requiring comprehensive knowledge) and devising broad solutions based on rational planning thought and expert knowledge with little or no public input. Several competing theories emerged which challenged the rational comprehensive model. Prominent here were McLoughlin (1969) and Chadwick (1971) who promulgated planning models based on systems theory, which in turn were challenged by Faludi's (1973a; 1973b; 1986) procedural theory in the early 1970s. These theories however did not include participation in any contemporary meaning of the concept of stakeholder participation.

Participation of stakeholders in the planning process became a central tenet of the communicative planning theories that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s. Drawing on Habermas' (1987) theory of communicative action, a body of theoretical knowledge developed on how to connect the systemic side of human life and the value-driven side of human introspection—the latter being defined as the 'lifeworld'. Prominent writers in this field were Healey (1988; 2006) and Forester (1989) who attempted to interpret and apply communicative action theory to planning decision-making focusing on ways to account for the language of practical conversation and communication. Forester (1993) analysed the effects of political and social influence on social action and showed how planners can modify the exertion of political power in planning processes. He argued that planners can use 'information' as a source of power and by proper use of it, they also can empower citizens through democratic planning processes (Forester, 1989). In a similar way Sager (1994) used Habermas' critical theory of communicative action to examine how mainstream planning theories are related to the concept of power and conflict. Healey (1999) further refined communicative planning theory in relation to societal and institutional capacity where she defined institutional capacity as a combination of social, intellectual and political capital. Healey believed that as this capital grows and spreads through collaboration and networks, the 'civic capacity' of a society will grow and participants will be more confident with ability and competencies to solve their problems (Healey, 1999, p. 428).

The proponents of collaborative planning argue that it produces commonly

accepted objectives and has a commitment to implementation. In this sense collaborative planning assumes that sharing information and interaction creates new ideas, leads to more creative solutions, builds social capital and reduces racial tensions and social conflicts (Ananda and Herath, 2003; Baum, 1999; Margerum, 2002). Innes (1996) advances the concept of consensus building with equality in the collaborative process. She argued that all types of stakeholders — public agencies, powerful private interests and disadvantaged citizens — are supposedly treated equally within the process of collaborative decision making (Innes, 1996). Her thesis is that learning takes place in the collaborative forum and at times conflicts are resolved and innovations emerge which can be seen as a process of give and take and joint problem solving (Innes and Booher, 2004a). However, this position has been criticised on the ground that equal participation of various stakeholders with different interests and levels of power and authority is misleading (Hiller, 2003).

1.3 Key issues of community participation in urban planning

Collaborative planning has now become popular in contemporary planning theory and practice. It is aligned with the concept of communication through democratic decision making processes which seek to bring to bear a range of stakeholders' views on decision spaces that are often entangled with sets of 'wicked' problems and issues (see Rittel and Weber 1973). An important question to emerge here is how effective is collaborative planning in dealing with often competing and irreconcilable interest sets couched within a maze of democratic procedures and regulations? The problem with collaborative stakeholder participation is often that planning policies often do not clearly state the purpose of participation. The NSW legislation, for example, only requires the exhibition of plans for public comment but says little about how the comments will be used and for what purpose. In this sense the purpose of participation tends to fit the definition of participation as a means — that is, a process of achieving the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply (Nelson and Wright op cit, 1995, p. 7-8).

Nelson and Wright (1995) argue that if community groups and other non-government organisations are to benefit from participation in plan-making, they need to be given sufficient power and authority to enable them to influence decisions in a meaningful way. Similarly other scholars argue that collaborative planning cannot influence decisions because it emphasises the process of consensus building rather than producing results and hence this can also produce bad results and cause increased costs and a loss of time (Cameron, Grant-Smith and Johnson, 2005; Lowry, Adler and Milner, 1997).

A major hurdle for participatory planning to become fair and effective lies in the problem of elite domination. In collaborative planning processes elites and experts can easily dominate the proceedings (Fung and Wright, 2003) which can lead to well-intended projects failing in terms of achieving key objectives because local elites can misrepresent community interests and seize control of a project (e.g. Cernea, 1993). This type of participation can be described as form of "covert privatisation" that can easily lead to centralised control with the loss

of desired incentives of the people (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Pavri and Deshmukh, 2003). Power imbalances such as these can be addressed in multi-stakeholder process of participation by providing equal seats to all groups of stakeholders and also by funding travel expenses or providing preparatory materials of communications (Hemmati, 2002). In addition, there are techniques available on methods and organisation of community forums in relation to the use of expert advice (see Carson et al, 2002; Gastil and Levine 2005).

Finally, the question of power to influence planning and implementation decisions is important. Fisher (2003, p.20) explains the relation between power, decision making and implementation in relation to community forestry as:

> *"Power can be thought of as the capacity to have a meaningful (effective) input into making and implementing decisions…. Having a meaningful role does not mean that an actor makes all decisions, but rather his/her interests are given serious attention in negotiations. Meaningful decision-making also involves implementation. If a decision cannot be implemented or enforced, then the role in decision-making does not involve effective power".*

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research employs an in-depth case study analysis as a methodological strategy. The focus of the research is on local/regional level stakeholder participation platforms/forums organised by the NSW Department of Planning in the making of the SMS. NSW has experienced a significant level of planning reform since 2004. The SMS represents as one of several comprehensive strategies intended to guide the future of Australia's largest city over the next 25 years (2005-2030). A fundamental element in the making of SMS and in the planning reform process in NSW is that government planning and decision making must have effective community participation to achieve sustainable development. The study of opportunities and impacts of the disadvantaged groups' ability to participate in the making of SMS is particularly important given that Sydney is one of the most socio-economically and culturally diverse cities in Australia. This research is largely based on critical analysis of relevant literature and policy documents. Data are collected from the internet, census materials, records and publications by individuals and organisations. The research has employed a triangulation method to establish the validity and veracity of the data sources in order to enhance the value and accuracy of the study. A database – Factiva.com – was used to collect 117 relevant newspaper articles with the key words – 'Sydney Metropolitan Strategy'.

3. SYDNEY METROPOLITAN STRATEGY (SMS) 2005

A principal objective of the NSW planning reforms is to deliver sustainable development with public input through participation in the planning process. The reform agenda focuses on strategic planning for growth areas, simplification and streamlining of planning controls, improving development assessment processes and allowing flexibility in the use of developer levies for local facilities and services (Department of Planning, 2004). Particular emphasis is

put on governance and implementation with the intention to deliver timely and strategic outcomes for NSW across all relevant areas of government responsibility. The Metropolitan Strategy Discussion Paper was released in September 2004 as the basis for discussing Sydney's future with the community. This paper sets out the vision, challenges, directions, priorities, actions and ideas for managing growth and change that will occur in Sydney over the next 25 years (Department of Planning, 2004).

3.1 Background

Sydney Metropolitan Strategy (SMS) 2005 is titled the 'City of Cities'. It is the sixth strategy for Sydney since 1948. The Strategy was initiated by NSW State Government and released in December 2005. Its strategic vision sets out infrastructure investment priorities and attempts to integrate planning policies with infrastructure investment in the Sydney region by improving the information base and responding to community views through participatory processes (Department of Planning, 2005). The strategy covers a geographic area of about 10,000 square kilometres which includes 43 local municipalities (see Figure 1).

A principal strategic objective is to bring state government, local government and the broader community together to discuss, review and make decisions to guide the future of Sydney's economy, environment and communities. The following five aims were identified in the Strategy: 1) Enhancing liveability, 2) Strengthening economic competitiveness, 3) Ensuring Fairness, 4) Protecting Environment; and 5) Improving Governance (Department of Planning, 2005). To achieve these aims seven strategies were outlined covering: a) economy and employment, b) centres and corridors, c) housing, d) transport, e) environment and resources, f) parks and public places and g) implementation and governance (ibid). Community groups' participation in the preparation of the SMS is identified as a key element in the implementation and governance section of the subregional planning and strategy review and updates.

Currently, ten Subregional Strategies have been prepared by the Department of Planning in consultation with local government, community groups and other stakeholders. The subregions are: 1) Sydney City Subregion, 2) East Subregion, 3) South Subregion, 4) Inner West Subregion, 5) Inner Sydney Sub-region, 6) North Subregion, 7) North East Subregion, 8) West Central Subregion, and 9) North West Subregion and 10) South West Subregion. These Subregional Strategies were put on public exhibition throughout 2007 and 2008. The intention is to implement the SMS through these Subregional Strategies which in turn give effect to the blueprint of the Metropolitan Strategy in the local level planning instruments and action statements (Department of Planning, 2005). The subregional plans have been adopted on the basis of target sets in the SMS. Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) at the municipal level must be consistent with the Subregional Strategies and the Metropolitan Strategy. The majority of local councils are now in the process of preparing new standard instrument LEPs (www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au, 2004, accessed on 15th Nov 2008).

Source: www.metrostrategy.nsw.gov.au, accessed on 23 November, 2008.

Figure 1. Geographical area covered by 'City of Cities'

In addition, the NSW Department of Planning will undertake an annual review of the process to ensure that each subregion achieves consistency with the aims and directions of the Strategy. A major review of the SMS's strategic directions and overall aims will be undertaken each five years, coinciding with the release of the Commonwealth census data to ensure assumptions, objectives and actions remain valid (Department of Planning, 2005).

Community participation has had a long history in Sydney's planning (Hall, 2003) and the current Strategy continues this tradition by prioritising national and international policies and agreements which are grounded in the need for thorough public consultation (Searle, 2006; Department of Planning, 2005).

3.2 Opportunities for community participation in the making of SMS

The NSW Department of Planning was given the responsibility to organise consultation with experts, local government, stakeholder representatives and community groups. These bodies provided inputs to the planning process through reference to a panel, Future Forums, local government and community

forums. It is claimed that more than 10,000 people were consulted and among these 1,000 were individual residents (Department of Planning, 2005).

The Metropolitan Strategy was launched by the Department of Planning on 22 April, 2004 and provided a number of opportunities for the public to participate in the process (see Figure 2).

Sydney Metropolitan Strategy 2005
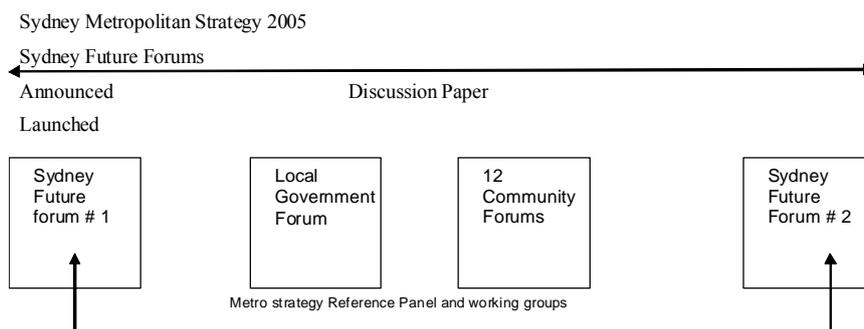
**Source:** Department of Planning, 2004, p. 25

Figure2. Stakeholder consultation process in Metropolitan Strategy 2005.

On 16 September 2004, with the inputs from the first Future Forum and Local Government Forum, a discussion paper was released. Submissions, comments through telephone, email or papers were invited. The Department of Planning received a number of submissions from organisations such as the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA). On 4 December 2005, the strategy was formally launched. Specific details on the opportunities for stakeholder participation are described below:

a) Reference panel and working groups: Experts were consulted through one Expert Reference Panel and four Working Groups (i.e. Employment, Transport, Environmental and Housing Working groups). The Expert Reference Panel members were urban planning specialists, economists, lawyers, social responsibility specialists and faculty members of the University of Sydney, University of New South Wales and the University of Western Sydney (see Figure 3). These participants not only led the consultation process but the Forums as well. This implies that the experts were given authority to drive the agendas of the Forums.

b) Future Forums: Two Future Forums were organised. The first Forum began on 18-19 May 2004, and was attended by 360 senior representatives from State and Local Government, industry and community groups. The second Future Forum was held on 13 December 2004 after the Local Government and Community Forums were held to bring a range of issues together for discussion. It is not stated anywhere in the SMS how many stakeholders groups were invited and how many of them chose to participate. Although these Forums were open

to community groups, the participation was by invitation only. Hence there was very limited opportunity for community groups and particularly representatives of disadvantaged groups to participate.
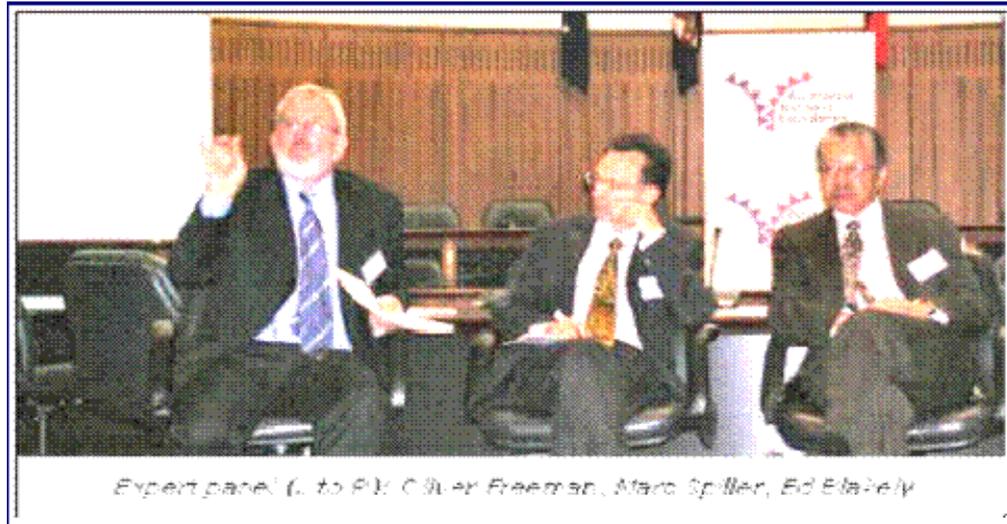
Source: Australian Business Foundation, 2005.

Figure 3. Expert Panel members in the making of Sydney Metropolitan Strategy.

c) Local Government Forum: On 17th June 2004, the Local Government Forum was held. It comprised Mayors, General Managers, councillors and Regional Organisation of Councils (ROCs) representatives. Two hundred representatives from 51 municipalities attended the meeting (Department of Planning, 2005).

d) Community Forum: Twelve Community Forums were held across the greater metropolitan region of Sydney on November and December of 2004. The participants were chosen on a random basis for Sydney, the Central Coast, and Lower Hunter and Illawarra regions. The stated aim of random sampling was to represent a wide range of groups across the community. The participants were asked to describe and discuss what they valued most about where they live, to identify things which will make Sydney a better place to live over the next 25 years and to say what they wanted Sydney or their region to be like in 25 years. Over 700 community members were reported to have participated (Department of Planning, 2005).

3.3 Community views on the future of Sydney

According to the "City of Cities" plan, four main themes were raised by participants (Department of Planning, 2005). They are:
   1. Protecting, preserving and having access to natural environment: This

includes the conservation of bio-diversity, bushland, waterways and parks. It was one of the strongest concerns shared by the participating community groups.

2.   Urban planning and development: There was no common consent about this issue, but urban consolidation, controls of high rise and high density development were raised as key concerns.

3.   Public transport: This includes the improvement of public transport service quality, good networks to both the CBD and the suburbs and a combination of different transport modes.

4.   A sense of community: This includes quality of access to shops, restaurants and involvement in community or social activities.

The SMS attempts to address the above community concerns through the seven specific sub-strategies mentioned above. It is interesting to note, however, that although the above issues and the objectives proposed in the Strategy appear to be consistent with key aspects of sustainable development, a number of initiatives are proposed for disadvantaged groups only in the Employment and Economy section sub-strategies by improving opportunities and access to jobs for disadvantaged communities. There is also a Housing section specific provision with the aim to improve housing affordability to the diverse community groups. However there is no specific community participation platform to facilitate the views of disadvantaged groups.

3.4 Issues of community participation in the SMS

The SMS has been subjected to severe criticism particularly for its emphasis on economic growth at the expense of the environment. The Gosford representative of the Future Forum reported in the Sydney Morning Herald that "A lot of talks were focusing on economic growth……but not approaching it from the most important factor, and that's the environment" (Tillet, 2004). Similarly, 90 councillors and senior staff members from 40 local councils raised a critical issue about how the environment can be managed and simultaneously support a competitive economy (Sydney Morning Herald, 2006).   These criticisms and questions are indicative of a perception in the community that the SMS may be biased towards economic growth and does not give adequate weight to protect environmental resources and promote a sustainable urban structure and form. The Newcastle Herald (2005), for example, reported that:

If there was a question for sustainable urban structure for lower hunter region, there must be something about protecting essential natural structure. But Sydney Metropolitan Strategy had failed to outline that.

In addition to the above general development and environmental issues, the SMS contains an explicit initiative on housing affordability which has been criticised because of a lack of affordable housing for people on low and moderate incomes. Also areas of socio-economic stagnation and deprivation were considered not to have been adequately addressed in the Strategy. The proposals for affordable housing were seen as unrealistic in scope as the plan is seen as principally driven by the need to enhance Sydney's economic role as a global city (Bunker and Holloway, 2006; Searle, 2006).

Although participation is a key part of the plan-making process, its

implementation can be criticised on the grounds that it was tightly controlled and biased towards vested interests. Because the Sydney Future Forums and the Local Government Forum were not open to the general public, they could be open to criticism. Furthermore they can be criticised as not transparent and biased towards the interests of business, industry, government agencies and peak non government organisations. Because attendance at the Forums was by invitation only, it is difficult to see why it was advertised on the NSW Planning Department's website. In addition, the basis as to how and why the invitees were selected is not made clear. It is also difficult to discern why the discussion paper was released with input only from the first Future Forum and Local Government forum and why Community Forums were conducted after its release. In terms of participation, it would seem critical to have had input from community groups, especially the disadvantaged which was clearly not the major focus of consultation strategies. The SMS can also be criticised for lacking detailed information about how the Community Forums were conducted and the basis on which participants were selected and what groups they represented. Complaints and dissatisfaction among community organisations for not having opportunity to participate in the Community Forums or lack of notification of the event on the Metropolitan Strategy website have been noted in community information papers such as 'Save Our Suburb' 2004.

Early involvement of the public is considered essential for effective public participation (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Durum and Brown, 1999; Hsu, 2006). Referring back to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation describing types of participation and community empowerment (see Table 1), it is reasonable to assume that any community consultation that did take place in the process of making the SMS was in the later stages of the process and was controlled by political elites with an overwhelming input from business interests, professional experts and senior bureaucrats. It is noteworthy also that the participation Forums were led by a Reference Panel and Working Groups who had little scope to think outside the terms of reference as laid down by the powerful political and bureaucratic elites. In light of the above analysis, there is strong evidence to suggest that the public participation process for the SMS correlates reasonably well with Arnstein's 'degrees of tokenism' in her ladder of participation (op cit).

4. DISCUSSION

The SMS created opportunities for stakeholder inputs into the decision making process through the Expert Reference Panel and Working Groups, (largely made up of elite representatives of government, professional and business groups), local government level Forums and public submissions. Community interests, however, were not directly and sufficiently represented and only found some voice through elites on the above Reference Panel and local level Forums. Analysis of the empirical data indicates that there was no direct participation of aboriginal and non-English speaking groups.

Critical issues in relation to community consultation concern the definition of a 'community' and how a disadvantaged group can be accounted for within this definition. While the Strategy indicates random sampling was used to obtain

views from community groups, it is silent with respect to the actual input from disadvantaged groups. What is importance here is the potential impact of the Strategy on disadvantaged groups, who are the very people most likely to have limited access to information and the least capacity to participate effectively in the Community Forums. Although some disadvantaged groups members did participate in the process, there is no record of what views they expressed nor is there any record of their group affiliation. What we can discern from the data is that disadvantaged groups were accorded some degree of representation in the Community Forums, but their input into the planning process as a whole seems likely to have made by bureaucratic elites and peak interest groups. This could explain why the Strategy contains few direct initiatives to address specific problems likely to be experienced by disadvantaged groups such as access to transport, health and community services on a level available to the more affluent members of the metropolis. This raises a question about why the Strategy did not contain policies that specifically address the needs and interests of the disadvantaged and to have elevated them to a much more prominent position so that their importance was prioritised in terms of targeted programs, funding and implementation (see Rawls, 1972). Hence it can reasonably be argued that input from the community groups had limited direct influence on the final decisions in relation to the SMS process.

The SMS does, however, address some conflicts between urban expansion and biodiversity conservation, through several initiatives such as supporting councils to achieve biodiversity certification and completing biodiversity mapping on a regional basis (Department of Planning, 2005, p. 212). It should be noted however that biodiversity certification is extremely controversial particularly with respect to compensatory habitats (see Gibbons and Lindenmayer, 2007). And while the Strategy includes the need for public transport such as the Northwest-CBD-Southwest Rail Link and new strategic bus routes to connect major commercial centres (Department of Planning, p.165-66), curiously there is no provision for light rail services even though this issue emerged strongly in the Community Forum.

In respect of the above deficiencies of community participation in the plan-making process, the NSW government claims an increased level of political legitimacy for the SMS. It considers it a Strategy developed from below or the People's Strategy. This is dubious claim in terms of the participation of disadvantaged groups because it is based on the grounds that the draft SMS was put on public exhibition, widely advertised in the media and subjected to Expert Panels and Community Forums involving more than 10,000 people over a two year period including a continuous commitment to engage people in future reviews and updates. Nevertheless there is strongly held view that strategy was significantly influenced by the will of developers and their associations such as the Property Council of Australia and Landcom (Searle, 2006). It should be noted, however, that the views of experts and private business owners were also not always accounted for in the decision-making process—an example being a private company's proposal to recycle sewage water was resisted by the Government ostensibly because of Treasury's fears in relation to reduced

dividends from Sydney water.

A further criticism is that the Warren Centre (an independent, not-for-profit organisation with industry links located at the University of Sydney) put forward a proposal for a fast train link between Parramatta and Central Sydney and that this was ignored by politicians and bureaucrats (The Warren Centre, 2004). Also the huge public interest in cycling and walking in Sydney were also largely ignored because of the Strategy's almost single focus on road and rail construction which reflects the power of government infrastructure agencies such as the Road and Traffic Authority (RTA). Community anger with the SMS process was reported in a Daily Telegraph (2008) which asserted that residents of Sydney's North and South-west were intending to launch a class action against State Government over the Government's unfair acquisition of their lands below market value to build railway lines and infrastructure. Later further accusations were made that the same land acquisitions were likely to be dropped as part of Government's cost cutting exercise.

5. CONCLUSION

Community participation in the making of Sydney Metropolitan Strategy closely follows Arnstein's ladder of participation in the sense that there was no empowerment or scope for the community groups particularly the disadvantaged to influence the Plan. While the SMS did include some form of participation and included a range of consultative mechanisms such as Expert Panels and Community Forums together with extensive advertising and exhibition procedures, the participatory planning process fell well short of the collaborative planning principles set down by Arnstein, Forester, Healey and Innes (op cit). Furthermore, the plan failed to satisfy community expectations, marginalised community groups and received a lukewarm reception from certain sectors of the business community. What we can conclude is that the key policy objectives and provisions in the SMS were largely pre-determined by government elites and that the public participatory processes were really there to give the Strategy a degree of political legitimacy. Hence public participation while now required by legislation is still trapped within the 'top-down' theoretical paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s and is yet to fulfil the lofty ideals expressed in the above mentioned communicative planning models that emerged from the late 1980s on.

If community participation is to be taken seriously in urban planning decision-making and to be inclusive of disadvantaged and minority groups, major rethinking is required with respect to the 'consultation' or participation process. This will require the terms of reference to be very carefully worked out and the procedures, methods and techniques for running the actual forums to be clearly set down at the outset. While executive government by definition will always control the process, the implementation of the legislation and regulations is the responsibility of the bureaucracy — that is, the role of expert panels, the selection of representatives from government agencies and non-government organisations, the management of community forums and the methods to limit control over the process by elite groups are in the domain of bureaucracy These are all matters that require serious consideration from the part of bureaucrats if

community participation is to work effectively and to be accorded the public legitimacy it requires.

Based on the above analysis, the following principles are offered for community participation to become fair and effective: 1) establish an independent agency backed by legislation to set the terms of reference for community participation; 2) accord the agency the legislative competence to guarantee participation and input from disadvantaged and minority groups; 3) provide guidelines backed by legislation for the management and organisation of community participation forums; 4) provide funding for appropriate expert input and resources to enable the participatory forums to carry out the tasks required of them. Finally this study implies that the public participation process for the SMS was still very much dominated by the interests of executive government with little real and effective input from disadvantaged and minority groups.

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