Design through participation: A review of definitions, theories and approaches

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ABSTRACT

Community participation has been a key to project success in many disciplines as it helps to ensure a mutual consensus over issues having contradictory opinions. Design through community participation is an effective method to arrive at successful design outcomes and numerous attempts have been made by designers to incorporate it in the design and planning processes. Despite its proven effectiveness, community participation is still not a commonly accepted practice for most of the designers.

The paper aims to review definitions, theories and approaches to community participation for a holistic understanding of the idea and existence of community.

Key words: Community participation, Community Design, Participatory Design, Democratic design, Community design methods, Anthropology, human development.

Community participation has presently become a norm for many disciplines to arrive at proper and realistic results. Due to its unprecedented success in delivering positive outcomes there have been attempts by researchers to define it and identify measures of success and evaluation methods. The paper is an attempt to understand the contemporary perspective to community participation and engagement.

Design and Anthropology

Design innovation in Architecture has helped in transformation of contemporary built environment**,** society and its culture. Since design is an inherent component of Architecture, diversity in Architecture directly relates to the diverse ways design is approached and perceived.

There are numerous perceptions of design depending upon the discipline to which it is linked. Researches in the field of design have explored terms such as design theories, design

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approaches and design methods. Design methods elaborated in the first generation design methods movement of seventies were Systematic Design, Pattern Language, Participatory Design (Salama, 1995).Design since the nineties has been researched in the knowledge disciplines of Environment behaviour studies (EBS), Sustainability and environmental consciousness, and Digital technologies or virtual practices (Salama and Wilkinson, 2007). The paper discusses a component of Environment behaviour studies (EBS), known as community design or public interest design, and the idea of community engagement embedded in its process.

Environment behaviour studies (EBS)

Environment behaviour studies developed from the confluence of architecture, urban design and urban planning on the one hand and the social and behavioural sciences on the other. (Moore, 2006). EBS provided an alternative and fundamental approach to design, beyond the debate of form and function. As noted by Lang "The role of environment-behaviour research is fundamental to the building of the design disciplines, if any image of the designer other than that of pure fine artist is accepted" (Lang,1991).

It initiated the social approach to design of built environment as noted by Moore "from …behavioural and social sciences – psychology, sociology, anthropology in particular…while much was known about individual, group and cultural processes, perception, cognition, preferences, values, attitudes, social norms, semantic structures, cultural differences, and so on – little was known about the relation of these social understandings to the physical environment" (Moore, 2006). Clarke points out that "…it was rare for designers to even talk with human and social scientists. These days, it's not unusual to find psychologists and anthropologists among designers, sharing and adapting methods, integrating insights, generating and evolving ideas and implementing them." (Clarke, 2010).

"EBS operates at the level of the individual, the group, the society and culture, and includes changes to the environment by the activities of people at these various levels. The field also includes studies of the political, social and economic context of environment-behaviour relations" (Moore, 2006). There are three fundamental orientations to the field of EBS as suggested by Moore (Zube, Moore; 1989):

1. A pragmatic, social-problem, or environmental-intervention orientation;
2. A range of substantive empirical, user group research, and socio-behavioural research);
3. Various theoretical orientations

Community Design

Community Design is a design approach that addresses social issues as well as user group research in design. Design has mostly been considered a facility for the privileged and most architects have in their profession conformed to this fact by designing for this class. But design for "the other 98% "as suggested by Bell have mostly remained unanswered (Bell, 2014). Community design or Public Interest Design addresses this issue as quoted by Wilson and suggested by Seymour: "Design is making things better for people" (Wilson, 2014). It highlights the fact that designers are not just accountable to their clients, but to all individuals, ecosystems, and entities effected by their work.

Community design advocates design for people (pro-poor), and involvement of people in the process of design. As stated by Lang "It grew out of the activist spirit of the 1960s, but also from the strong criticism of the attempt to solve urban problems through physical design and the elitist values upon which concepts of good communities were built. The movement led to the development of the whole field of environment-behaviour research" **(Lang,1991).**

Community design produces designs that are more acceptable and owned by the community. It cannot be created without engaging the affected community which is otherwise isolated. Therefore design for the community also requires understanding them, making them sensitive to vital issues to be resolved within the community and involving them at different levels of proposals developed and implemented for their benefit. The outcome may not be perceived as an aesthetically finished product but it is important for everyone involved due to its underlying process that relates to everybody in the design process.Since community design depends upon community involvement or participation in the process of design, the meaning of both the terms: community and participation or engagement require a deeper understanding.

Community

It is a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings (MacQueen et al., 2001). Definitions of community in current usage are many and usually vague and non-isolating" (Crow, 2007).

Community can be viewed through different perspectives such as a geographical area; a group of people living in a particular place; and as an area of common life (Schmidt, Terao and Yuen, 2013). A Community is created when people convene, in a manner that is either physical or virtual, and share the experience of an event (Bowman, 2012). Given the diversity of ways in which society exists or is perceived, solutions for various issues and problems faced by communities cannot be universal. A deeper study of societies and way they interact with each other helps in arriving at solutions which are individual, realistic and human.

Participation

Hamdi (2014) defines participation as a responsibility with authority in partnership with other stakeholders. The concept of user participation is as wide and variable as that of democracy touching political, ideological, psychological, managerial, administrative, legal and economical aspects in relation to various countries.   (Bayazit,2004). The concept of participation may seem more aligned towards the planning perspectives but it is important to understand the effects of participation at the grassroots level and the changes it can bring in people's lives as it may also be equally relevant in terms of design to an individual or a group of people at the same time. Participation is therefore a rich concept that varies with its application and definition (Mathbor ,2002). It is also contextual and varies in type, level of intensity, extent, and frequency. As noted by Hamdi, "Participation is about empowerment, assets, gender, resilience, sustainability, identity, community, design, interdependency, partnerships, equality, rights, ownership, efficiency." (Hamdi ,2014).

Numerous definitions of participation can be found in the literature (Sanoff,2000). But there has been little analysis of the content of citizen participation, its definition, and its relationship to social imperatives such as social structure, social interaction, and the social context where it takes place (World Bank, 1995).

The goal of participation is to encourage people to learn as a result of becoming aware of a problem (Sanoff, 2000). Participation defines needs (desires and necessity), converges vested interests, gets accurate information, identifies conflict and trouble shooting, discovers alternatives, provides continuity, mobilise interests, mobilise resources, creates partnerships, positions problems, reduces dependency (Hamdi ,2014).

Factors that motivate people to participate are wanting to play an active role in bettering their own lives, fulfilling social or religious obligations, feeling a need for a sense of community, and wanting cash or in-kind rewards (Jo McCloskey et al., 2011). The main source of user satisfaction is not the degree to which his/her needs have been met but the

feeling of having influenced the decisions (Sanoff, 2016). Factors that affect participation are the kinds of actors, culture of decision-making, existing organisation and hierarchies. (Hamdi, 2014)

Perception of community is inherent in the meaning of participation, as participation implies an act by a group of people. The concept of community participation relates to and is used in many disciplines where a larger group or whole community is affected.

Methods of Community Participation

Community stakeholders can participate in a variety of ways, and to different levels of influence, in identifying needs, generating solutions, planning new initiatives and service delivery (Community Places, 2017). When people participate in the creation of their environment, they need the feeling of control; it is the only way that their needs and values can be taken into consideration (Sanoff, 1988). Participation in decision making is likely to contribute to participation in benefits. It is equally important that "Who participates (and how they participate) is as important to consider as to whether there is participation, and of what kind" (Uphoff, 1997). Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility (Jo McCloskey et al., 2011).

Despite the presence of vast literature discussing models of participation, Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation is considered to be the most widely accepted model. It is a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made (Lithgow-schmidt.dk, 2017). Since then many attempts have been made to arrive at a model of participation, one group among them attempting to modify or build upon Arnstein's model itself. Apart from these linear ladder models, several non-linear model such as cyclic ones have also been introduced, still Arnstein's model and its derivates are the most widely accepted. As illustrated in fig.1, a few prominent models have been placed along with Arnstein's model as explained by Sanoff (2000), in accordance with its 8 rungs of participation from non-participation to citizen power. Similar stages in other models have been kept in similar horizontal rows. Deshler and Sock (1985) place emphasis on reconfiguring the Arnstein's ladder and is more detailed. Other models show their alignment towards certain specific rungs.

					VIEWS ON PARTICIPATION					
S. No	Arnstein's Ladder of Participation		IRDC, Cornell University (by USAID)	Burns	Deshler and Sock			Rankopo	Sunderland Community Development Plan	
	1969		1976	1979	1985			1995	2008	
8	Citizen Power	Citizen Control			Genuine Participation	Empowerment	Citizen Control			
7		Delegated Power	Evaluation			Cooperation	Delegated Power	Participatory mode	Partnership	Delivering Services
6		Partnership	Benefits				Partnership			Developing solutions
5	Tokenism	Placation	Implementation	Implementation	Pseudo-participation	Assistencialism	Consultation	Incremental mode	Engagement	Commenting on Decisions
4		Consultation	Decision-making	Decision-making			Placation		Consultation	Being asked
3		Informing				Domestication	Manipulation	Manipulative mode		Being informed
2	Non-Participation	Therapy		Perception			Therapy			
1		Manipulation		Awareness			Informing	Anti-participatory		

Figure 1: Views on Community Participation

These models suggest that basic parameters of participation are similar, and more emphasis has been given in realigning these parameters on new lines of thinking. Emphasis is again to suggest stages which relate to non-participation and participation leading towards citizen control and empowerment of the community. The initial stages of non-participation leading towards informing and manipulation, and last stages relating to citizen control and empowerment suggests stages through which people centric project can be developed which involves them in the deepest sense in making and controlling their own environment.

Conclusion

Participation is an essential tool if design has to reach to all. It helps in building common knowledge and essential learning by the community and with the community. Effective participation can change lives of the community for good and may result in an aware and informed society, who knows how to take its own care.

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