

# Interfering politicians: the underbelly of local community development within a South African context

Monique Marks\* and Kira Erwin

---

**Abstract** This article examines the complexities of local community development initiatives within a particular South African context, which of Kenneth Gardens, a low-income housing estate in Durban. The interface between community development, state politics (at a local and national level) and networked arrangements are discussed through the experiences of working on the Kenneth Gardens Community Project. The negative impact of political interference within local community development projects such as this one can lead to apathy and paralysis. We argue that this frequent interference in South Africa narrows spaces for meaningfully practicing democracy at a grass-roots level. However, local community dynamics and networks are also important factors to consider. As in the case examined in this article, these dynamics and networks ensure that development partnerships outside of the state are not completely immobilised or derailed.

---

## Introduction

This article is concerned with the interface between community development, state politics and networked arrangements. These intertwined issues are under debate in countries the world over, but particularly within low income societies (Beaumont and Nicholls, 2008). Despite commitments to 'participatory governance' driven by state bodies, the state has been increasingly 'hollowed out' (Shaw, 2008), leaving local communities

---

\*Address for correspondence: Monique Marks, Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology, Durban 4001, South Africa; email: [moniquem@dut.ac.za](mailto:moniquem@dut.ac.za)

primarily responsible for local development programmes. Often this requires having to deal with antagonistic government agencies and party agents, especially at local level, in the process (Fung, 2003; Wampler and Avritzer, 2004). The article, which takes the form of a narrative case study, explores one such case within a low income housing estate in Durban, South Africa. Our hope is that this narrative will open up debate and deliberations about local government, local community development and alternate governance arrangements.

In early 2011, the Community Development Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) embarked on a community engagement project in Durban's largest municipal low income housing estate, Kenneth Gardens. The idea of such a project was greeted with excitement not only from residents within Kenneth Gardens, but from city officials who were well aware that the estate suffers from neglect. The general enthusiasm for this project was in large part because, despite its size and significance, no social intervention programmes were taking place in Kenneth Gardens. In addition, at the time no research paper or book had been written about this place, except for Sally-Anne Murray's semi-autobiographical account of growing up in Kenneth Gardens, *Slow Moving Parts* Murray (2009). The Kenneth Gardens Community Project (KGCP) includes both research and engagement components and has received substantive funding from the National Research Foundation, for which the authors are deeply grateful. In this article we focus on two of the larger engagement projects.

Following community development principles and theory we began with a series of consultations to establish whether a university initiated engagement process was needed and desired by residents and other key stakeholders. Our initial engagements with the then residents' committee, non-profit organisations (NPOs) in the community and eThekwin officials all indicated that it would be welcomed. In hindsight, we acknowledge that it was naïve to believe that we could embark on this project, aimed at the co-production of knowledge and development, with buy-in from all quarters.

Localized community development initiatives can be highly politicized, to the extent that political interference can lead to co-production paralysis and entrench community apathy. We are aware that the Kenneth Gardens experience is not an isolated one. Indeed, throughout South Africa, local political agents' involvement in development initiatives has had the effect of derailing community development projects, rather than facilitating them. In line with Heller (2009) and more recently Piper and Anciano's (2015) observations, this article will show that South African civil society is becoming increasingly subordinated to party politics. The result is that civil society actors (including universities) are less and less able to find spaces where

they can meaningfully practice democracy. Even at the most local ward level there is a 'vertical dimension of democracy' (Heller, 2009:132). This makes networked, bottom-up co-produced development extremely arduous. We believe that it is important for this reality to be documented and shared amongst those who are interested in local development and engagement, as well as in localized co-production of knowledge and services.

Elsewhere we have published findings from the broader project (Erwin, Marks and Couchman, 2014; Erwin, 2015; Marks, Erwin and Mosavel, 2015). This article draws on our own experiences, as well as notes from meetings and conversations, about the various processes and dynamics that make up the 'underbelly' of this engagement project. Woven into this are accounts of similar dynamics within local community development initiatives in other parts of the country (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2009; Piper and Nadvi, 2010; Malabela and Ally, 2011; Katsaura, 2014). Democracy may begin with free and fair elections but a more useful measure is examining democratic practices in various strata of society (Fox, 1994). Thinking through the political implications for democracy using micro-level contexts such as Kenneth Gardens points to a troubled democratic practice where politics is entangled within civil society and citizen initiatives in unproductive ways. This stands in stark contrast to the South African government's National Development Plan (NDP), that states, 'people must be active champions of their own development and where government works effectively to develop people's capacities to lead the lives they desire' (Republic of South Africa, 2011:1–2). Whilst we do not engage in a dense analysis using political theory, it is imperative to place community development and engagement projects within the turbulent terrain of national and local politics.

The article begins by describing the depth and breadth of political interference in the KGCP and then examines what has been achieved in the projects thus far, and to what extent this has resulted from resistance or acquiescence to political influences and players. Taking into account plural governance arrangements are critical to understanding local community development, particularly in the context of a heavily contested political terrain. More broadly this case study raises questions about democracy and participation in South Africa.

### **Contested local politics and development in Kenneth Gardens**

Kenneth Gardens is a public housing estate established in 1948 for poor 'whites', in what was then a 'white' suburban space, close to key public amenities. The two middle class suburbs of Glenmore and Glenwood, and the working class suburb of Umbilo border the estate. These suburbs were 'white only' under apartheid, and whilst they are more diverse today in

terms of 'race' and 'ethnic' make-up, the political allegiance of the majority of residents, certainly in Glenwood and Glenmore, remains fairly liberal-right with a high vote for the Democratic Alliance (DA). This is in stark contrast to the reality of Kenneth Gardens where the majority of residents are now classified 'black African' with strong political allegiance (at least in voting patterns) to the more left African National Congress (ANC). The ANC is the dominant political party in South Africa, and also in the Durban municipality and the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Whilst Kenneth Gardens is Durban's largest housing estate, it is estimated that only about 1500 people live there. However, despite its relatively small population, many political fireworks have been lit by development initiatives in Kenneth Gardens. These were fuelled by local councillors from both parties that felt that community development initiatives were outside of their control. This was more the case with regard to the local ANC Proportional Representative (PR) Councillor and to some extent the local ANC Branch Executive Committee (BEC) where the PR Councillor played a leadership role. The politicization of local development in Kenneth Gardens led to development initiatives and contestations being played out at the highest levels of office in the eThekweni (Durban) City Council. Council leaders had to mediate political tensions and dynamics between academics, local political figures and Kenneth Gardens' residents. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful.

As noted earlier the project started with consulting relevant stakeholders about whether and what kind of engagement process should take place. Meetings were held with the residents' committee, the Ward Councillor and senior officials in the eThekweni Housing Department (now called Human Settlements). A community field worker, let's call him Alec, was employed by the university to begin forging relationships with all groupings that might be stakeholders in a potential project. Alec, who grew up in a former disadvantage 'coloured' township outside Pretoria, had experience as a development fieldworker in the Western Cape. Alec, as well as the authors, began to meet with a range of Kenneth Gardens' residents. At this stage, all stakeholders welcomed the university as a partner in development projects. The municipality was well aware that Kenneth Gardens had been neglected, and the residents felt that they lived in a space of invisibility. There was thus strong commitment from all parties to the coproduction of development and knowledge.

Given this positive response, we did not anticipate the local politics that were to emerge. Two early incidents hinted at what was to come. The first was when we were cautioned by the then Kenneth Gardens residents' committee that we needed to have a consultative meeting with the ANC PR Councillor about the university's possible engagement in Kenneth

Gardens. We were more than happy to do so. Alec set up a meeting with the ANC PR Councillor that did not go well. He was informed that nothing was to go ahead without her consent and that of the ANC BEC. Alec raised some concerns and by that night rumours were abounding (apparently emanating from the ANC PR Councillor) that members of a minority new party called the Congress of the People were trying to infiltrate Kenneth Gardens, under the guise of UKZN. Whilst Alec never overtly discussed his political affiliations he was to our knowledge historically a member of the ANC. The ANC PR Councillor positioned herself, and the BEC, as gatekeepers within Kenneth Gardens. Numerous efforts were made to shut down developmental initiatives despite the fact that these were co-produced with residents and their representative organizations. Over the following two years the authors attended further meetings with the PR Councillor, as well as met with the ANC BEC in an attempt to develop a more positive working relationship. Whilst some members of the BEC were receptive to the need and design of the projects, the PR Councillor remained antagonistic to university actors associated with the projects.

The second incident was when a senior housing official – who was initially very supportive of the project – indicated in a semi-formal conversation that we should under no circumstances appear to have any linkages with the DA because if we did the ANC PR Councillor would easily be able to veto project proposals at Council level. This was despite the fact that the DA was the official governing party in the ward in which Kenneth Gardens is located.

It should be noted that the party politics we experienced at Kenneth Gardens are typical of ANC domination tactics in Durban. The eThekweni Council is heavily dominated by ANC councillors. Ward 33, in which Kenneth Gardens is situated, is a DA ward with an enclave of ANC supporters.<sup>1</sup> As a result the elected Ward Councillor was from the DA, but the ANC ensured that it had a strong presence through the PR Councillor. Deploying ANC PR Councillors as shadow councillors to wards that the ANC lost is common practice in the municipality (Low, Ballard and Maharaj, 2007). Whilst Ward Councillors are elected directly, PR Councillors are elected through a party list and are primarily accountable to the party they represent (Paradza, Mokwena and Richards, 2010). In essence this means that 'whilst the electorate has the option of rejecting ward candidates by refusing to vote for them, they cannot do the same for list candidates' (Low, Ballard and Maharaj, 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup>In the last Local Government Elections in 2011 the DA won 71.19 percent of the votes in the ward and the ANC 22.85 percent.

The Ward Councillor's role is meant to be distinct from the PR Councillor. Ward Councillors are expected to ensure that concerns relating to the wards they serve are raised in Council. On the other hand, deploying PR Councillors appears to enhance the party's accountability and visibility in the communities it is embedded in, but not elected to. Given the ANC's dominance in the Council, ANC PR Councillors have more support and access to the corridors of power than Ward Councillors belonging to opposition parties. Not surprisingly, there is often a fair degree of conflict. This was certainly the case in Ward 33 where there was a long history of antagonism between councillor positions, as well as a fudging of roles and responsibilities. Low, Ballard and Maharaj (2007) highlight similar tension and conflict in at least three other wards in the Durban area.

With authorization from the Housing Department, the PR Councillor for Ward 33, who passed away in June 2015, converted an outhouse in the middle of the estate into an ANC office. Whilst brick outhouse buildings in Kenneth Gardens are not officially allowed to be painted, this office was brightly painted in ANC colours and in many ways continues to be a landmark within the estate. The office was 'positioned' to represent the needs of those that are believed to be inadequately served by the opposition (elected) party Ward Councillor. It would not be an understatement to say that within Kenneth Gardens, the PR Councillor positioned herself as *the* councillor; this self-appointed 'role' was supported by the fact that her party dominates the Municipal Council. Elected Ward Councillors in Ward 33 felt so undermined by the PR Councillor that one, after real attempts to address service delivery issues within Kenneth Gardens, resigned from his position in May 2013, stating that his DA affiliation left him powerless to either represent his constituency or to impact decision making processes in Council (Chapman, 2013).

The power wielded by the PR Councillor was not simply the result of the political party she represented or her very strong personality. It also resulted from the fact that, in contrast to the DA, the ANC had real support within the estate. Via the PR Councillor, the ANC positioned itself as a group to be reckoned with when any political, service delivery or development related issues were brought to the fore. As a result, DA Councillors tended to shy away (some after protracted battles) from the many service delivery and development deficits in Kenneth Gardens, leaving the door open for the PR Councillor to play a dominating and dominant role. 'Participatory democracy', at this very local level became little more than participating in initiatives that were initiated or supported by the PR Councillor. As Heller (2009) rightly concludes, given this type of interference, in South Africa broadly, the local spaces in which citizens can

practise democracy and take control of localized development processes have narrowed.

In addition, the ward committee, mainly made up of Kenneth Gardens' residents, was often embroiled in contestation and divisions between the PR and Ward Councillors. Piper and Nadvi (2010) note that in many parts of contemporary South Africa ward committees have been rendered useless as a result of competition for political control. Ward arrangements have stymied bottom-up and participatory approaches to local development due to the complicated and contested political dynamics that limit the efficacy of any form of participatory democracy or governance (Bénit-Gbaffou, 2008). Bénit-Gbaffou (2009) goes as far as to say that the provision of public goods is often exchanged (promised) for public support. In Kenneth Gardens the ANC PR Councillor time and time again promised to channel local concerns to relevant government bodies with the understanding that what was expected in return was votes for the ANC. Similar situations are noted by Low, Ballard and Maharaj. (2007) in their study on the dilemmas of representation in post-apartheid Durban. This weakens any form of civil society engagement and organization, making a mockery of the jargon of 'active citizenship' and democracy embedded in the NDP (Republic of South Africa, 2011:258).

Local social actors are often co-opted by political parties, creating what some South African political scientists have called a 'disengaged-enraged' dichotomy (Piper and Nadvi, 2010). At the most local level residents are disengaged from any form of influence or access to power, and they are enraged when promises made are not honoured. Within Kenneth Gardens this dynamic played itself out somewhat differently. Regardless of residents' frustration or anger at the PR Councillor's actions, very few were prepared to vocalize this discontent as it may have been positioned as being anti-ANC. They deferred to the PR Councillor for assistance, mostly with limited results. They were frustrated by their lack of control of their own locality, but at the same time there was a real fear of the consequences of being openly hostile to the PR Councillor. During our four years of collaborative community development work in Kenneth Gardens, we observed that there was a generalized belief amongst the residents (regardless of demographics or political affiliation) that she had direct links to those who held power within the City Council. It is not surprising then that in talking about Johannesburg (also an ANC dominated council) Malabela and Ally conclude that 'power to influence decision making is dangerously attenuated to the party structure of the local council' (2011: 4). In the absence of a strong civic response and organization, clinging to this tenuous link to power elites resulted in a combination of anger and



acquiescence amongst Kenneth Gardens' residents. Of course, residents were savvy and there were strategic reasons for maintaining good relations with the PR Councillor. Local ANC councillors who wish to punish confrontational community activists could make access to municipal resources difficult.

## Challenging political domination

Given this scenario, in the South African context, challenging dominant political parties and their agents to 'get stuff done' at the most local level takes a variety of forms from surreptitious to confrontational. Challenges resulted from the inimical stance of the PR Councillor toward residents and university actors, a few of which are highlighted here.

The first that comes to mind was the re-election of the residents' committee at the end of 2011 which occurred a few months after UKZN first entered Kenneth Gardens. The UKZN Community Development Department was invited to the meeting by residents on the existing committee as 'objective' observers. The election took place in what appeared to be a fair and free manner. It was presided over by a member of the ANC BEC. The residents' committee grew from two to ten active members who seemed positive about the new committee. The committee members quickly became a cohesive group, lobbying for service delivery and working collaboratively with the UKZN team to conceptualize and implement projects. The UKZN team also worked closely with two other groups of organized residents in Kenneth Gardens, both of which ran small but significant NPOs. We regarded the residents' committee as an important partner for us as 'outsiders', given that they were a genuine representative body of those who live in Kenneth Gardens. However, within a short space of time the PR Councillor, supported by the BEC, began to raise questions about the 'legitimacy' and 'representivity' of the residents' committee. The committee was said to have too many 'whites' and 'coloureds' and not enough black Africans. The PR Councillor thus declared the committee illegitimate and for the most part refused to work with it. For example, when the residents' committee joined hands with the UKZN team to create a community food garden to supply the feeding scheme run by one of the NPOs the ANC PR Councillor set up her own community garden alongside it. She hoped to demonstrate that the way she developed the garden was more sustainable than the way the UKZN/Kenneth Gardens team had. In truth, neither of the gardens survived very long, in part because residents did not take control of their daily care, but also because the tensions generated by the PR Councillor infused the gardens with an atmosphere of political



competition. The committee's relationship with the PR Councillor became increasingly antagonistic and the committee wrote at least two letters of complaint that we know of to city officials about her interference in development initiatives. Interventions at the highest levels of the Council were not successful in breaking this deadlock, which has lasted close on four years.

The PR Councillor continued to exert enormous influence until her untimely death in June 2015. During her term of office, she and her team impacted significantly on co-produced development initiatives. Perhaps the most significant manoeuvre was her insistence, and eventual success, in securing the election of an alternate residents' committee before the term of office of the existing committee expired. The elections were hosted by the PR Councillor who managed to populate the 'new' committee with predominantly ANC supporters and BEC members who lived in Kenneth Gardens. Despite this election being declared a victory by the PR Councillor, the committee was effectively defunct and whilst the chairperson maintained his title, no meetings were held for well over two years, nor has a re-election been held. The councillor's use of race to emasculate the former committee is not uncommon in community level politics (Katsaura, 2014:111), and resonates with national ANC politics that enforce race and nationalism as central to political mobilization and representivity (Beall, Gelb and Hassim, 2005:688).

The two authors that initiated the KGCP subsequently left UKZN for the Durban University of Technology (DUT). When the KGCP was established, Professor Marks was the Academic Leader of the Community Development Programme at UKZN. In 2012, the PR Councillor wrote a letter to the Head of Corporate Relations at UKZN stating that Professor Marks had no idea how to conduct community development work and had purposefully excluded the ANC in her consultations. The then Head of Corporate Relations convened a meeting with Professor Marks, the ANC PR Councillor and the then DA Ward Councillor. The PR Councillor arrived late, accompanied by the entire ANC BEC. Since the BEC had not been invited, the Head of Corporate relations closed the meeting. No further action was taken by UKZN. The PR Councillor's allegation that Professor Marks had not consulted the ANC about the project is indicative of this Councillor's self-assigned gatekeeper role.

At about the same time, a sport and recreation programme for young children living in Kenneth Gardens was established at the local feeder school, Glenmore Primary. The school principal was a strong partner from the time of inception of the KGCP. His commitment to the project was driven by his belief that it was the first intervention aimed at the real needs of children from Kenneth Gardens, many of which attended his school,

bringing with them a range of learning and social problems. The PR Councillor attempted to intervene in this programme by insisting on meeting with the principal and informing him that she had not been consulted about the project and that it could therefore not continue. The principal had her escorted off the school premises and has since refused to allow the local ANC to hold any events at the school. The modern dance and capoeira programmes initiated by the KGCP were in their third year and, at the time of writing, continued to run at the school weekly with roughly 40 participants.

In April 2012 a free homeopathic clinic was opened in Kenneth Gardens. This initiative emerged in response to conversations with Senzokuhle, one of the NPOs that provides home-based care to residents, as well as the findings of a household survey conducted by the UKZN in 2011 (the survey sampled 157 of the 282 units in the estate, covering a total of 641 residents). Discussions with many residents confirmed the survey findings that their most pressing need was access to public health. In partnership with the KGCP and Senzokuhle the Homeopathy Department at DUT decided to run a clinic within the estate every Wednesday morning, initially from an outhouse in the estate that serves as a community room. This clinic has been valued and well utilised by residents inside and outside of the estate (Erwin, Marks and Couchman, 2014). More than 120 people were cared for both in the community room and through home visits by the final year homeopathy students and a member of Senzokuhle. Soon after the clinic was opened the PR Councillor announced that she would arrange for a mobile allopathic clinic to visit Kenneth Gardens on a weekly basis. The mobile clinic arrived once or twice but was not a regular feature for the past two years.

Initially the clinic operated from the small committee room which did not allow for privacy and had no facilities for medicines and equipment to be stored, or for proper sanitation. Senzokuhle members identified an outhouse building that has since been converted into a clinic/wellness space with huge support and contributions from Glenridge Church, a new partner in the KGCP. Despite growing support for the clinic, and indeed many residents' complete dependence on it, the City continued to refuse to electrify the building. At the time of writing, city officials had not assisted with certifying the clinic, or acknowledged that the city benefits from having a free clinic in a ward with very serious health facility deficits.

In the early months of the conceptualization of the project, the eThekweni Housing Department stated that it was keen to form an memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the UKZN Community Development Programme. This would include the lease of one of the 'outbuildings' for a primary health care clinic. The ANC PR Councillor actively opposed the signing of

an MOU or lease agreement. She threatened officials in the Housing Department and caucused ANC Council Members against such a partnership. On one occasion, she interrupted a meeting to finalize the content of the lease and the MOU at the eThekweni Housing Department offices. The meeting was cancelled. The much needed MOU remains unsigned, which has serious consequences, for funding and the formal registration of the clinic.

In late 2013, one of the UKZN team members and a member of Sensokuhle were invited to attend a council meeting to outline why a lease was required for the clinic. After sitting in the council meeting for some time, the 'matter of Kenneth Gardens' was mentioned and the Council was informed that it had been struck from the agenda. This seemed to be a surprise to the official from the Housing Department. Informal conversations revealed that the PR Councillor had caucused members of Council to ensure that this occurred. One might ask how a PR Councillor could hold so much sway over Council. The answer appears to lie partly in the fact that she was a central member of the provincial South African Communist Party, and a long serving and high profile ANC cadre who spent many years in exile in extremely difficult conditions. It may also lie in Council politics where ANC PR Councillors have more say in initiatives in DA wards. In this case, political ties and allegiance were a much more important priority than local development projects.

The end result of the unsigned lease or MOU was that a resident who has worked in partnership with us, let's call her Ms Mbatha took a lease for the unused buildings in her own name, which residents can rent for additional storage. As noted earlier, Glenridge Church renovated the building to operate as a clinic. The Glenridge Church pastor and his constituency took this on as their own community engagement project. In early discussions with Glenridge Church and Sensokuhle, a strategic decision was taken that UKZN representatives would not be part of the team that approached the PR Councillor about the renovations. This was effective and the PR Councillor was supportive of the renovation and even wrote a speech that was read out by a colleague at the opening of the new building in March 2015 that congratulated Sensokuhle for forming partnerships, including the one with DUT. This may in part be because the university team took a backstage role in this development process, or because faith-based organisations can be more effective at circumventing political allegiances. It may also be because the PR Councillor was suffering from ill health and had taken leave of absence.

The struggles continued, as indicated by the refusal to install electricity. At the time of writing this article, Ms Mbatha had been threatened by a Housing Department official who claimed they would act against her if she used the building for a clinic. They insisted that they would close down

the 'clinic', even though they had allowed her to call it a 'wellness clinic'; these threats have yet to materialize. The future politics that will play out around this community resource are yet to be seen. Ideally, a public health facility requires a registered nurse or doctor who can dispense medication. Senzokuhle and other partners continue to work towards this goal. In the meantime the 'wellness centre' continues to function with a growing client base. At the time of writing electricity had still not been installed.

What is recorded here are parts of a bigger story that has taken place over a period of four years in the small but significant public space called Kenneth Gardens. Whilst numerous other incidents could have been mentioned, in telling this partial story, we have sought to demonstrate the direct interference of political groupings and party 'champions' in the daily running and planning of local development projects. The effects of such interference are not innocuous. Hours are wasted in endless and unproductive 'consultative' meetings whilst at high levels of city politics, caucusing results in stalling tactics. Community members feel threatened and have to weigh up whether the co-production of development (with, in this case, a university actor) is worth the political fallout that may follow. Brave and resourceful community members engage in development processes 'under the radar', and in so doing render the state and political parties both invisible and irrelevant (Bénil-Gbaffou, 2008). The by-passing of state systems of development by means of citizen-led co-production of their own services and alternative income streams is a global phenomenon that Redwood (2009) refers to as 'slumdog sustainability'. The following section briefly outlines the gains in the co-production of knowledge and development within Kenneth Gardens despite on-going political interference and gatekeeping.

### Significant developmental 'wins'

The accomplishments of the homeopathic clinic and its likely growth can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, a local NPO, Senzokuhle, largely took ownership of the running of the clinic. Members of Senzokuhle championed the clinic from its inception and are actively involved in its daily operations. Secondly, the clinic is sustainable because it is run by an academic department at a reputable university. The work that final year DUT Homeopathy students do at the Kenneth Gardens Clinic forms part of their required service learning. There is now an official MOU between DUT and Senzokuhle that commits the university to provide Homeopathic and Food Nutrition services to users. We believe that the clinic can be viewed as what Sutherland (2011) calls an 'invented space

of participation'. Such 'spaces', she argues, are created by citizens who feel they have little alternative but to intentionally disregard and avoid formal spaces of governance.

An equally inspiring development programme within the broader KGCP was the sports and recreation initiatives hosted at Glenmore Primary School. Whilst the capoeira and modern dance programmes were initiated by UKZN, they now run independently of both UKZN and DUT. Under the leadership of the principal, the school authorities have institutionalized these programmes within the school. There is a strong partnership network between the residents of Kenneth Gardens, the school and the providers of the capoeira and dance programmes (existing and former staff members at the respective universities).

None of these projects and initiatives resulted from smooth and uncontested processes. Indeed, in all cases there were hiccups which were resolved by the coming together of team leaders from the universities with residents and other partners. It is worth noting that there was a Kenneth Gardens Community Task Team made up of representatives of the various partners in the project, many of whom were residents. The Task Team's role was to provide direction and assist in finding solutions to problems that emerge or that are systemic. We believe that this was the key to the sustainability of the various projects, reinforcing [Pestoff's \(2014\)](#) view that the co-production of knowledge and development is critical to effective community development. It was the Kenneth Gardens residents and the various actors who run the projects that 'lived' out the real life challenges, dilemma and achievements, all of which were critical sources of learning.

## **Reflections on the local co-production of development**

The stories in this article raise critical questions about the possibilities of the co-production of development within highly contested and politicized local contexts. It should be noted that none of these projects include partnerships with government officials or departments, despite initial attempts to bring them on board. Non-state groups have been at the forefront of these initiatives, particularly local representative groupings. The KGCP is a real example of a non-state driven network at the most local level.

University academics, other partners and residents have navigated around (and below) local government structures. This gave rise to community development initiatives that are likely to endure because they resulted from rational consensus around key issues by a range of plural actors who were directly affected ([Beaumont and Nicholls, 2008](#)). Admittedly, this was not easy to achieve. The experience of local politics as obstructing rather

than enabling community development was significant, but it is important to bear in mind that when plural actors come together in a space of participation and engagement, developmental processes are possible, with or without the state.

In the South African case more broadly, we hope that this article facilitates and adds to much needed conversations about shared experiences of local political interference in development initiatives. Furthermore, it is critical to reflect on what this means for democracy in practice at the local level (Fox, 1994). Democracy is compromised when there is 'a growing lack of distinction between councillors representing localised communities and those representing the municipality as a whole, and a complex, and to some extent hidden, geography to the politics of representation in the city' (Low, Ballard and Maharaj, 2007).

Whilst these experiences of interference have diverse local contextual flavours, we would argue that they tell us something of importance about the national political landscape. Indeed, political dominance of civil society within the national landscape both protects and enables local level interference. Ward level interference has severe implications for creating and maintaining local or municipal level partnerships with government. In Kenneth Gardens, for example, it simultaneously resulted in acquiescence to the dominant party, and quiet defiance in sourcing alternative routes to development goals. Whilst we wish to highlight the incredible resilience of the Kenneth Gardens' community and its partners in building engagement projects despite local political interference, we do not wish to overly romanticize this. There is an inherent tension in these avoidance strategies. On the one hand, the successful implementation of community projects that do not rely on government and are driven through civil society-community partnerships might be regarded as exemplary democratic practice. Arguably this type of independent partnership is a positive sign of active citizenship. On the other hand, the lack of government involvement, especially at partnership level, creates fragility given possible future government antagonism and interference resulting from not going through 'official' channels. For example, at a more practical level the lack of government buy-in has prevented access to formal documents, such as the building lease and the installation of electricity, which at one point resulted in a loss of funding for the clinic.

Butler (2000) argued that the dominance of the ANC was a stabilizing force through the transition to democracy and did not automatically translate into a problematic one-party state. Five years later, Beall, Gelb and Hassim (2005:688) observed that 'stability achieved through single-party dominance remains fragile and contradictory'. The ANC dominates at the national, provincial and municipal levels, where political careerism is hard to separate

from party allegiances. Strong party allegiance operates outside of, and indeed supersedes government officials' roles in delivering to the people it claims to serve. This can serve to protect wayward councilors as their personal faults are difficult to untangle from a strong loyalty to party cadres.

'Ordinary' citizens often do not want to rock this boat as doing so may result in more than personal antagonism, and includes the possibility of being cut off from broader local government resources. As Kastaura argues, in resource scarce contexts community activism or community development work can be positioned as a potential source 'not only of political, symbolic and social capital, but of economic capital too' (Katsaura, 2014:108). Acknowledging how the broader context of a deeply unequal society with limited state resources and problematic service delivery creates obstacles to grass-roots democracy is crucial. Beyond the enticement of accessing the types of capital that Katsaura lists above, there may simply be a desperate desire by councilors to own development initiatives as proof that they are fulfilling their mandate. Thus, the microcosm of local development work cannot be disentangled from the broader political and economic landscape.

In conclusion, focusing on a local case such as Kenneth Gardens is useful for analysing democracy and local development in practice. It highlights how engagement and development work is strongly shaped by national politics. It also demonstrates the potentialities of development initiatives when plural governance arrangements (even without state actors) are forged. Indeed, in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, local agents, together with their partners, do strategize to get things done. Through strategic partnerships and plural governance arrangements, local communities, such as Kenneth Gardens, can draw in a vast range of knowledge, skills and resources that make co-produced development possible, against all the odds.

---

*Prof. Monique Marks is the head of the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology in South Africa; her work includes community development in the field of urban security and policing.*

*Dr. Kira Erwin is a senior researcher at the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology in South Africa, her work focuses on race and identity within various urban environments.*

## References

- 
- Beall, J., Gelb, S. and Hassim, S. (2005) Fragile stability: State and society in democratic South Africa, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, **31** (4), 681–700.



- Beaumont, J. and Nicholls, W. (2008) Plural governance, participation and democracy in cities, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, **31** (1), 87–94.
- Bénit-Gbaffou, R. (2008) Are practices of local participation sidelining the institutional participatory channels? Reflections from Johannesburg, *Transformation*, **66/67**.
- Bénit-Gbaffou, R. (2009) Local democracy, Clientelism and the (re)politicisation of Urban Governance – reflections from Johannesburg stories, in V. Padayachee, C. Crammer, B. Freund, K. Hart, and N Pons-Vignon eds, *The Political Economy of Africa*, Routledge, London.
- Butler, A. (2000) Is South Africa heading towards authoritarian rule? Instability myths and expectations traps in a new democracy, *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, **27** (2), 189–205.
- Chapman, W. B. (2013, June) *Op-Ed Daily News: 'Why I stood my ground'*, accessed at: <https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/bJD0BNI4VQ6F2?domain=warwickchapman.com> (11 December 2015).
- Erwin, K. (2015) Race, place and identity in Kenneth Gardens: narratives from a low-cost housing estate in Durban, *Urban Forum*, **26** (2), 187–201.
- Erwin, K. Marks, M. and Couchman, I. (2014) Homeopathic health care in a low-income housing estate in Durban: possibilities for a plural health care model in South Africa, *Journal of Health, Wellness and Society*, **3** (3), 1–16.
- Fox, J. (1994) The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico, *World Politics*, **46** (2), 151–184.
- Fung, A. (2003) Associations and democracy: between theories, hopes and realities, *Annual Review of Sociology*, **29**, 515–539.
- Heller, P. (2009) Democratic Deepening in India and South Africa, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, **44**, 123–149.
- Katsaura, O. (2014) Contours of urban community politics: learning from Johannesburg. in H. Christoph and H. Marie eds *Urban Governance in Postapartheid Cities: Modes of Engagement in South Africa's Metropolises*, Gebrüder Borntraeger Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart.
- Low, M., Ballard R. and Maharaj B. (2007) Dilemmas of representation in post-apartheid Durban, *Urban Forum*, accessed at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12132-007-9019-0/fulltext.html> (15 October 2014).
- Malabela, M and Ally S. (2011) The people shall speak? The ward system and constrained participatory democracy: a case study of Chochocho, Mpumalanga, *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, **76**, 1–21.
- Marks, M. Erwin, K and Mosavel, M. (2015) The inextricable link between community engagement, community based research and service learning: the case of an international collaboration Building Global Bridges project, *The South African Journal of Higher Education*, **29** (5), 214–231.
- Murray, S. (2009) *Small Moving Parts*. Kwela Books, Roggebaai.
- Paradza, G., Mokwena L. and Richards R. (2010) Assessing the role of councilors in service delivery at local government level in South Africa, Centre for Policy Studies, *Research Report 125*, Open Society Foundation, South Africa.
- Pestoff, V. (2014) Special Issue: Co-production and Public Services, *Public Management Review*, **16** (3), 383–401.

- Piper, L. and Anciano, F. (2015) Party over outsiders, centre over branch: how ANC dominance works at the community level in South Africa, *Transformation*, **87**, 72–94.
- Piper, L. and Nadvi, L. (2010) Popular mobilisation, party dominance and participatory governance in South Africa, in L. Thompson and C. Tapscott, eds, *Citizenship and Social Movements: Perspectives from the Global South*, Zed, London, pp. 212–238.
- Redwood, M. (2009) Slumdog Sustainability, *Alternatives Journal*, **35**(5), 24–26.
- Republic of South Africa. (2011) National Development Plan 2030: our future-make it work, *National Planning Commission*, accessed at: <https://protect-za.mimecast.com/s/NIYRBafYbVaiY?domain=poa.gov.za> (11 December 2015)
- Shaw, M. (2008) Shifting away binaries: the entanglement of insurgent urbanism, formal participation and state action, *Community development and the politics of community*, *Community Development Journal*, **43** (1), 24–36.
- Sutherland, C. (2011) *Chance2 Sustain*, accessed at: [http://www.chance2sustain.eu/fileadmin/Website/Dokumente/Dokumente/Publications/C2S\\_WP3\\_OP\\_V1.pdf](http://www.chance2sustain.eu/fileadmin/Website/Dokumente/Dokumente/Publications/C2S_WP3_OP_V1.pdf)
- Wampler, B and Avritzer, L. (2004) Participatory publics: civil society and new institutions in democratic Brazil, *Comparative Politics*, **36** (3), 291–312.