

Changing Practices of the State

Challenges and opportunities of community engagement in Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo - Officials' perspectives



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A report prepared for Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo,
as part of the CUBES series: Exploring Participatory Governance of
Johannesburg Urban Parks

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Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo and Community Engagement: Officials' Views on Challenges and Opportunities

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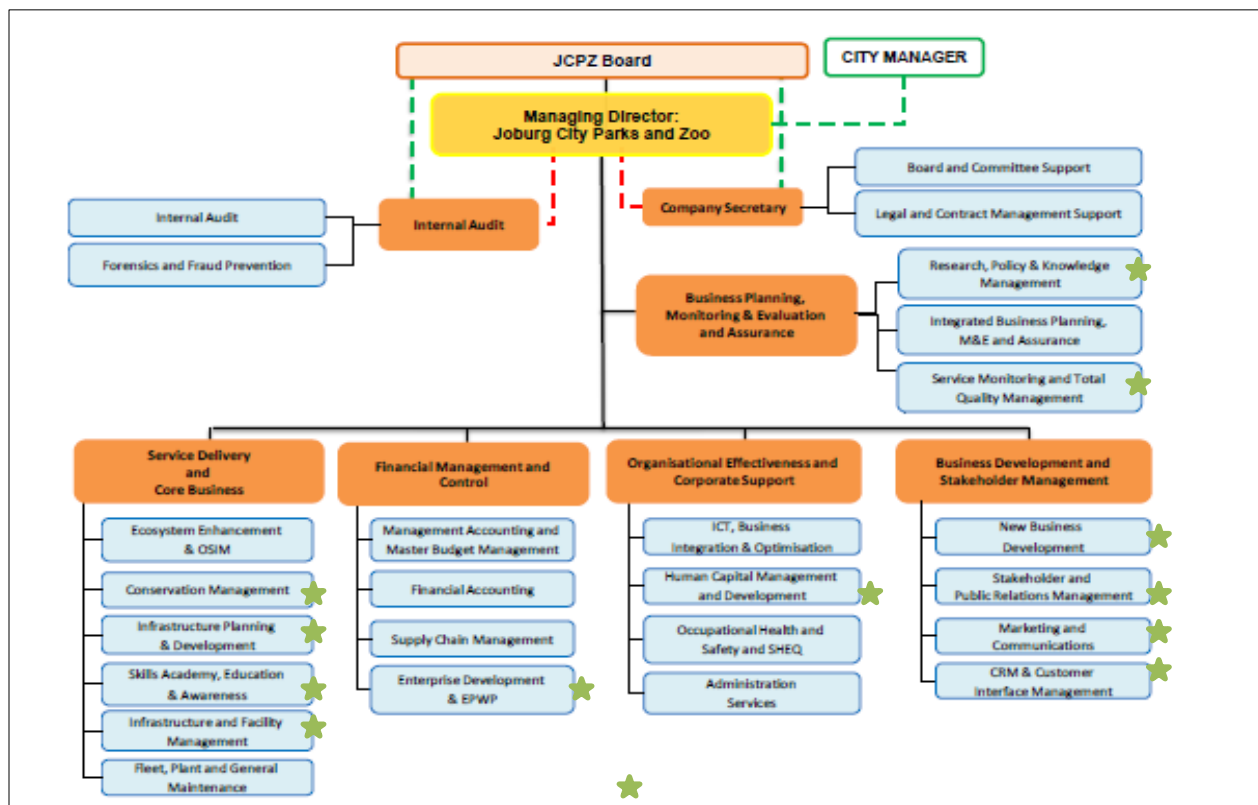
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Executive Summary

City Parks used to report to the Environmental Sector in Johannesburg City Council. Since its 2011 restructuring and its merging with Johannesburg Zoo under Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ), it has to report to Community Services. This is a major shift, from an environmental-oriented service to a people-oriented service. For people working for JCPZ, this might mean a change in practice, in orientation, in professional and institutional culture. This change is challenging, all the more there are instances of verbal abuses from park users committees used to work on their own and frustrated by the lack of response of an under-resourced City Park institution. This reports seeks to start investigating which institutions have been set up to frame and to encourage community engagement in City Parks; what processes are followed when a park is designed, or to set up a management partnership between JCPZ and park users committees (or Friends of the Park); and what experiences are encountered by City Park officials engaging with communities.

This report argues that current JCPZ institutions, processes and officials' key performance indicators are often not conducive to meaningful community engagement. Community engagement generally remains a tick-box exercise, generating frustration amongst both officials and communities, rather than the much needed, long-term relationship of trust building, essential to sustainable parks management. JCPZ officials are often ill-equipped to deal with local community engagement processes – where park users generally have limited knowledge on how JCPZ operates; where many broader social ills coalesce in the park, to which there is seldom a short fix, in a city still marked by stark social and racial inequalities. The report identifies a few of the institutional and policy shortcomings and makes recommendations on how JCPZ could make community engagement more effective.

1. Multiple, fragmented institutions engaging with communities



Community engagement is not one person's, one section's responsibility – even though there is a section of JCPZ called 'Stakeholders and Public Relation Management'. Whilst there are four Stakeholders Liaison Officers (SLO), each in charge of two regions, community engagement operates also in 'Core Business', for instance through complaints to the park or regional manager. When a park is being developed, it is the responsibility of Infrastructure and Planning Development to engage. When the park is finally developed, the Environmental Education starts its process. When there is an event in the park, communities might engage with Events Management.

Is this multiplicity an advantage or an inconvenient? The report argue that it is rather an advantage, as community engagement is everybody's business, not confined into one section of JCPZ – and therefore permeates the whole institution in its effort towards people-orientation. But park users get lost in this institutional maze: a dedicated, trained and resourced Stakeholders Liaison Officer should systematically and consistently help park users navigate the complexity of JCPZ operations.

2. Testimonies from City Parks officials at the coal face of community engagement

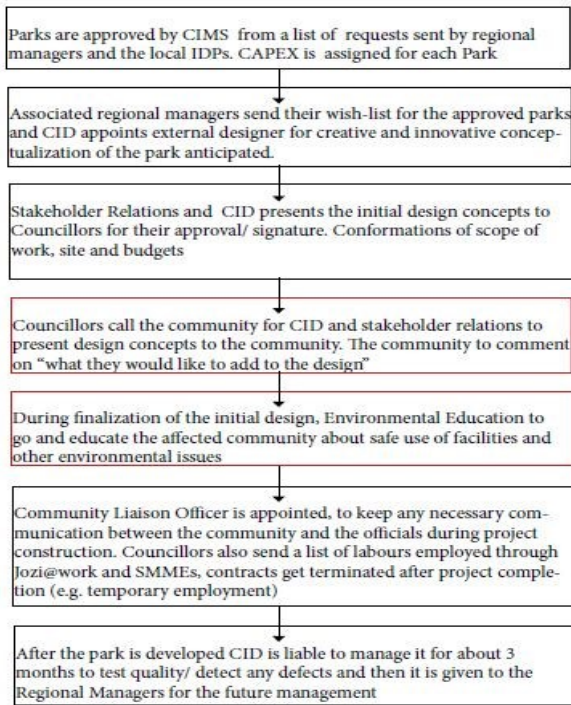
Testimonies collected from officials on their practices of community engagement were marked by frustration, even if at time mentioned the excitement and opportunity this new mode of governance opens. The prevailing elements in officials experience were:

- Communities' lack of understanding about what JCPZ does and does not; their unrealistic expectations that JCPZ is to solve any social issue as manifested in parks and public open spaces (crime, homelessness, litter, etc.).
- Communities' lack of understanding of how the City of Johannesburg works, administratively, financially (e.g. difference between capex and opex) and politically.
- Challenges in finding the right balance between communities' excessive appropriation of parks (over-commitment) and communities' lack of interest and involvement in parks management (under-commitment).
- In the northern suburbs, level of mutual distrust, resistance to City and to parks transformation, leading to a vicious cycle of disrespect. In townships, level of expectations in terms of job creation and resource distribution, central to any engagement process, but limited contribution and mobilisation around park management.
- Only occasionally are partnerships developed, where JCPZ and Friends of the Parks are able to tap on their respective and complementary skills and resources for the benefit of the park. Cf FoP's environmental and legal skills handy when it comes to protecting parks against undue or excessive private development.
- There are challenges in formalising community partnerships with JCPZ in terms of park management.

3. The non-participatory process of designing parks: a recipe for unsustainable management?

JCPZ has embarked in an ambitious and forward looking drive to develop parks in previously disadvantaged areas, where open spaces were seldom developed as parks. The City is committing some capital budget for this purpose, and parks have multiplied at a great pace in Soweto. In doing so, JCPZ has a unique opportunity to involve residents and communities in the design, development and future management of urban parks. Unlike in the Northern suburbs, there is no tradition of park users committees – yet open public spaces need community management.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PARK



The red boxes indicate the phases where communities are engaged

However, this opportunity of mobilising communities and establishing strong partnerships with Friends of the park, opened by the park design process, does not appear to be used.

Once a park is approved and budgeted, the design is given to an outsourced, external designer who has limited institutional memory, does not necessarily take future management costs into consideration, and seldom has time to familiarise herself with the site and the community.

Community engagement on the design is limited, occurs generally at the end of the designers’ contract. Users are consulted via their councillor on what they would like to add to the design, but no feedback showing how the design has (or not) incorporated their wishes or claims is given.

Participation and Community engagement is mostly conceived in terms of job creation – an important, but short term objective.

Interrogating design and management, constructing communities and training future Friends of the park, does not yet seem to be part of the picture. The report questions the (counter-productive) principle of outsourcing park design to outsiders, and argues the whole process of park development would need revision to involve communities far more deeply – which would ultimately save costs and lay the ground for sustainable park management.

4. Formalising community involvement in park management – a good idea, instruments and policies to still be developed

Several instruments and draft policies pertaining to community engagement are examined:

- The role of Stakeholders Liaison Officer (SLO) is key to assist Friends of the park in navigating the complex City of Johannesburg and JCPZ institutional structure – and be empowered to make things work and respond to the issues they are faced with in the park. Allocating a SLO to specific parks is therefore important. However, in practice few SLO regularly attend the Friends of the Park meetings. Unfortunately, SLOs did not testify on the reasons explaining their limited presence (lack of resources, too many parks to attend to, lack of respect of FoP, etc.).

- The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for Stakeholders Liaison Officers do not seem the most conducive to their regular engagement with Friends of the Park. Based on the number of meetings attended, rather than on the (more difficult to measure) quality or outcomes of this engagement, KPIs seem to encourage meeting attendance as a tick box exercise. Possibly KPIs could try and capture more meaningful engagement, such as the % of meetings attended with each FoP committee, or the number of MoUs signed between JCPZ and FoP, or the number of park master plans jointly developed and agreed upon.

- The Volunteer Policy, which aims at formalising the involvement of individual volunteer in JCPZ, seemed somehow unbalanced – enumerating the duties of the volunteers but not his benefits; treating volunteers as suspects that need to be controlled and bound by confidentiality agreements.

- The (draft) Framework for Service Partnership Agreement aims at regulating the joint management of nature reserves. A very much needed document, it remains vague as to the roles and responsibilities of each of the signatories (JCPZ and FoP); and it possibly confuses the role of the joint committee in managing the park (indeed a joint responsibility), and the role of FoP in fundraising for the park (development and management), an activity in which JCPZ cannot participate directly.

5. Recommendations

The research made it clear that JCPZ is exploring progressive and innovative forms of state practices. JCPZ institutional and policy shifts towards a people-oriented institution puts it at the forefront of a responsive and accountable state. The unfortunate context of scarce operational funding for JCPZ compels the entity to seek partnerships with communities, in a dynamic that could lead to deeply transforming the city and its governance.

► Investing in long term engagement with communities – fostering continuity, building a trust relationship, sharing documents, providing clarity on what is negotiable and what is not, what can be done and what cannot. Accountability, regularity and continuity in meetings is key. In this respect, **training and resourcing Stakeholders Liaison Officers (SLOs)**, so that they are enabled to more systematically and continuously assist Friends of the Park navigate institutional complexities, and build local expertise around regional parks. **Revised KPIs** could be developed to measure the quality, rather than a quantity, of engagement with Friends of the park. **Regular SLO feedbacks to the managerial level** on what issues are encountered by Friends of the Park, where are the stumbling blocks, what other municipal entity needs to be reached, might help SLOs to build capacity and community participation facilitation skills.

► **Revising park development and design processes**, so as to use the opportunity to integrate sustainable management in park design, and construct stronger park user communities. Opening space for inputs and discussions, within clear time and budget lines presented by SLO and other relevant JCPZ officials, at different stages of the process, will significantly improve the visibility of JCPZ, its reputation and its relationship with communities.

► **In-sourcing park design** as a key function of JCPZ park development and management. Resorting to outside consultants to design parks has not been leading to deep nor sustainable engagements with surrounding communities, nor has it reaped the benefits of investing in parks to sustainably mobilise and consolidate a community of park users, in particular in the former townships.

► Similarly, **using the Master planning process as a way to mobilise** and consolidate Friends of the Park in their engagement with JCPZ, is a key opportunity. This process does not require the availability of budget to take place (as long as there is clarity on it); by engaging FoP to frame their visions, in negotiation with JCPZ and their own community). Constructing a shared vision, even if this entails robust discussion, is key to transform the city and its residents. Agreement on a Master plan means that FoP can more easily mobilise resources and conduct fundraising operations, in the context of a broad agreed direction.

► Accept that partnerships require **power sharing**, and reflect on what functions should be retained by JCPZ and which ones can be devolved or shared. Revise the Volunteer Policy accordingly, not only in terms of duties of the volunteer, but also in terms of what can be gained for him/her. Incorporate into the Service Partnership Agreement more clarity on power sharing and decision-making processes (in particular around how funding is to be spent, plans to be developed, etc.).

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Introduction

Community engagement is an integral part of the notion of a developmental State, in that it is promoted as one of the principles of democracy (e.g. as participatory planning/ engaging the community from the project inception), which emphasize participation and interaction of the public in the businesses of the State, here the co-production and co-management of local development by communities and government. Furthermore community engagement has been identified as an important component of the sustainability and managerial efficiency of the urban projects being developed.

Community engagement is not a new notion. It reflects a developmental agenda that is traceable from the 1970s, and it came with the realization that in order to maintain the integrity and wellbeing of the environment and public services, this requires both the state and community working together, so that the provided facilities and amenities are not simply prescribed spaces but actually get to belong to the communities and the market which is meant to use them. However in many cases this has only remained a theory not effectively implemented. This might be partly explained by the challenges experienced by the authorities driving community engagement in the process of urban governance and development, such as political pressure, lack of resources, time constraints, challenges of coordination, derailment of projects, inter alia.

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The social value of urban public parks go beyond their environmental value, as they perform a vital role in socio-cultural aspects. They do not only enhance liveability and greenery in densifying cities but they also contribute to social justice and democracy by providing communities access to nature's amenities, psychological and health benefits. As Lo (2011) maintains, they may contribute a sense of place through enhancing people's social life especially in marginalized, crowded and unpleasant living conditions where many cannot afford alternative recreational facilities. They give platforms for collective activities with cultural or political themes, arenas where one can interact with diverse people and children can play sports.

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo is a parastatal tasked with the management of about 3000 public spaces in Johannesburg within limited resources. These spaces exist in a society that is riddled with social ills such as unemployment, crime, inequalities and poverty which showcase publicly in ways that are difficult to manage. The broad and multi-dimensional issue of homelessness for instance is very manifest in public urban parks, as the scarcity of shelters means that parks are often turned into informal shelters for homeless people.

Since 2011, JCPZ has been in an institutional reshuffling process aiming to re-orientate the institutional culture from a purely environmental focus (reporting to the MMC Environmental sector) to a people-oriented focus, as JCPZ now reports to the MMC for Community Development (JCPZ 2013a). This has meant that community engagement becomes a major part of JCPZ officials' mandates.

The research aims to investigate what community engagement means for JCPZ and what officials experience when engaging with communities and park users associations. The context and

complexities which State officials need to deal with is seldom documented, with community engagement literature tending to examine public engagements from the participants perspective, narrowly understanding the experiences of State officials in trying to manifest their mandates. The research adopted a state-centric perspective, in trying to understand the officials' side of the story (narratives) which is hardly documented in community engagement discourses. What was drawn broadly from the analysis was the importance of structure (the institutional programmes and systems put in place to support community engagement) and perceptions (what officials' feel and think about communities) as two influential elements to the actual State practices in their act of community engagement.

The term *community engagement* refers to any form of sustained interaction between the institution of JCPZ and social groups. It differs from *individual interaction* with JCPZ, that rather falls into complaints management and is monitored in different ways (through score cards measuring the level of 'customers satisfaction' and proportion of complaints addressed) – although individual complaints can ultimately feed into community engagement, as an indicator of issues that could lead to broader, collective mobilisation. The term *community partnership* is more restricted. It is one specific form of community engagement, and refers to more formalised and institutionalised relationship aimed at sharing roles and responsibilities around parks development and management.

*

This report is based on an academic research report conducted in the fulfilment of an Honours degree in town and regional planning (Bosaka 2015). The research was enabled and supported as part of a broader NRF research programme, 'Practices of the State in Urban Governance' (Grant HSGR 96277), coordinated by Prof Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, and hosted by the Centre for Urbanism and the Built Environment Studies (CUBES). In this context, CUBES established a partnership with Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, in which Patience was hosted for a few months in 2015.

The research adopted a qualitative methodology, focusing on understanding what is practically done by JCPZ in community engagement, as it was narrated, understood and practiced by the officials engaging with communities in some form or the other. This was complemented by a review of JCPZ institutional structures and related documents, such as JCPZ organogram, score cards, the strategic business plan, annual report, policies. Finally attendance to meetings, accompanying various JCPZ officials in their practice of engaging communities, shed another, essential light in the realities of the challenges experienced by officials on the ground.

The first section of this report will reflect on the perceptions and experiences of the officials involved in community engagement. The second section will analyse the institutional platforms and programmes set up to support community engagement.

1. What JCPZ officials experience when engaging with park users groups

Participatory governance of public spaces needs to be perceived not only as the capacity of the officials (e.g. officials as the professionals) but also as a task which needs the contribution of the

public or the communities, not as submissive agents to the rules and commands of the officials but important stakeholders, and possibly even partners, in the development and management of urban parks. This understanding of engagement entails the construction of a relationship of mutual respect, trust and dependency, where officials and park users can collaborate with one management vision. When time and effort is invested in engagement, it bears fruits of successful and effective partnerships (Jones 2002).

However, this vision is seldom experienced in practice, or even expressed as an ideal, in actual practices of JCPZ officials when engaging with local communities. Understandably a new practice for many officials – in the relatively recent institutional change that made JCPZ a more people-oriented institution- officials' experiences seem predominantly negative, marked by conflict, challenges, and frustrations. Before trying to unpack the institutional sources of these frustrations, it was important to hear what these frustrations were, and how officials themselves talked about them from their own experience.

These narratives have been categorised into four main themes; sense of ownership, community expectations, transformation issues and formalization challenges. These correspond to the main challenges of community engagement as put forward by the JCPZ officials we interviewed, in various sections of JCPZ and also at different ranks and levels.

1.1. Community expectations: there are unrealistic requests from communities and a lack of understanding of JCPZ constrains and processes

This subsection reflects on some of the pressures that officials receive from communities. The dominant views from officials were that there are various misunderstandings (of structures, budgets and process) on the side of communities which result to them demanding and requesting things that are beyond JCPZs capacity and control and thus leading to tensions and conflicts. Here, the difficulty in establishing a long-lasting relationship between officials and park users may hamper the latter's understanding of City parks' ways of working, mandates, budgets and constraints.

Misunderstanding of Government structures

“The challenge is that people don't know how we as local government operate, there are issues for different spheres of government, but for them government is government, they see one thing. You explain to them, whether they like it or not, but you have explained to them” (Manager, 2015)

“The community gets frustrated by these issues; they don't know who to go to and how to go about reporting them. When we come to engage with them, it's a challenge, they see Johannesburg logo and they attack, for them the City is one thing, one department, even if the issue is for Joburg water for example, they see the City logo and they spit fire” (Environmental Education officer, 2015).

Misunderstanding of Government budgets

“It is not easy to tailor-make these developments with the community: there's planning, there are implications and budgets, and they are always demanding” (Stakeholder Relations, 2015)

“Every year the budget is cut and JCPZ is not a profit generating company so it becomes such a huge challenge. The money from fundraising and events goes into the bank and disappears, we get a lot of money but it doesn't come back to us. Sometimes people do not get that.” (Manager, 2015)

“You find that now we making compromises of not maintaining the developed parks because people are making noise about sidewalks that need to be cut” (Manager, 2015).

“The challenge is when people can't differentiate between Capex budget and Operational budget. When we say we don't have Capex budget to address this problem right now, that's where people will have a problem, they want things to be done instantly and it can't be, I promise you.”(Manager)

Misunderstanding of processes and time frames

“Community raise their issues in petitions, that's how they feel they can get attention and how are we supposed to stop crime?” (Stakeholder Relations, 2015)

“Some of these issues you just... you know, people are meant to understand but they tend not to, that's why they vandalize these facilities just as a way of saying we want attention. But it doesn't work like that” (Stakeholder Relations, 2015)

The above frustrations from officials indicate a very blurred understanding from communities about how local government (in general) and City Parks (in particular) operate. This misunderstanding is linked both to the complexity of local government institutions, structures and processes (that officials themselves find difficult to navigate at time), and to the complexity of parks management, where a number of broader social issues tend to crystallise, without JCPZ being mandated nor equipped to respond to these issues (crime, drug abuse, homelessness, unemployment).

That communities demand well-functioning and well-maintained parks is understandable – and that they make City Parks officials responsible for it as well, as the central point of reference within the state, especially given their approach in terms of community engagement. This does not mean that CJPZ officials can respond to these issues on their own: but perhaps their task is to understand and explain the various structures, departments, and entities responsible for each task, and to consolidate a network of officials practically working with them to solve issues. This education of the community regarding the complex institutional structure of local government, and this consolidation of networks within City Council so that problems are, if not solved, at least addressed in a joint manner, are key for community engagement to be built. It requires time and continuity in the way City Parks officials engage with communities.

One of the causal factors to this lack of understanding by communities is the attitudes of the officials: there is a degree of impatience towards people who have little knowledge about how the City's systems and procedures work. Perhaps this is due to a lack of training of officials, or their lack of network or influence within the City structure: it can be daunting to mobilise other officials around key issues in a problem -solving attitude. For instance, it is clear that JCPZ officials struggle to get Johannesburg Property Company's response to their issues around derelict, vandalised or squatted property within parks (Hanyane et al, 2015). Another possible factor is the lack of continuity in engagement with communities – educating and constructing a joint network of action, where the officials' own network is complemented by communities' own ways of reaching out to other officials, do take time and require a prolonged relationship. There is however limited evidence of such continuity in CJPZ engagement with communities (Mccetywa et al. 2015).

Communities have thus resorted to raising issues through mobilization in the form of petitions, as a drastic measure to get the attention and ears of officials. Officials, instead of taking this as a cry by communities for a sustainable reliable participatory platform, respond by hosting one community

meeting to discuss solutions and leave the management of the solution in the hands of local councillors.

Box 1- Notes from observation: KNR Forum meeting on 27/07/15

I attended a meeting in the Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve (KNR), between what could be called a multiplicity of park users' committee groups, and JCPZ officials. This meeting, that came after a certain level of tension and dispute had risen between FoP and JCPZ officials, was chaired by a Chief Operation Officer in JCPZ, in order to relaunch a process of constructive engagement in the form of a KNR Forum.

It became clear during the meeting that the officials usually engaging with these diverse groups of park users, had challenges in sustaining a constructive relationship with these groups. Part of these appeared to be linked to the officials' own personality and skill profile: technically, nature conservation – oriented, rather than political or community facilitation skills); and with possibly limited resources and decision-making power he could yield (linked to his status in the institution) to enter this arena of engagement. Part of these difficulties could be linked to the harshness of this specific community dynamics, marked by a multiplicity of users' groups with various agenda and visions, and levels of disgruntlement, negativity and lack of respect towards JCPZ officials that might be understood as forms of racism. The result being that mutual lack of trust and respect have rendered the interaction very tense.

The more senior official from JCPZ, the COO, however engaged successfully with these Friends, on this occasion. Drawing from my observation, the COO was able to drive the process effectively because she portrayed leadership skills of patience, understanding, and respect and encouraged the participants to think and only speak constructively, strictly sticking to the agenda of the meeting, emphasizing the need for solid political skills in dealing with people, and a passion to make the relationship with community groups work, rather than seeing it as a nuisance or a risk, even in complex and tense situations. It is important to acknowledge the fact that the Chief Operation Officer is in a higher position institutionally, and that during that meeting, several key officials from City Parks were deployed. This indicated a respect and consideration of the frustrations of the Friends of KNR, that changed the setting - making the context favourable for better engagement, and opening the conditions for a more effective meeting. Several of the FoP members insisted that the COO continues to chair or participate in the meetings, which she declined.

What this leads me to reflect on, is that, especially in FoP groups marred by tensions and a history of dispute or confrontation, it is important that the engagement process is led by a more senior officials, with a degree of community participation facilitation skills (formal or informal). Technical skills on nature conservation, no matter how good they are, are not sufficient in difficult and tense contexts. I found it surprising, in that context, that the JCPZ officials institutionally dedicated to community participation (such as the Stakeholders Liaison Officer for the region), were not more proactively nor systematically chairing the meeting, leaving it to the conservation manager (trained in nature conservation issues) to deal with these politics. Community participation is as much about the politics of the relationship as it is about technical knowledge (Jones 2002) – both are needed.

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Part of the problems again ascribes to the organizational/ institutional structures which assign minimal time, training and resources for officials to conduct community engagement successfully. However it should be acknowledged that community engagement is not an easy thing that can simply be mastered through training and passion like this official stated. "It takes a step by step, gentle, thoughtful, gradual process; it is not a quick fix" (WASSUP Sticky Situations, professional community facilitator, 2015).

1.2. Finding balance in the sense of ownership: a lack of community commitment, or an over commitment

Communities misunderstandings of the role, mandate and capacity of JCPZ also lead to challenges in defining the role and functions of park users committees or Friends of the park in the management of parks and nature reserves, vis a vis JCPZ own role. One of the dominant

frustrations of officials' regarding communities was around the issue of co-governance/ co-management. Officials wish to receive helping hands from park users associations in the management of the nature reserves and parks. However one of the problems is that these relationships never seem to have an active or official memorandum of agreement. JCPZ is well aware of it, and in the process of drafting policy documents to guide such partnerships (see below 1.2.).

In the meantime, there have been shifts in what is considered legitimate and acceptable in the respective roles that Friends of the Park and JCPZ should or could play. It would seem that after a period where City Parks was less functional and marked by a variety of crises (in the 2000 decade), Friends of the park have de facto, in tacit ways (sometimes formal but no written agreements could be traced in various case studies: Baloyi et al 2015, Hadebe 2016; Hanyane et al 2015; Mcetywa et al 2015; Ratau et al 2015), overtaken the management of urban parks and nature reserves, especially in the northern suburbs amongst middle class groups. The 2010 decade, with the restructuring of JCPZ, marks a re-appropriation of its mandate by the newly formed JCPZ, and therefore a redefinition of the Friends of the Park's roles – but this redefinition occurs informally, without clear guidelines, leading to a number of tensions. In parallel, JCPZ continues City parks' rapid development of parks in former townships (and Soweto in particular), where there is a strong tradition of residents mobilisation, but not around parks and in the form of park users or Friends of the Park (Hadebe 2016). There, supporting the creation of such mobilisation proves daunting (Mcetywa et al 2015; Hadebe 2016), possibly because of the institutional process of park development, which is not conducive to the construction of strong park users committees (see section 2 of this report).

What this means for JCPZ officials is that they struggle to find appropriate forms of commitment of the communities they engage with. In some occasions, officials complain about an 'over-commitment' by those who do lend a helping hand, but then tend to want to control the activities that should happen in the parks as well as the maintenance procedures in the parks, as they feel a sense of ownership due to their committed volunteerism. In other occasions, in particular in (but not restricted to) townships, officials stress on the contrary communities' lack of commitment, where residents merely complain about park management without offering help or being constructive in their criticism, nor realistic in their expectations.

Over commitment

“Remember these guys [Friends of the Park] have been using these spaces for years and years and years so they feel like ‘this is ours, we own this space and you cannot tell us what to do in this space’” (Manager, 2015)

“There are users who prefer to jog in the reserves or perform rituals and these Friends [of the Park] don't want that, they want to select users and dictate what happens in that specific space, that's where the whole fighting is coming from” (Manager, 2015)

“They employ their own labour [...] to spy on us and they run to the media, I tell them I don't need you, you need me, you are just a volunteer I can get other volunteers” (Manager, 2015).

Lack of commitment

“In areas where there are no facilities, we get endless demands. But then they get the facilities and they do not look after it. They get the facilities and shift responsibilities. They do not want to take

ownership or have a sense of being part, saying it's ours. It's always seen as a JCPZ asset but when it's not there, they want it. They do not come handy to us, you know" (Stakeholder Relations, 2015)

"We can't continue maintaining areas that are already developed. We can't take all the money and take it to Sandton. Us as officials we need to take money from Sandton and go develop Soweto. But then again you develop Soweto, they vandalise, 'it's not for us to look after things' " (Manager, 2015)

"And you find that most of these communities don't even contribute to rates and taxes of the City but they are busy vandalizing and demanding facilities, saying JCPZ is 'supposed to' " (Stakeholder Relations, 2015)

These two modalities of engagement between officials and park users (organised or not) reflect to some extent different histories – stories of over-commitment seems to focus on previously advantaged suburbs, whilst lack of commitment affect formerly disadvantaged areas, where parks are newer and park user committees are only recently being tentatively established (Hadebe 2016). But residents' complaints about not wanting to get involved in parks management, as they pay their rates and taxes and 'it is the City's job' are spread all over the city, across income and racial lines – and correspond to what Jones (2002) as described as an initial phase of the engagement: bringing in complaints rather than pro-actively seeking solution in and through engagement.

This contrasted experience from City officials also talks to the challenge in finding the right balance for community involvement in the management and development of the park, while JCPZ reinstates its own mandate – managing public spaces that are open and inclusive, redistributing resources across the metropolitan area, democratising access to open spaces and urban parks, but also finding better ways of managing scarce resources and responding to parks management issues. As stated in the officials' complaints about lack of park users' involvement and ownership, JCPZ needs park users' involvement in park management and oversight – as there is a lack of human resources to look after each individual park. However, on the other hand, JCPZ has not yet defined the "proper" role that park users should play – the process of setting up boundaries, defining respective roles and prerogatives, has so far not succeeded in finding relevant balance.

1.3. Challenges of formalisation of partnerships in park management

This is manifest in the attempts from JCPZ to formalise partnerships between the institution and park users, through both the Volunteers Policy (JCPZ 2015), defining guidelines for individual involvement of residents in park management, and the draft Stakeholders Partnership Agreement (JCPZ 2013b), aiming at guiding Friends of the Parks partnership with JCPZ in the management of nature reserves in particular. The template for such agreements is being drafted, but according to Operations and Conservation Managers (2015), this is still in the pipeline and not yet enforced.

Both documents appear a step in the right direction, but they do seem to be sufficiently based on significant choices and commitment to meaningful community engagement. What appears to prevail in both is

- the necessity to protect JCPZ image – and a politics of distrust towards FoP and their exposure to relevant documents, financial decisions and policy or implementation processes;
- the need for JCPZ to find complementary resources (human and financial) – requesting civil society's contribution but without explicitly sharing power with volunteers or park users committees.

A Volunteers Policy marked by distrust rather than shared power

Taking stock of the absence of text of reference defining the roles and responsibilities of park users involved in parks management, JCPZ's recent Volunteer Policy attempts to frame the terms of such involvement. However, it does so explicitly in order to protect JCPZ's own reputation and information, in a quite defensive manner that is obvious even in the preamble of the policy:

“There is no company policy to encourage and manage the volunteer environment thus resulting in exploitation and reputational damage” (JCPZ Volunteer Policy, 2015:1)

Rather than trying to outline to volunteers what benefits, advantages or positive responsibilities they would be given if engaging as a volunteer with and within JCPZ, the policy multiplies the warning and the constraints that volunteers would have to commit to:

“All Volunteers are prohibited from engaging with the media with regards to any JCPZ interests and are bound by a confidentiality agreement to not disclose any information which may become privy to due to their volunteer activities” (Volunteer Policy annexure F:9)

“A volunteer must adhere to all JCPZ policies and procedures while undertaking tasks as a volunteer or at any other time when representing the JCPZ brand, e.g. in uniform” (Volunteer Policy annexure G: 12)

“A volunteer must subscribe to all JCPZ generic policies” (Volunteer Policy annexure F: 10).

Volunteers are expected to sign a confidentiality agreement binding the following among others:

“I further confirm that I am aware that I may not communicate with the media in respect of any JCPZ matter” (Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement annexure E: 7)

“As a volunteer, I shall follow a code of conduct for volunteers and conduct myself in a professional manner at all times” (Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement annexure E: 7)

These quotes indicate a lack of trust with members of the community hence the various binding codes of conduct. They also indicate that currently the relationship with the general public is tentative, thus the code that ensures that volunteers may not by any means exploit the department through media. The categorization of a volunteer in JCPZ's language can again tell us how community partnership is desired or imagined: with lots of duties but limited power transferred to the Friends of the Parks.

This may be one of the underlying issues that challenge the effectiveness of community engagement in JCPZ. The officials want the communities to help take charge and responsibility but are reluctant to give or share power with them. JCPZ seems to fail to recognise that community engagement is an exercise of compromise and sharing of power (Jones, 2002).

The heaviness of formal procedures

Furthermore, and possibly in relation to the previous challenge, officials sometimes indicated that there is a challenge with making use of the formal procedures for engaging volunteers (e.g. getting the volunteers to sign the Volunteer Policy). They attributed it to processes being too long (a volunteer needs to write a proposal, go for an interview and then sign a contract); and people being reluctant to bind themselves in contracts. For this, many officials have resorted to using informal

means of partnering with some community members who help them in the management of the parks.

“Partnerships with the private sector used to work so well, e.g. giving some of the maintenance tasks to the businesses. But the politicians are against it... You know people want to be employed, so they feel that the businesses are taking away their employment opportunities” (Manager, 2015)

“There are some informal agreements that we do to get things going, for example the community would ask, if you do this and that for us, we will help with the clean-up. And it works ... But if I try and make these relationships formal, it takes forever. People always think someone wants to benefit something. They don't understand the pressure. Also, people don't like writing proposals and committing themselves in contracts” (Manager, 2015)

Those two quotes show the range of options used by JCPZ and sometimes communities themselves to establish partnerships with a problem-solving approach – from hiring a private company (as is the case for instance with private security companies monitoring the parks in middle class suburbs: see Ratau et al, 2015); to informal exchange of services and to creating job opportunities in lower income communities. Pressure by lower income communities (and their political representatives) to receive payment for services of maintenance and management has led to the use of specific programmes, such as the Expanded Public Work Programme (EPWP) and Jozi@work¹, as a way to compensate community members for their work. Partnerships and participation are often understood in that sense (paid community work).

This form of ‘partnership’ could be described as both empowering (compensating and resourcing lower-income community members for their commitment to parks management) and disempowering, as a form of neoliberalisation where communities are used as cheap labour to replace too scarce municipal employees (Miraftab 2004).

Other forms of (non-money related) commitment, as captured in the Volunteer Policy, do not seem to adequately capture the nature of the relationship between JCPZ and individual or collective park users. Community engagement is always an exchange – people give their time and resources for various benefits, be they social recognition, inclusion and networking, informal or formal economic benefits (cf the informal deals where the officials offer a favour in return for the help: Hadebe 2016).

Leaning to share information and power

The draft document framing the establishment of partnerships between park users committees and JCPZ around the management of nature reserve (JCPZ 2013b), remain vague on how decisions would actually be taken, how roles would be shared, how funding raised by FoP would be spent and decided upon; but also how JCPZ capital and operational budget allocated to the nature reserve would be presented and discussed with FoP. It is precisely these issues that are at the core of existing tensions marring community engagement in existing nature reserves (see Baloyi et al, 2015, for instance).

¹ Programmes that officials are mandated to use, to employ members of the community during the development and sometimes management of Parks. The EPWP is a national programme has been used by JCPZ to supplement City parks scarce human resources, allowing to allocate specific staff to specific tasks in a specific park. Jozi@work is an incoming programme, that will be replacing EPWP. It is funded by the City of Johannesburg, and aimed at fostering the creation of community cooperatives providing services, in order to encourage training, empowerment and sustainability.

The document for instance sets up a management structure for the nature reserve as a joint initiative and agreement between JCPZ and Friends of the Park, but without clearly indicating how the management committee will be composed, how it will be nominated or selected, how it will be chaired (by an official, by a member of the park users group?) – or how this would be decided on an ad hoc level.

MANAGEMENT

The management committee will be made up of:

- Not less than 4 (four) office bearers (Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary);
- A Representative of the MD of the Jhb City Parks.
- As many portfolio sub committee chairpersons as required from time to time.
- A Ward Committee member, who shall act as an *ex-officio* member of the management committee. (JCPZ 2013b: section 4)

It seems the document is trying to deal with too many issues at the same time, that actually would require distinct institutions and processes – and this prevents the document from addressing the important issues on each account:

- (1) the need for an agreement on joint management of the reserve (establishing a managing committee including both officials and FoP); and
- (2) the need for regulation on how the fund potentially raised by FoP can be used and decided upon (one of the motivation for the establishment of partnerships, to complement JCPZ scarce resources; where the task of fund-raising cannot involve JCPZ directly).

Indeed, fundraising activities around the park can be driven by FoP, but probably not by a joint committee (such as the management committee proposed in the draft document) involving JCPZ, as this might raise legal issues and be in contradictions with the Municipal Finances Management Act (MFMA) in particular (an issue that JCPZ is aware of). This confusion is visible in the draft document (MFMA is mentioned in red as potentially entering into contradiction with the suggested guidelines):

FINANCE

- a) The **Organisation** may: *(MFMA?)*
 - i) Apply for, invite, obtain, collect and receive money, funds, securities and other sources of income and capital by way of contributions, subscriptions, donations, grants, legacies and the sale of publications of the organisation.
 - ii) Manage, develop, build on, work or deal with its undertaking regarding all or any part of the funds generated by the organisation or its assets.
 - iii) Invest the monies generated but not immediately required for its purpose (especially for bigger projects).
 - iv) Open and operate banking accounts in the name of the organisation or management committee.
 - v) Reimburse a member of the organisation for expenses that he/she has paid for or on behalf of the organisation as approved by the management committee.
 - vi) If the organisation has funds that can be invested, the funds may only be invested with registered financial institutions. These institutions are explained in Section 1 of the Financial Institutions (Investment of Funds) Act, 1984. Organisations can go to different banks to seek advice on the best way to look after their funds.
- b)
 - i) **JCP** will budget for general operational activities and capital projects, subject to the approval of funds
 - ii) JCP will appoint an internal auditor to audit the Organisation's Financial Statements. *(MFMA?)*
 - iii) The organisation will submit its monthly financial income and expenditure report to JCP.

(JCPZ 2013b, Section 5)

Therefore, we suggest that policy guiding the joint management committee should be distinct from guidelines regulating the way FoP may raise funding and use it for the benefit of the nature reserve – an area where current uncertainties are an impediment to Friends of the Park engaging in fundraising (Hadebe 2016, Baloyi et al 2015).

- 1) In order to frame the joint management of a nature reserve (and possibly of a park), JCPZ would need to elaborate on (inter alia):
 - Framing / nomination of the joint management committee, and balance of power/ members between the two partners;
 - Respective roles and functions of FoP and CJPZ in the management of the reserve / park
 - Appointment and management of workers for the nature reserve / park (through various funding sources)
 - Processes for the joint development of strategic plans for the reserve/ the park;
 - Processes for sharing information and co-deciding on the use of funding for the nature reserve / park, including CJPZ operating and capital budget for the reserve / park, as well as funds raised by FoP initiatives.

- 2) In order to guide and regulate the way FoP deal with funds that they raise privately around the nature reserve/ the park, JCPZ could suggest a number of regulations
 - Park users committees following these regulations would be accredited by CJPZ and receive the title of Friends of the Park, and be eligible to sign a partnership with CJPZ for the joint management of a nature reserve/ of a park
 - Funds raised by the FoP could be used to maintain or develop the reserve / the park, subject to approval of CJPZ.
 - A (limited) portion of the entrance fee into the reserve; a (limited) portion of the income paid to the City or CJPZ by events' organisers, could be allocated to FoP.

The task is daunting, and 'the right balance' can only be found through experience, via a trial and error process, that some of the case studies documented by CUBES have started analysing (see Hanyane et al, 2015; Baloyi et al 2015; Ratau et al 2015). What is 'the right balance' might also need a level of flexibility depending on contextual elements – but principles and guidelines nevertheless need to be determined. The above mentioned suggestions are one way of re-establishing CJPZ mandate over parks and nature reserve, but engaging in power-sharing processes where master plans are co-developed and funding raised through different sources (within the City or externally) can be mobilised towards the realisation of this plan.

1.4. Challenges of transformation

The notion of transformation can refer to different changes in an institution. For example it could mean a change in the development strategies and developmental direction that an institution such as JCPZ is taking. It could mean a change in the corporate culture and norms, a change in management structures and the way officials' practices are guided and monitored. In South Africa it has also a strong racial dimension to it – transforming mentalities and relationships in a post-apartheid era, between different groups that have been formed around their class-cum-racial identities. In engagements between (predominantly) black CJPZ officials and (predominantly) white, middle class Friends of the Park groups, these issues are certainly present.

How transformation in its different dimensions is understood and materialized through practice can also vary with different officials. We get to see in the following quotes how different officials (anonymized due to the issues being sensitive) view the Friends of the Park as 'untransformed' or 'non-transforming', because of their understanding of what the park should be, and what the respective role of JCPZ and FoP are, in determining legitimate uses within the park.

Mutually testing legitimacy around parks management – issues of skills

“If your knowledge about what you do is not up to date, you will have people challenging what you do, sometime they just challenge you because they want to see if you know” (Manager, 2015)

“These areas used to be predominantly white, so when they want something they would get it, so now when they want something we ask why, and they don't want to be asked why” (Manager, 2015)

“The Friends help us a lot; they are like our friends... And remember, rich white people you find that in that group there's engineers, town planners, lawyers. You find that next to the reserve they want to build something, these people will know first-hand, we don't read the notices of these developments but they do, and they would read and submit objections. I like them because of that. They are our whistle blowers. Whenever there's some development notice they will call and tell me to go there and see what's happening” (Manager, 2015)

Different testimonies refer to different stages and quality of the relationship between park officials and (middle class) Friends of the Park. These three quotes are interestingly about knowledge and skills, a racially loaded term in post-apartheid South Africa (von Holdt 2010) – black officials feeling they are being tested on their skills because of their skin colour; white residents not used to be requested to justify their actions and their claims, especially to a black person, according to this officials. This can be very undermining and disrespectful especially given the racial differences and a history of racial injustice. Whilst tasks need to be performed adequately by each partner in partnership, and certainly skills grow and evolve through interaction in a variety of environments, it might be important to state that mutual respect is a crucial condition for any relationship of trust or even joint work to develop.

The two first quotes also relate to a relationship between City Park's officials and FoP that is being reshaped, shifted perhaps – with JCPZ coming back to the fore where parks management have been for decades left to increasingly autonomous Friends of the Park. The reconfiguration of this relationship logically comes with tension, and this tension, not unsurprisingly, does take racial forms. However, the third quote also talks to a constructive use of the skills and resource gaps based in class, race and history: the alertness of middle class white residents, based on decades of practice, to the language and processes of development applications, notification and requirements.

Opposing parks' development, or parks' transformation?

Challenges of transformation, in multi-racial partnership and parks environments, also relate to the content of park development, and what different visions for the parks entail.

“There would be new associates saying we want to do boot camp and those old Tanis users would say, but boot camp here, [no way!]... And that is why there's always fighting. Because all these spaces evolve, like Kruger Park used to be for nature, games; now there are hotels, golf courses, airports... So, they don't want these areas to be developed. If you see this park bare as it is you would be scared to go in, but if it is nicely developed, it becomes inviting. We never agree on development, residents

are always against development. But remember you can't stop development. I is growth and, going forward, it shows the country is going forward" (Manager, 2015)

We must use these parks, not have white elephants. [...]. We have a mandate and part of it is to bring previously disadvantaged people [into the parks] and you find that the Friends [of the Park] are saying, bringing too many people here make people walk off the trails and them creating new trails, they are against this. Remember in the parks we don't allow bottles. If you drink you only drink wine, and that's how you also select your market, we don't want taxi drivers... You apply by-laws, say no drinking no loud music, and you know people that are not sophisticated, they will not come. So that's the by-laws we use. But if you book for a wedding we then allow this to happen. But I have noticed people who get married in Kloofendal Nature Reserve² it's not your person who will want to go get married in Thokoza Park³" (Manager, 2015)

Conflicting views about park development, between strict nature conservation and people-oriented green open spaces, come to the fore in the process of co-managing the parks (see Baloyi et al, 2016, for a brief presentation of various balances that can be found, internationally, between those two objectives). In South African post-apartheid cities, and in Johannesburg where social and residential mobility has, to some extent, challenged segregation patterns (as former white suburbs are becoming more racially integrated), these choices also take a racial dimension. Indeed, changing park use patterns, attracting new park users amongst the previously disadvantaged groups who are not accustomed to making use of these spaces, features strongly on City Parks agenda as making the park more public, more widely accessible, more "democratic". This requires making the parks and nature reserves more people-friendly, more inviting, catering for a broader diversity of uses, without compromising the very identity and nature of the park. Finding the right balance, and acknowledging both needs (increasing and democratising park uses, and respecting the parks and nature reserve's environment) requires negotiation and debate. In some cases it takes the form of negotiation between (black) City Parks officials on the one hand, and (white-dominated) Friends of the Parks committees. In other cases, views are shared across groups between more conservation-oriented, and more people- or development-oriented views.

Box 2- Reflections on the tensions in the management of KNR – breaking the cycle of distrust and disrespect

As noted above (Box 1), there is a level of tensions in the relationship between City Parks and the various groups composing the Friends of the Park in the management of the Klipriviersberg Nature reserve. The levels of distrust are feeding further tensions and deepening distrust, in a downward cycle that it is difficult to break.

On the one hand, the City Parks official in charge feels he is constantly treated with disrespect, and with a degree of racial prejudice by the (predominantly white middle class) FoP. He also experiences that each development proposal he brings to the table is criticised, turned down and ultimately blocked, if not used to go to the media to attack City Parks and describe its practices in ways that are often a caricature. To him the Friends of the Park constitute a conservative block, not interested in developing nor transforming the reserve, neither in establishing a constructive relationship with City Parks. His response to this has been to withdraw, be reluctant to share information and to participate in meetings, and move forward on his own, at times unilaterally, to be able to conduct what he understands as his mandate – develop the nature reserve.

On the other hand, FoP are marked by intense frustration in the relationship with City Parks officials (Baloyi et al 2016). In one meeting attended, there was reference to a Master plan for the reserve, as well as a Nature reserve management plan, that had been developed three years ago, and that the FoP had not been

² In the north western, middle class suburbs.

³ In Soweto.

communicated (and even less debated and participated in). When the FoP requested for the official to share that documents for debate, it did not seem forthcoming. In other instances, the official would not be true to his word. He would circulate a document supposedly as a proposal to be debated (a “design concept” for the nature reserve’s new gate). The proposal would be contested in the meeting; the next step being that the new gate was being built without further engagement (Baloyi et al 2016). FoP would feel disrespected and even betrayed, and once again go to the media to express their deep frustration, which would further lead the official to withdraw, and to be reluctant to share development proposals with FoP.

Difference of views and positions exist, and in KNR case these are strong and articulate views and positions, that have become rigidified in this tense engagement. Some members of the FoP have a determined conservationist view of the reserve, a vision that is not shared by all members of FoP, and that is not fully in line with JCPZ vision. All, including City Parks officials, however are opposed to the commercialisation of the reserve, and all want to see the reserve thrive, be well managed and to some extent increase its notoriety and use. Possibly the visions themselves, although in need of alignment, are not incompatible – provided a process of constructive engagement occurs.

Community engagement in this type of context needs to be robust rather than avoided. Community facilitation as well as political and strategic skills, and a level of seniority and decision-making capacity, might be needed to break the vicious circle of distrust, assert City Parks’ line and objectives whilst opening the space for negotiation and debate that can be opened. Once clearly delineated, the space for engagement can become constructive, if not devoid of disagreements, and transformative of both City parks officials’ and FoP’s cultures and visions. The *ad hoc* intervention of the COO to launch a KNR forum and attempt to break the vicious circle of distrust and disrespect was well received by the FoP (see box 1). However her intervention remained punctual, and as soon as she left, the relationship reverted to what it was previously.

CBG&PB

One of the main lessons of this research is that community engagement is a continuous and mutual effort. It requires mutual respect – in the tone and level of the engagement; in keeping true to one word; in conducting and participating in meetings; in trying to solve issues internally before raising them externally. It requires also an effort to present one’s own position (vision but also constraints, resources, capacities) whilst trying to understand the other parties’ position, worldviews and issues. And it requires the courage for the officials to present, and for the park users groups to accept, that some elements might be non-negotiable (CJPZ broader policy and objectives with regards to parks). However difficult, it is crucial for the officials to clearly delineate what space there is for negotiation, and nurture this space for debate, that will undoubtedly entail robust discussions – but it can be argued that this discussion needs to be held, rather than avoided.

2. In which institutional settings are officials to engage communities

These CJPZ officials’ experiences and visions need also to be replaced in the broader JCPZ context. Therefore, the research has attempted to trace the different sections or parts of JCPZ that are involved in community engagement, as well as how each of these section is mandated to respond to communities.

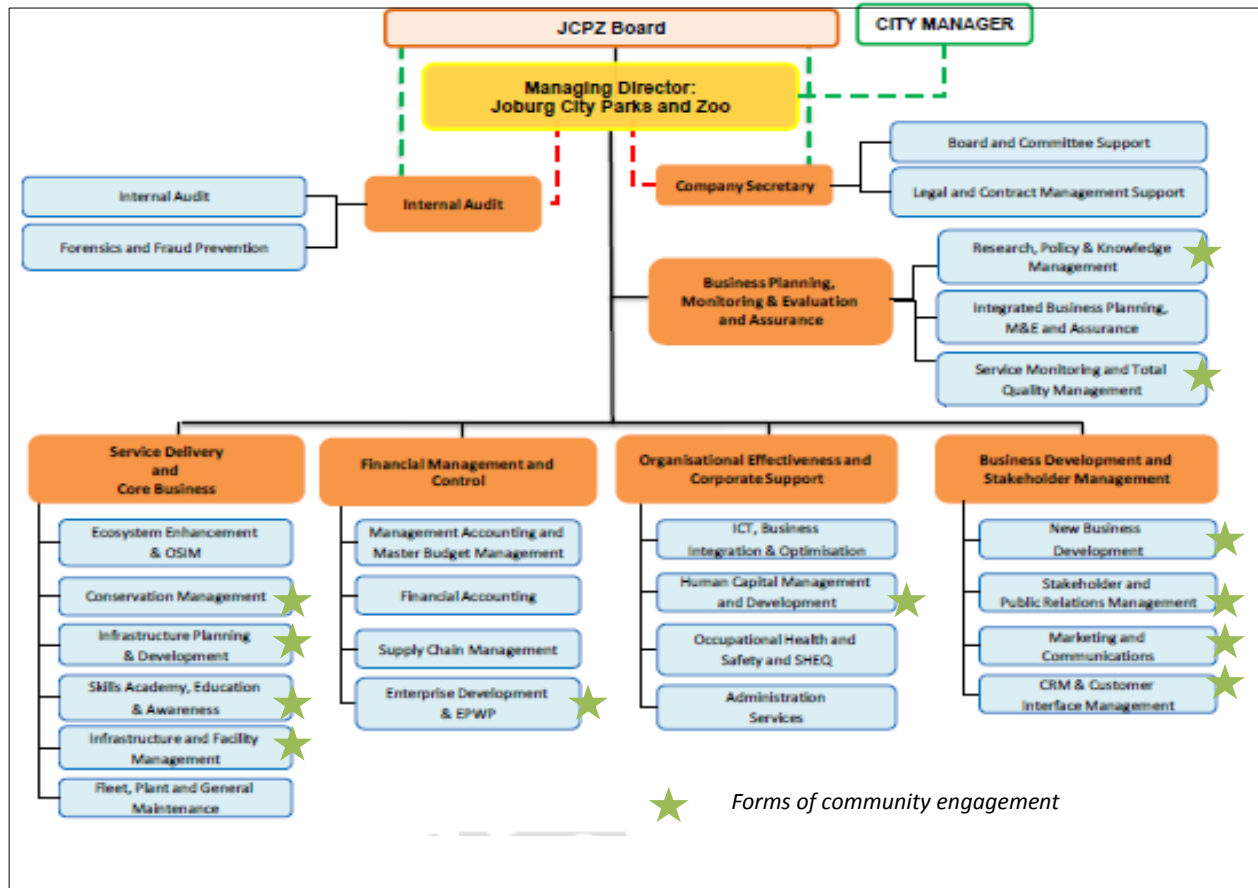
2.1. Community engagement is not the sole responsibility of Stakeholders Liaison Officers, and is relatively ubiquitous in JCPZ

It very soon became obvious that community engagement is not the prerogative of one department or section (not even the Community Stakeholders Engagement), but is ubiquitous – located in a multiplicity of institutional areas in JCPZ, albeit with different emphases.

These multiple sites of community engagement are active at different phases of park development and management; or they entail different types of engagement (co-management, complaints, environmental education, income generation, etc.).

This indicates that community engagement is taken to be every person's/ departments' business and not the sole responsibility of the Stakeholder and Public Relations Management, which could be considered a good thing in terms of institutional culture. But on the other hand, the multiple sites of community engagement bring a sense of fragmentation, and communities find themselves engaging with various JCPZ officials from different departments. They would contact Regional Managers (responsible for Regional maintenance) for everyday issues in parks management, in the form of complaints typically. Under them, park managers would interact with park users and Friends of the Park. Stakeholders Liaison Officers would also typically be expected to regularly engage with Friends of the Park (establishing or guiding them in regular meetings). CID (Capital Infrastructure Development) officials would engage during park development. Environmental Education officials come and address communities during project construction, and partner with schools for ad hoc education programmes. When there is an event in the park, communities need engage with Events Management. This may get confusing for communities, as it is not as clear for them whom they need to complain to, with which matters. Understandings of the architecture of JCPZ, and the City of Johannesburg as a whole, are extraordinarily confused amongst community members (see Hadebe, 2016) – and it is not a surprise that expectations towards JCPZ might be wrongly construed (as highlighted by officials), given the actual level of complexity of both JCPZ and the City of Johannesburg.

Figure 1 – Locating Community Engagement in JCPZ organogramme



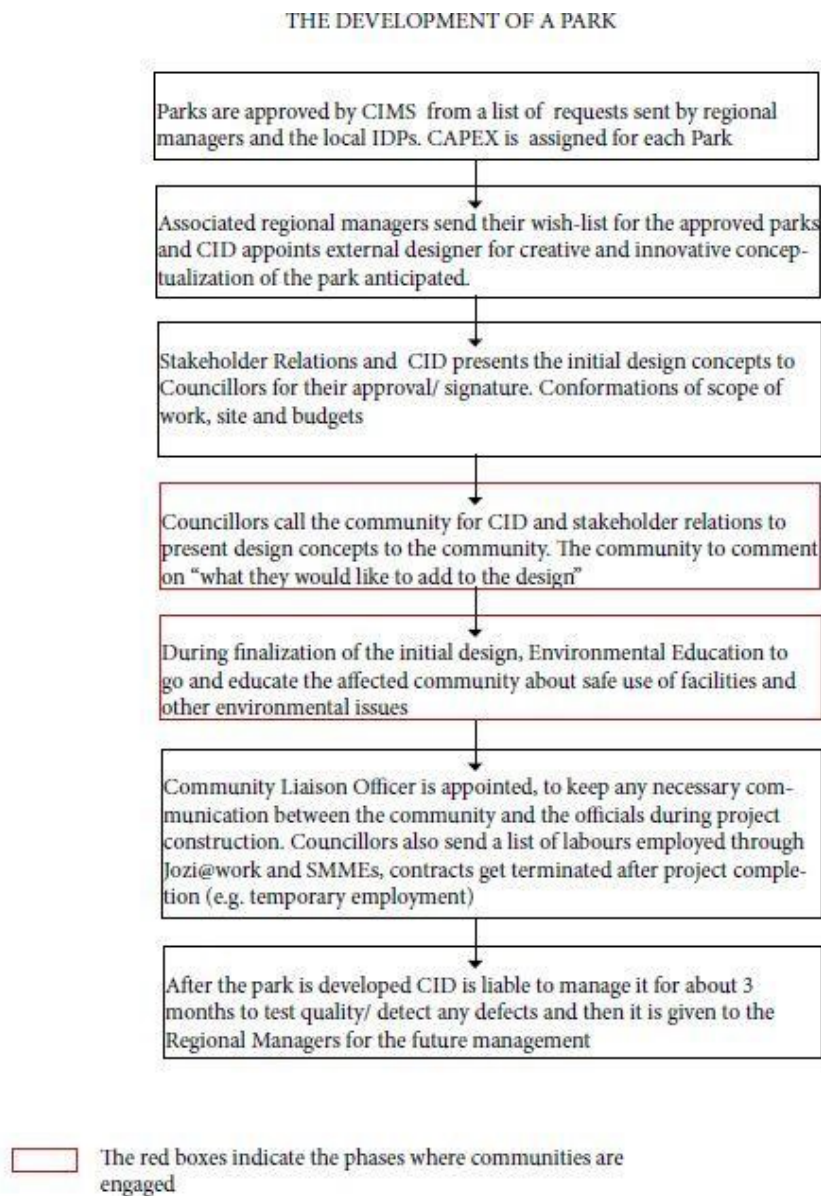
Source: Sketched from JCPZ Corporate Strategic Plan (2013/14-2017/18): pp. 83

2.2. Community engagement as tick box exercises

In spite of JCPZ being now accountable to Community Services and developing a more people-oriented take on parks management, and in spite of the ubiquitous nature of community engagement in the organogramme, the study also observed that community engagement in JCPZ is largely associated with service delivery and business-related matters. In other words, structurally, community engagement is set up to be something officials have to ‘deliver’, as a once-off task, and not necessarily continuously nor sustainably engage with, to master it or partner with communities as the custodians of the spaces produced. This argument is illustrated by the development of a park flow (figure 2).

The process indicates that communities are consulted as a once-off event, and on conceptual designs that are already signed by the Councillors. This begs the question on whether there is genuine consideration of community members’ opinions, when the designs have already been finalized with the Councillors signature.

Figure 2 – Locating community engagement in the process of park development



Source: Bosaka, 2015- informed by interviews

Some JCPZ officials are quite critical of this process, and explain that it is merely informative. At best, the opinions of the communities are considered, if they are 'practical'.

"People would be more receiving of the City decisions if they would be informed in sufficient time and not rushed in once-off meetings after designs are already done" (Environmental Education Officer, 2015).

“We then present to the community what is going to happen in that park, and Environmental Education then later comes to teach them not to waste these facilities” (CID official, 2015).

“You can’t engage the community after you have created a design already for them. You need to engage them once you find out there’s a budget, you go there and tell them we have 25 million for example, for site 21, what do you want to see for a park? And people will tell you; this park was used for 1, 2, 3; the taxis park here and so forth. And then you can get themes for a park development and direct the discussion accordingly... This is what I was taught at a workshop I attended. Not this thing of calling the community when the designs are already done signed off by the councillor, then presented to the community as what? This is your park? It’s not my park; I wasn’t part of designing it! You need to get people to buy in to the concept when it is still a concept, while it’s still not there. By the time it comes up they will already know how it’s going to look, they had input on how it looks, whose going to work there, and they will love it, they won’t feel like visitors in their own space, they will feel like we own this space because we designed it” (Environmental Education officer, 2015)

It is thus evident that in practice, communities are taken as customers to form business like relations and deliver products for, rather than citizens to co-govern, co-produce and co-manage with. It is also clear that some officials are very committed to more meaningful participation, but don’t find the time, space, structure or institution to conduct participation as they would wish to.

This has caused problematic outcomes. It firstly inspires an ‘us against them’ attitude where because engagement is done on an ad hoc basis during project development, communities then resort to challenge the officials through petitions and strikes when they are not happy about an issue partnering to the current development, see below scenarios.

Box 3- Discomforts with community engagement

Example 1

Official: The community threatened to stop the development of Oliphant Place Cemetery due to the people employed were from a ward that did not qualify

PB: So how was the issue resolved?

Official: We involve stakeholder liaison, we try to solve it however way but at the end of the day it must be resolved. I am really running late for my meeting, can we finish up?

Example 2

Context: There was an instance where the community challenged the appointment of the CLO (Community Liaison Officer) in a wetland project and took the matter up in a petition against the development.

Official: “Communities are sometimes unnecessary. We have a formal procedure of recruiting CLOs, we post notices for people to apply, and then they apply like they would any job. We have basic requirements like a matric certificate. They come for interviews and that’s how one becomes a CLO. Just because they did not see the notices, now they want to challenge the appointment of the CLO.”

My analysis: The networks of sharing information between officials and the community is certainly one problematic aspect that adds to the officials’ frustrations with community engagement.

PB

Despite the fact that the above officials could not give enough details on the stories, one can pick up the tense challenges that officials have to address during park development and this can be ascribed to the sometimes hostile relationship between the communities and officials. As the following official stated

“We are really just the communication channels between communities and our internal departments. Communities raise issues through petitions or contact us directly and we send the relevant department or go and talk to them and try solving the matter the best way we can, after meeting with them. The councillor then follows up to ensure the community is satisfied with the way the matter was resolved” (Stakeholder Relation Officer, 2015)

This indicates that the officials and communities thus remain strangers to each other, not really understanding each other's constraints and demands. JCPZ officials relate this superficial engagement to two main structural factors: the need to work through the ward councillor to call the community to meetings (which acts sometimes as an obstacle, rather than giving legitimacy to the process); and the way capital investment decisions are made, through a centralised system that leaves little time to engage and sometimes leads to investment disconnected from local dynamics.

2.3. Reaching the community – ward councillors as obstacle rather than facilitators?

The officials react to somewhat extinguish the fire of the petitions and leave the management and follow ups of the solution to Councillors. This specific example also talk to the perhaps competitive mandate that officials engaging in stakeholder liaison feel they have with ward councillors, officially in charge of facilitating community participation and communities links with local government.

Furthermore as evident in the development flow above, Councillors are the ones responsible for inviting their communities to the engagement meetings, but this has sometimes had negative consequences, as it appears that in practice councillors tend to conduct their mandate as a partisan one, rather than engaging with the whole ward. The politicisation of ward councillors and the exclusive effects this creates has been analysed by scholars, as an issue limiting the scope of community engagement in South African cities (Piper and Deacon 2008). This is presented as an obstacle to broad engagement by JCPZ officials:

“Councillors are biased in terms of community engagement, they do not invite everyone to the meetings [e.g. those they don't get along with], then these groups who were not invited, challenge and fight against the developments because they never knew about them” (CID officer, 2015)

“And this thing that the community doesn't come to the meeting doesn't help. The councillor would know that he has 30 people that will attend the meeting, others don't even bother, so they won't know what is happening in their community and they will say why did they develop a Park and not a Clinic?. And this draws us back” (Environmental Education officer, 2015).

“Communities feel like community engagement is a political thing as in ANC vs. DA thing and those who do not support this character then feel like these meetings are not their business... Perhaps we should look into changing the approach, perhaps inform the community through posters or flyers so that everybody can feel included and not feel like they have to be politically driven to have a say in the developments” (Regional Manager, 2015)

It is acknowledged that changing the process might be beyond JCPZ's capacity. However there is value in tracing the constraints and problems the structure of the ward councillor system causes and thus begin to imagine how the different agencies within that structure can manoeuvre and rip the most positive outcomes. As emphasized by this official;

“We cannot change this procedure [the councillor is the one inviting communities]. But we can try and influence how it is actually done” (High rank JCPZ official, 2015).

Scholarly work on local councillors also show how disempowered, and un-recognised they are in their work – in a City Council structure that does not give them a space to actually represent their constituencies' claims in Council, and therefore brings limited incentive to work in a bottom-up direction, as opposed to political rewards in being faithful to party lines, in a dominant party system (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008). The rise of competitive politics at the local level, and especially in the major metropolitan areas, might alter these dynamics and lead councillors to work more actively to be accountable to their constituencies. In the meantime, it is also clear that the establishment of better relationships between ward councillors and JCPZ could help in rendering these processes of community mobilisation more efficient. Consideration for ward councillors in JCPZ, rapid and visible response to their claims, would contribute to consolidate the ward councillor's own legitimacy in her constituency, and demonstrate the benefits of working with JCPZ. There is evidence that, beyond the expected political games, councillors sometimes feel discarded or disrespected when they attempt to engage with JCPZ in the name of their constituencies (except perhaps when they are resourced with powerful political networks) (Hadebe 2016; Ratau et al. 2015, Hanyane et al. 2015), and that might lead to them being less responsive when requested by City Parks officials to mobilise their communities.

2.4. Budget versus planning cycles

Capital expenditure for park developments in JCPZ is approved using a system called CIMS (Capital Investment Management System). Decisions are taken during the periods of April and May for each year, where actual development then takes place from 1 July (CID officer, 2015). CIMS is a system used to prioritize capital expenditure at a metropolitan level in the City of Johannesburg. For JCPZ, it means CIMS decides which and how many Parks gets upgraded in each region, according to a number of criteria in line with broader metropolitan strategic planning (including for instance, the need for redistribution and prioritisation of townships; the urban boundary and limitation to urban sprawl; and metropolitan priority areas). This centralised system, located in the Planning department in the City of Johannesburg, allows for more objective measurement of the place, nature and amount of City expenditure in the metropolitan area. However, the system appears out of reach of JCPZ officials, who have limited vision on the timing, the nature and the extent of funding that will be allocated in one given year – and that leaves limited room for manoeuvre to sustainably engage with communities (as it is difficult to plan and predict what funding will be available, where and when). This issue requires more investigation, but it came in several discussions with JCPZ officials, who complained:

“The reason why things don't work out sometimes is because of the pressure. The pressure that we have is too much. You find that in a year we have to develop about eighteen Parks. Sometimes I don't even get information about a park that's being developed and I don't get to go and do education, because people are under a lot of stress. [...] And when these parks are not developed at the targeted time frame, the budget gets taken back” (Environmental Education officer, 2015).

2.5. How is community engagement assessed in officials' performance?

Since 2011 and the adoption of New Public Management principles within JCPZ, officials are assessed on their key performance areas (KPA) using categories referred to as key performance indicators (KPI). These are the requirements and duties that shape what official ultimately have to do each month. This assessment rubric is called the score card. The score cards differ with different departments and different ranks and positions.

This research was only able to review one score card from the Stakeholder and Liaison Unit, as officials from other departments were reluctant to share this information.

Key Performance Area (KPA)	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
1. Internal Business Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal engagement with other JCPZ departments such as CAPEX, OPEX, operations etc. and number of meetings attended [They attach a signed attendance register] - Internal coordination and facilitation of departmental programmes such as environmental education, operations, and recruitments of community liaison officer (CLO) (32 per quarter) [they are measured according to the projects that are funded for development for that particular financial year] - Monthly reports and councillor queries (100 %)
2. External Stakeholder Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of councillor engagements (120) - Number of engagements and joint programmes and campaigns with CoJ, provincial and national government (12) - Engagement with organs of civil society, concerned residents and political parties regarding Service Delivery challenges (100%) [they are measured through the number of attached signed attendance registers of these meetings] - Councillor forum and sessions (4/ 1 per quarter) - Regional service delivery , JOC or Section 79 meetings (24)
3. Learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and development programmes including workshops, one per financial year

Source: Bosaka, 2015 from interviews

CJPZ officials are to meet these targets (KPI) in order to be rewarded a bonus for good performance. They risk their job if they repeatedly fail to perform according to these criteria. The way the KPI are defined also shapes what will get more attention from officials, especially when there is a lot of pressure, as these areas are the ones stipulated as worthy of assessment and thus matters that are not perceived as falling under key performance areas may be neglected.

When one assesses these indicators, it appears they rate and reward the quantity of work and not the quality of work which contributes to how officials will take on their duties (e.g. rushing to tick the box and not paying much attention to how well the job is done).

This played out during the time of fieldwork, when members of the Stakeholder Liaison Unit would miss friends of the park meetings when things got challenging, perhaps because the number of community meetings that they had to attend for that month could allow them to manoeuvre these meetings and only attend those that were not as challenging. The attention to the number of meetings attended, rather than to the qualitative progress in the relationship with Friends of the Park, means that officials are not encouraged to engage more with communities in periods of crisis (in a 'make-it-work' attitude). Yet, deterioration of relationships between JCPZ (and the City more broadly) and Friends of the park can often be attributed to this lack of continuity, of presence when issues require quick resolution and intense engagement (KNR report, GHP report; Hadebe 2016).

Possibly other types of KPI could be introduced to be more sensitive to the nature of community engagement, or even to the outcome of the engagement (e.g. number of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), Service Level Agreements (SLA), or types of partnerships signed between JCPZ and Friends of the Park or other park users groups). Some argue however that it is the whole KPI system, focused on quantitative measurement, that is detrimental to officials being given the space, time and resources to pay attention to the nature of the relationship built over time.

In order to make more meaningful and constructive recommendations however, one would need to better understand the whole system of management, score cards and KPIs for officials throughout

the line in JCPZ. This might not be possible due to the sensitivity of the issue, but this is key to understand how officials practices are both shaped and constrained by the indicators they need to comply with, and what happens to the key social and community tasks that are also part of their mandate, but less easy to capture or reflect through KPIs.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The research focus has been a difficult context to manoeuvre. Officials were often reluctant to talk or to confide about their experiences and issues, scared that their responses and statements would be used either as a proof of their bad performance, or could be seen as direct critiques of the institution, even if the intention was to document and recognise the very real challenges officials face when engaging with communities in quite constrained environments.

The study thus had to make means with the limited information that was attained. Effective recommendations would need to come from a much greater understanding of the institution and the officials' practices. What is possible at this stage is to suggest a set of constructive critiques and implications of the analysis that was conducted on the challenges officials face in the endeavour of community engagement. The research appreciates that there is value in trying to understand the other side of the story, which are the narratives of the officials in their experiences with community engagement as this is hardly documented.

The research illuminated the dominance of negative feedback from officials' experiences with communities. Frustration was rife, and there were actually very few positive or innovative outcomes that officials were able to gain through these engagements. We understand these frustrations as both a consequence of officials' own skills sets (and the challenges of changing usual practices), and (perhaps more importantly) as the result of insufficiently supportive institutions and frameworks.

Enhancing CJPZ officials skills in facilitating community participation

► These frustrations in our views stemmed partly from officials own training and skills sets - with few of the existing staff having capacity or training in facilitating complex participatory processes, in often tense and frustrated communities; in navigating local politics including engaging with local councillors. There were some officials that preferred to not engage with communities at all, on the bases that it is simply not possible to try balance community demands and institutional demands. Some would avoid community meetings when possible. Hence these individuals remain strangers to communities receiving pressures and misunderstandings as both these parties are not involved and investing in a more sustainable engagement. **Training for the facilitation of community participation, and appointment of more senior or experienced officials to facilitate community engagement when the local situation is tense**, would be step in the right direction.

► There also needs to be an investment in officials training especially those who are mandated to manage stakeholders and communities, so that they are enabled **to continuously assist park users groups to navigate institutional complexities and understand the institution better**. This will generate better understandings of CJPZ mandate but also the limitations to its mandate and capacity. That will also give park users group a sense of progress and agency: understanding the proper channels of engagement within the City around specific problem solving will limit the frustrations

often unduly expressed against CJPZ. FoP might even assist CJPZ in reaching out to other municipal departments and entities, that are often non-responsive to CJPZ own queries.

► In this respect, the fact that community engagement has many facet throughout the CJPZ institution is not seen as negative, on the contrary – community engagement is everybody’s business. But, if CJPZ is serious about fostering co-management of park with park users groups (of Friends of the Park), **there is a need for a dedicated City Park official regularly and continuously engaging with those park users.** Sometimes this role is played by a Park manager, sometimes by a Stakeholders Liaison officer – but officials’ irregular attendance to park users meetings limits the potentials for a constructive engagement. **Structural issues such as lack of human capacity for too many park users meetings; or lack of seniority and decision-making power for these officials to be in a position to respond to the issues raised** in these meetings, might explain this phenomenon. Better resourcing stakeholder liaison officers, and elaborating spaces, platforms or mechanisms for them to bring local issues on CJPZ agenda, might assist in fostering constructive community partnerships.

► More generally, what would be needed to build ultimately less conflict-ridden and more productive engagements with communities is for officials to **invest time and efforts in long term and regular engagements with communities.** In these engagements, **consistency, clarity, and transparency** (on what the resources and the constraints, the time frame and the processes are in CJPZ for instance) are key. The absence of information sharing (a master plan not being communicated to FoP for several years for instance, responding to distrust and fear of conflict) can be disastrous for building trust. The lack of clarity on what funding is available and in what time frames always lead to frustrations and tensions – whilst a realistic presentation of resources might trigger more realistic expectations but also more innovative solutions. In the context of regular engagement that bring clarity on constraints and opportunities, communities can thus get to understand what is and what is not in JCPZ’s capacity, what can be negotiated and what cannot be negotiated.

► More than that, **using the production of a Master plan as a tool to engage communities** – even if it is in robust discussions; even if the funding for the realisation of the Master plan is not (yet/fully) available, can be a great tool to build partnerships. Here again, whilst some principles might be non negotiable from CJPZ perspective, the process of negotiation around the master plan might lead to CJPZ officials and FoP to understand both the difference in visions but also the commonalities, which might be much wider than officials imagine (as much of the tension and opposition in reality focus on processes of engagement, more than the content of the park management or development choices). A Master plan produced as the result of negotiations and compromises between CJPZ and FoP will produce a joint sense of ownership and trigger FoP to fundraise to contribute to the realisation of the master plan, in complement to the scarce CJPZ funding.

Developing institutions, processes and guidelines more supportive of community engagement

In examining the sites of community engagement in JCPZ it was observed that institutional structures have everything to do with the manifestation of actual practices, in that they provide the grounds, the support and means for officials to be able or unable to perform their mandates.

- ▶ **Key performance indicators** included in the score cards for officials involved in community participation, **do not reflect the quality of the engagement constructed or attained by officials**. Based for instance on the number of community meetings attended, irrespective of whether there has been any form of continuity in the officials' engagement with specific group, or if the engagement has led to meaningful results in terms of parks development or park management agreements, these score cards are not conducive to deep engagement – which does take more time and is more strenuous arguably. Basic quantitative measurements of community attended (rather for instance than number of stable relationships created with park users groups) ultimately shape what officials will prioritize, and encourage a culture of ticking the box of community engagement as a quarterly/monthly/daily service mostly geared towards meeting the score cards' demands.
- ▶ **More meaningful incorporation of community engagement within processes of park development** would significantly improve not only the relationship with communities, but also parks management and sustainability themselves (see also Mavuso 2016). In this respect **having in-house park designers** (instead of outside consultants), with experience in specific sites and communities, and able to design parks with a concern for sustainable management of the park, would lead to significant improvements.
- ▶ More broadly, park development would need to be based on an assessment of existing local practices and needs, including informal ones, with a particular **emphasis on immediately surrounding communities**. These users groups (including informal ones, as long as they are not criminal), if integrated in park development process, could be mobilised as natural surveillance of the parks: a **far more efficient than fencing** to ensure safety, maintenance and public uses of a park (Mavuso 2016). In this respect, **reading of, or exposure to, Jane Jacobs' essential texts (Jacob 1961) on parks management should be mandatory** for CJPZ officials...
- ▶ With regards to park development or revamp, **CJPZ would need to explore new ways of engaging and mobilising local councillors** – and empower them when possible to play an active role in shaping the park development and facilitating community participation. Local councillors are structurally disempowered in the City of Johannesburg and in South African cities more broadly (Béni-Gbaffou 2008), and their understandable frustration might lead to them playing a gate keeper or blockage role - as one way of building their political legitimacy. In case of blockage or inability for CJPZ to establish a partnership with the local councillors, recourse mechanisms should be explored.
- ▶ With regards to community participation in the management of parks, as defined by practices but also draft or current guidelines and regulatory documents, it seems urgent for **CJPZ to accept that engaging with communities (not to mention partnering with them) requires forms of power sharing**. Regulating documents need to be rethought not only defining the limitations and duties of volunteers and Friends of the park (and these need to indeed be clarified), but also the benefits and the power granted to volunteers or park users groups, in strategic and everyday decision making about the park they give their own resources and time to co-manage. **Proper consideration of communities' requests** around events organisation; joint development of master plans or strategies; clarity on available resources and timeframes available for a project; continuous and regular presence of a dedicated City Parks official in park management meetings... are some of the basic (and not illegitimate) claims made by Friends of the Park towards CJPZ, and the failure to respond to them is what is perhaps the greatest cause of tension.

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Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo has undergone a major institutional restructuring in 2011, where the former City Parks entity was merged with Johannesburg Zoo, and where the municipal entity shifted from being accountable to Johannesburg Environmental Management, to Community Services.

This meant a shift from an environmentally-oriented institution, to a more people-oriented entity. This shift is mirrored in JCPZ organogram and in its strategic objectives, some of which focusing on developing engagement with park users communities. Whilst institutional change is crucial to drive change in state practices, it is clear that change takes a long time and needs incorporation in state officials practices and mind-sets.

This report gathers testimonies from JCPZ officials at the coalface of community engagement, and interrogates their experience, frustrations and challenges, in the face of limited resources, contradictory institutional requirements requesting them to engage communities but limiting the space and resources for meaningful engagement around park development and park management. In this light, it might not be enough to focus on officials' training and education to much needed skills of community participation facilitation, whilst the institutional structures are still not sufficiently geared towards making community engagement a significant part of park management and development. In this light, officials' experience are precious to identify practical recommendations to consolidate and deepen park users engagement with JCPZ.



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