

UNPACKING THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF JOHANNESBURG CITY PROJECTS: A
DIALOGUE BETWEEN DESIGN AND PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

As a 'reflective' architectural practitioner in the City of Johannesburg I am finding there are limitations in the understanding and its potential value add of participatory planning. This is severely shortchanging communities. Through the Ivory Park and Alexandra Linear Market case study, I unpack the dialogue between design and participation as potentially a powerful mechanism for social justice. Although transformation is scribed into the South African constitution and is 'celebrated' through different forms of socio-politics, characteristics of the current political regime, silo'ed government spheres and hierarchy organisational structures creates a potential undercurrent which hinders its very democracy. Themes of participation, practice and urban development are three lenses through which the case studies are unpacked. The paper seeks to reflect on the politics of participatory design in post-apartheid Johannesburg, and the complex interface between communities, professionals and city officials in driving urban change.

From: Denver Hendricks [mailto:denver@urbansoup.co.za]
Sent: 21 July 2015 10:44 AM
To: Siyabonga Genu; Lerato Kola
Cc: Ray Harli; John Odendal
Subject: Re: LINEAR MARKET: WAY FORWARD

Dear Siya and Lerato

We would just like to highlight a few things from our side based on last week Thursdays' community presentation in Ivory Park and Alexandra.

Ideal process:

1. Conventionally the client (DED) should have first done a community engagement process to solicit their exact needs and practical requirements (ie. number of stalls, safety, lighting, etc)
2. Those requirements needed to form part of the competition brief
3. Winners are elected.

In the current case- what should happen:

1. The competition was put out.
2. Urbansoup won the competition (as per JDAs' correspondence)
3. Community engagement was done (at this point ONLY Urbansoup should have been invited because there is ONE winner)
4. Urbansoup consolidates community requirements INTO the WINNING DESIGN
5. Urbansoup revises the design
6. Urbansoup presents a final detailed design to the community

The current events are watering down the process for the following reasons:

1. There appears to be a serious compromise of the process as the client (DED) is not only confusing the stages, but also the community and the consultants.
2. As a result the executive architects (Iyer Architects) are requesting information of which we cannot supply because of the current confusing process.
3. In addition the client (DED) is overriding the agents' (JDA) role to run the process and make decisions.
4. DED is also compromising the integrity of the process as they are creating an opportunity for unfair judiciary process. The way DED presents the community engagements allows an opportunity for the community to be swayed against JDA's decision. This is viewed as unfair practice after being nominated as a competition winner.

Please advise on a clear way forward so that as winners of this competition our roles and time is not compromised.

Fig.1 An Email to the project manager at the Johannesburg Development Agency

Introduction to the case study

I sent this email to our project manager of the Johannesburg Development Agency, our client and also the implementing agent of the City of Johannesburg, in response to the community engagement meeting we attended in Alexandra and Ivory Park on the 16th July 2015 for the Linear Markets projects we designed. The communication in the email outlines concerns of basic inclusive design objectives and principals, which have appeared to me to be severely compromised.

Alexandra and Ivory Park Linear Market Community Meeting

Two the community meetings were held that Saturday at which we presented our concept, one in Ivory park in the morning and another in the afternoon in Alexandra, both chaired by the Department of Economic Development (DED), This is the government department in charge informal trading and also the client of the JDA). The DED introduced the consultants and established that the objective of the meeting was to present the projects. The community members sat observantly and took it all in. When there was an opportunity for questions they were vocal in voicing their opinions. The concerns ranged from of reducing dark corners for their safety, sufficient vandal-proof lighting, whether the trade stalls sizes are in alignment with the current standard, supplying sufficient trade stalls for everyone, storage



Figure 2- Community member from Ivory Park



Figure 3- Community members at Alexandria community meeting

to lock away extra stock, and locations of running water, toilets and drainage. They were articulate, respectful of each other's voices and considerate of each other. They spoke inclusively and deliberated.

However, the DED, although addressed these concerns within the design by pointing to various slides and assuring new agenda items were to be considered. During the presentation my concerns of the process and the content began to grow (which is what I voiced in my email in Figure 1). Firstly, I questioned the fact that our design was not informed by the community's needs on the outset. The information articulated by the community at this meeting was extremely important which set the basis for the design. Instead, the DED decided on our winning concept and then took it to the community to be presented. Secondly, although our scheme was chosen by the DED, they invited the runner up architect to the same community meeting to present his design as an "alternative" design option. This contradicts the announcement of the winning scheme. In addition the runner up design presentation confused not only the community, but also us as to what the objective of providing alternatives. The DED then invited the community to vote on the winning design and to count raised hands. These numbers were not recorded or documented. Thirdly, the DED threatened the community by saying they will request that the metro police close their shops in order to force the community to attend the meetings in the future.

We left both meetings more confused about the process because we were unaware that the community was only being engaged after the design. It also made sense that the brief for the design had not included specific design requirements. The chairing of the meeting by the DED also limited deliberation with the community by keeping a strict agenda and power within the meeting. It is clear that the design will never truly reflect ad-hoc processes and controlled mechanism through meetings have negated its maximum potential because the plethora of information that requires it to be synthesised. Is it too late to conceptually incorporate all the communities concerns onto the current design? Is it confirmed that we are the appointed architects for this project? Will the community feel welcome to return for a

de-briefing meeting to approve and comment on the revised design especially after they had been threatened by the DED? My business partner and I drove back to the office that afternoon and confessed that the meeting felt staged and ambiguous. Hence, I subsequently wrote to the JDA requesting clarity the process, structure and relationships between the DED, JDA, the community and ourselves.

Background to the project

Our firm won a design competition for a market in Ivory Park and Alexandra from the city of Johannesburg in June 2015. The brief was to design trade units for existing traders whom line the street edges outside the neighbourhood mall. They have positioned themselves to catch the foot traffic of the daily shoppers. These neighbourhoods were declared black townships some as early as 1912 with rapidly growing in population numbers. The dry and treeless neighbourhood are fragmented, low income, with a small to medium percentage of immigrants from neighbouring countries. Alexandra and Ivory Park evolved in the early 1900's due to rapid economic development in Johannesburg resulted in an influx of from the rural to urban combined with the 1934 the Slums Act which forcefully removed black people from the city (Harrison, et.al. 2012, p. 346). I am a Director at Urbansoup Architects and Urban designers (PTY) LTD in Newtown, central Johannesburg. We work on city-based public projects mainly transit-orientated developments, markets, inner city re-development and other projects for the city. We specialise in medium to large infrastructural projects often involving the city officials, their agents and stakeholders. Within the areas in which we design and build, the stakeholders are constituted of a number actors both nominates, elected,

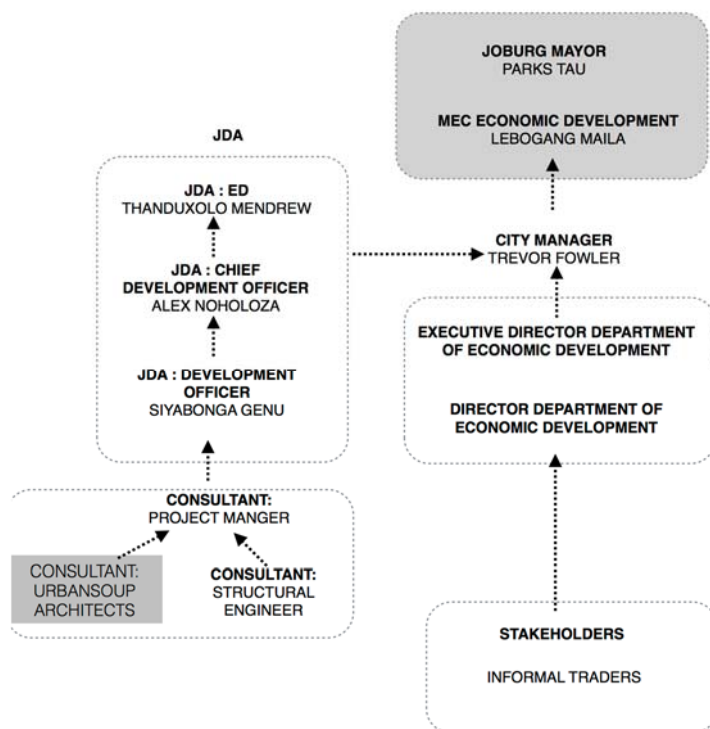


Figure 4- Relationship diagram

official and non-official. Ward councillors, activists, community leaders. These members of the community are very vocal, articulate and politically active. The Alexandra and Ivory Park Linear markets are one of three the stories, which articulates the complexities design, and community interacts within. We have worked on two projects, Kazerne Transport Orientated Development and My and Your City Futures project for City of Johannesburg's implementing agency known the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA).

Our primary objective is to deliver an appropriate public architecture, which is relevant, robust and sustainable. It gives us immense joy to be 'true' to the brief by maximizing the full design potential based on good founding mapping evidence. But, it is the conjunction between urban governance and design, which this research emanates from. As a result, as designers of space we are forced to engage with lengthy and sometimes frustrating planning processes in order to realise the final product on the ground. As a result, the stories are not offering conclusive evidence but it describes the nature of inclusive design.

The aim of the paper is to critically look at the process of public project delivery in Johannesburg city and understand what influences the process and unpack the challenges for various role players. The aim is to understand how democracy is exercised during public participation process against official's agendas and technocratic rationalisation techniques- that wins and articulate the impact. It is valuable here to present a case- a project, which I partook in with the JDA to comparably look at the dialogue between design and community.

Introduction to Inclusive Design Theory

In order to reflect on the case studies and remain unbiased, it's important to relate the case study to normative theories and locate it within current context of decision-making processes. I propose to frame the debates of participatory design practice through three lenses: best practice, the deliberative practitioner and the current participatory planning context in Johannesburg. Firstly, normative literature providing helpful context and articulation of best practice strategies on participation in decision-making and design will facilitate a grounding and introduction into the subject. Secondly, reflective practicing literature is intended to relate to a similar position I find myself in both as a practitioner and mediator. Thirdly, scholarly writing on participation in Johannesburg will provide a vivid underpinning, which will allow the research to demonstrate contextual justification.

But first I begin to look at the kaleidoscope of terminologies: participatory practice, public participation, inclusive design, participatory planning, human-centered design, co-design are only some of the terms being used within various design disciplines. All of which have similar objectives to include the users into the authorship of the design. Specifically within the designing of cities, it is an emerging practice for the last fifty years which stems from the increased active citizenry and growing reputation to deliver infrastructure and services (Francis, 2015 p.14; Kirsten, 2009 p.23). Although the term "*participatory design*" is interpreted differently by various practitioners and it is applied in a sliding scale of inclusion levels (Arnstein, 1969).

Best Practice

The role of best practice is to articulate the necessary values, which underpin participatory design. The founding value of best practice is in how the actors within their roles relate to each other. Learning, understanding and mutual respect seems to be the cornerstone of most scholars writing (Forrester, 1999; Leong, 2009). These values are best practice principals, which are going "*beyond compliance*" (Leong, 2009). Forester (2012) refers these phenomena as "*critical pragmatism*" which is a co-generated, co-constructed or negotiated planning

practice (Forrester, 2012 p.8). Kirsten states that it is important to build relationships which are transparent, open and accessible (Kirsten et.al., 2009 p.27). According to these scholars to embody specificity and good intention within human interaction. It is the behavior of persuasion, authority, coercion that has a direct negative impact on the participation process as found in the text of Forrester (1999), Leong (2009), Francis (2015). Negative behavior of officials or designers could be linked to the resignation by communities and other critics (Hou and Rios, 2015 p.19). Therefore, focusing on the process and building community allows a cooperative and a *"binary interaction"* (Hou and Rios, 2015 p.19). The theme *"finding common ground"* appears to be the main theme of Leong's text (2009) on participatory processes. It considers *"building community"* through particular human ways if being. The text is well versed in the area of *"unconventional ways of mediating processes"*, which stems from his experience to articulate the strategies, which solicit the maximum cooperation amongst communities, officials and designers. The authors go beyond normative approaches by documenting 'uncommon' approaches, suggesting that the power of joint decision-making lies within *"mutual learning"* (Leong et.al., 2009 p.24). On the other hand, Leong (2009) is sensitive to the fact that the idea of *"exchange of information"* could be giving away too much power to the community to decide and that this may be dangerous (leong et.al., 2009 p.24). Different strategies of how to relate are high recommendations, like meeting the stakeholders on their turf; understanding the motive behind their requests, opinions or statements.

Another dimension to *"relatedness"* is related to networks and power. This aspect of participatory design is linked to dominance of one over the other. These coercive strategies can come across subtly but can exist between the consultant, official or the community. Stone (2006) writes explicitly about relationships of dominance and negotiation while Forester (2012) discusses more loosely strategies of how to approach the community in a more considered way. In the paper *"Power, Reform, and Urban Regime Analysis"* (2006) he explores the rationale behind boundaries of power relationships and analysis of two conceptual types of power relationships. A hierarchical power called *"Power over"* (Stone, 2013 p.25) describes a form of power of one over the other. This relationship may be mistaken for ignorance by the person being dominated but guards readers against assuming that this relationship is *"asymmetrical"* in terms of power (Stone, 2013 p.25). In fact, this is a mutually beneficial relationship and both the sides of the entity may exercise power. It is more about *"bargaining rather than domination and subordination"*. Therefore Stone further argues this concept of *"power to"* is far more simplistic and clear than it appears. *"Power to"* (Stone, 2013) within a community, union or coalition who strive for collective aims are equal individuals he argues can be more complex. The *"altering"* of intentions or overriding of one over the other could give rise to subliminal shifts in the *"social movement"* (Stone, 2013 p.26) due to the aspect of 'timing'. The relationship of timing within an association can allow certain assumed rights over another or simply the effect of evolving preferences.

Although these concepts can be arguably viewed as theoretical, social and psychological it establishes value within this research. It is contextualised within the urban governance and the dynamics, which brings about decisions, it is important to understand who is making those decisions, what is their context and their agenda. It is also important to understand how they related to other and within which *"power regime"* (Stone, 2013 p.26) they are categorised. The concept of relating, position and reference is here important and brought under the lens. Stone is explaining that when there is hierarchy within an urban regime, the designation of actors and their positions defined that system which is not necessarily rooted in superiority order but of equal access to benefit. When there is a community of 'equals',

these more “latent” (Kirsten, 2013 p.26) complex associations, membership and affiliation. The study of interpersonal relationships provides a frame to view the connection between the DED, and the community to develop a deeper understanding of “urban regimes” (Kirsten, 2013 p.26).

I propose that within the Linear Markets project case study, the DED has a relationship with the communities of Alexandra and Ivory Park. However, the values of learning and understanding are drastically limited. The agenda of the DED for the community meeting is mainly to present the DED’s chosen design and use the community as a sounding board. The values, which allow deliberation is absent and is merely massaging the community’s core considerations of their everyday practice as a secondary value, add into the design. In addition, although the relationship between the DED, community and ourselves as designers are framed as ‘equal’ partners, which according to Stone (2013) is most problematic, the DED exhibits characteristics of position drift and sways from a role of authority to that of being a co-designer.

Deliberative practitioner

Design and participation not only creates inclusive and equitable spaces but also creates a theoretical framework for these values (Anderson, 2014 p.17). However, public projects can become time consuming as design decisions seeks consensus by many parties with indifferent agendas. Therefore completing projects on time and within budget is a well-rehearsed narrative by Forrester in his paper “*Design confronts politics, and both thrive*” (2013). Hou and Rios, (2015 p.26) states that the current practice of design participation is problematic in the training of professional practitioners architects and urban planners as it does not accommodate for such conflicts in such conflicting environments. The community is directly involved in curating the vision and requirements of the brief. But where is the line between local and expert knowledge? Who is justified to make what decisions? How are they trained or what experience do they hold? The collaborative input by the community, official and designer is an intricate one that therefore requires unbundling.

Architects are producers of space often offering a solution to an established problem (Anderson, 2012 p.18) and are considered expert knowledge. On the other hand community members are authors of their own space in what Anderson (2014 p.18) considers to be “*The everyday*”. Based on Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ and Mark Purcells’ seminal theories, Anderson articulates the debate that it is only the users of the space which can read and define public and private spaces in its plurality. To the ‘bourgeois’ it may appear to be a singular public space, ambiguous and difficult to articulate. Leongs (2009 p17) reflected on the relationship between the local and the expert indicating that often the local would dismiss expert knowledge if local knowledge is not acknowledged (Leongs et al’. (2009 p.17). It is the process of translation (Francis, 1983:17) and interpretation from the community to the architect which is crucial in the understanding of “*the everyday*” to which mapping and examination is insufficient. “*Social space is thus produced by dynamic, just thinking mechanisms that superstructure public and private life*” (Anderson, 2014 p.17). This briefing into spatial integration provides a “*reciprocal*” relationship of binary knowledge which Leong (2012) quotes Lowry, Adler and Milner (1997) if “*transformations of awareness resulting in personal growth*”. Anderson (2014) terms this architecture of “*action and process*” because the collaborative process determines the direct results of the built form. The practice of design is generally self-apprising, except when limited consensus from a singular client body and is considered a “*open loop*” (Anderson, 2014 p.16). Working with the community shifts this normative design approach to an iterative and “*reciprocal activity done in partnership*

with communities" (Anderson, 2014 p.16). Anderson (2014 p.16) states that in this case the *"emphasis of social production of space, the everyday, and the relational underlie the theories of 'Praxis'"*. Praxis is design with the inclusion of *"equity, inclusivity and social justice"* (Anderson, 2014 p.16). What values and skills are required to be a community practitioner or official during such deliberative processes?

Although community designers will never be able to fully embody and read the public space in order to re-create and maintain the social and organisational forms, they are heavily reliant on the community to get as close to that reality to which the public space would appropriate itself. These community practitioners however have to exercise certain skills according to Francis (1983) and Forrester (1999). The foundational skill the practitioner should be open to new ideas. It should be seen as an educational process. Being a *"reflective practitioner"* (Forrester 1999) and similarly Francis (1983) agrees on the practitioner being reflective, critical, a good listener, a good facilitator and good anticipator.

Although the DED and ourselves as designers took turns to play the role of the deliberative practitioner to solicit a deeper understanding of the 'everyday' - it is clear that the process did not allow for a sequential build up of mapping through physical and oral accounts. The meeting documented in the case study was the second meeting with the community. It was also the first meeting at which the community engaged with the design. Nor did it allow the time to exercise social justice because some of the requirements were compromised by the existing design.

The Current Participatory Planning Context

The purpose of the third and final lens is to geographically contextualise the previous two lenses of design participation. Johannesburg, like other urban centres of South Africa is undergoing major urban transformations to both rectify the scars of apartheid and compete as a global city. The thread focuses on literature of both of local and national government policy documents and contemporary scholars whom focus on the state of participatory practice of urban development of Johannesburg in the 21st century. The JDA mainly focuses on projects of the city and their objective is stimulating development through multiple and collective upgrade projects which contribute to socio-economic growth of Johannesburg.

Winklers' (2012) text on 'Retracing Johannesburg: Spaces for Participation and Policy Making' (2011) focuses on the current state of participatory planning processes in Johannesburg. She takes a critical approach, which looks at the integrity of transformation and measures the congruency of an inclusive planning process. Winkler suggests that the *"third way"* of thinking (participatory planning) has been adopted from international models of urban governance which exhibits neoliberal characteristics. In addition the 'emphasis of participatory governance' is related to *"global competitiveness"* and *"performance management"* (Winkler, 2012 p.258). It is here Winkler first alludes to the fact that its original concept and implementation (shared approach to planning and policy formation) is not fully understood and goes as far to state that it lacks integrity (Winkler, 2012 p.258). Confirmation that this strategy of planning approach is *"borrowed and replicated"* from leading global cities (and this is not uncommon) but it lacks true comprehensive implementation, which limits the transformation (Winkler, 2012 p.258) in South Africa and specifically in Johannesburg.

There are three areas of Winkler's text, which characterizes the nature of the planning process in Johannesburg today. Firstly, the 'enshrining' of participatory democracy within the constitution; the cultural and political practices of the current regime (The African National Congress) and thirdly, the challenges of the national and municipal implementing body (Winkler, 2012 p.259). Policy formulation and adoption occurs at national level, ie. the

presidency, executive committee and cabinet level while the implementers and evaluators are at national and municipality levels (Winkler, 2012 p.259). The paradox that at national level the constitution states that democracy is exercised through transparency, accountability, and public involvement is true but is misconstrued to “*tick the box*” and is absent of genuine deliberation. In fact, techniques are purposely curated to render the process meaningless. There is also emphasis on what ‘real’ transformation means. Winkler states it is not only a right to participate but also be afforded the opportunity to shape policy (Winkler, 2012 p.267). She warns via scholarly citing that participation can be riddled with bureaucracy and technocrats, instead it is meant to be an iterative process and not once off or “*linear*” (Winkler, 2012 p.260) as exhibited in the Alexandra and Ivory Park case studies. In fact, it should be seen as deliberative and discursive in which participants, including the state, learn from the process.

Winkler is unambiguous in her criticism about the culture of the current political regime. The role of the African National Congress (ANC) is fairly new and unchallenged. The hand over of the political reigns from minority white rule post 1994 in South Africa has seen the ANC dominate without threat from other political parties both nationally and locally. Limited “*sharing political power*” (Winkler, 2012 p.260) and ultimately the making sole decisions to its own discretion are well-exercised techniques. Having said this, the state still leads participation, is centralised and therefore highly politicised.

The role of municipality as an implementer and evaluator of policy in participatory practice Winkler concludes is under pressure to perform comprehensively against many challenges in time and logistics. Winkler (2012 p.260) questions unemployment rates and informal housing backlog: “*what is the role of legislated public participation*” and how is it addressing these issues? (Winkler, 2012 p.259). From her case study, officials during the post 1994, August Johannesburg Rapid Land Development Program which attempted to re-appropriate initially 250 000 households. Not only was the project watered down to 5300 households (Winkler, 2012 p.262) without consultation but a non-engaging culture developed by officials. In addition the community was moved to the new area, which was serviced, but no top structure. A five-year delay and amendments to the township layout ensued created additional ‘anxiety’ for the community.

Conclusion

The three lenses presented in this paper not only illuminates the role of community building, design culture and urban governance, but also the intrinsic relationship between each entity. It is imperative to acknowledge these roles in the building a society of justice and trust within the communities and with their officials, especially within the context of a new constitution. Leongs (2009, p.26) articulates that participatory design requires focus on the relationships. The DED will need to build on these relationships, which fosters values as opposed to attempting to deliver results.

Unfortunately, the nature of participatory planning is cumbersome. To incorporate each individual’s opinion and consider each urban practice into a design has a direct impact on the delivery of the project. But it is due to conflicting issues of strong political agendas, social network strengths, limited time constraints, upholding democracy, legitimacy and efficient fund expenditure which creates a difficult space for the creative practice of design to thrive. The value of design is being stripped to a simplistic tool of ‘make something’ as opposed to imagination. Compromising the quality of space by constraining processes results in poor architectural manifestations. Leongs et als’. (2009) text is useful here because it guards against popular “*watered-down*” versions of design participation like “*invite-inform-ignore*”

and “*decide-announce-defend*” as well as it develops a foundational criteria of good practice.

In addition, despite the fact that the community has the constitutional right to a voice their needs and is obliged to be included in the discourse of making space, it is the shape of that voice at implementation level, which is being severely compromised. It is argued that legislated participation is merely an “*administrative tool*” to promote confidence in and governance (Winkler, 2012 p.266). It is through the interview of the COJ official, which captures the “*political rhetoric*”, states that “*inflexible targets limit the quality of participatory process*” and it suggests that it becomes a box ticking exercise which only count towards the performance management of the individual official (Winkler, 2012 p.267). There are clear indications of ignorance and lack of process understanding demonstrated by the officials. Hou and Rios echoes (2015 p.19) Hester (1999) in that the practice of community participation is still “*institutionalised and parochialised*” and that the original purpose is defeated. The irony is that the current ruling party (ANC) won the 1994 elections through preaching ‘social justice’. It is a double standard in that the same group of politicians prioritises loyalty to the party over democratic justice for the South African people it represents. What could the future of South African cities be if the paradigm shifts from power to a long term objective of community building through deliberation? To this end empowerment has the potential to be “*re-imagined*” (Winkler, 2012 p.260).

As authors of space we are not only trained to underpin our interventions with solid reasoning based on legitimate mapping of the intangible, but we are also provoked to question the dynamics which brings about that reason. In addition, objectivity has to be maintained within a subjective discipline while mediating the landscapes of politics and power. I would consider myself to be a deliberative practitioner who constantly reconsiders the ways of practice critically, looking through lenses of equity, social justice and inclusivity. We might not be able to change the national policies and enforce compliance but we can continue to exercise our opinions and voice our concerns about unfair practice to our clients within the built environment.

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