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**WORKSHOP CONTRIBUTION:
“BOTTOM UP MEETS TOP DOWN, THE CHALLENGE OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN
REGIONAL PLANNING
FROM UK AND COLOMBIA”.**

INTRODUCTION.

To date UK regional and urban planning policy and practice has been a largely ‘*top down*’ and adversarial experience. Although public consultation is a statutory duty the rigid and proscribed nature of this engagement usually excludes the possibility of any meaningful dialogue between citizens, other key stakeholders and the decision-making authority. In response to this analysis stakeholder engagement has been placed at the heart of the UK government’s new planning policy. Statements of Community Involvement (SCI’s) are the cornerstone of this approach and recognise the value of engaging communities and wider stakeholders.

The experience in Colombia has been rather the opposite – often unregulated and ‘*bottom up*’. People themselves, especially in poor urban areas, are responding to their situation and are developing their own settlements through the construction of housing and community infrastructure. Sometimes these initiatives work well and are integrated and adopted by the city and authorities, sometimes the quality and level of community organisation is poor and the settlement fails.

Although UK and Colombian experiences of urban planning are polarised, both are attempting to tackle the same challenge but from very different starting points. In both countries local and regional government needs to learn how to encourage and support the clear benefits of stakeholder engagement in the planning system. The key challenge in the UK is to translate the aspirations of policy into the delivery of quality engagement strategies that genuinely enable stakeholders to influence development and inform real change. Likewise for Colombia the challenge is to draw lessons from the positive outcomes of spontaneous settlement creation and to develop the policies and support infrastructure to harness and improve the quality of poor urban settlements.

The paper explores these two challenges and suggests key actions for the development of more successful stakeholder engagement strategies. Experiences will be shared to demonstrate how ‘*top down*’ can meet ‘*bottom up*’ in the UK and how ‘*bottom up*’ can enrich ‘*top down*’ in Colombia.

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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOW INCOME SETTLEMENTS IN COLOMBIA³.

Poor urban areas in Colombia are normally boundary sectors that are characterised by great shortages of resources; such as the lack of urban infrastructure, decent housing and social services. These settlements originate in one or more of the following ways:

- Purchasing of plots by public or private companies - the “standard way”,
- Plots that are bought by illegal developers “clandestine” or
- Land invasion - communities of settlers that later achieve full development thanks to self build and/or self help practices.

The impact of these sectors in Colombian cities is huge. In Bogotá more that 50% of the urban fabric has been developed spontaneously by the inhabitants without the “interference” of any private or public planning institution. People themselves have built and improved their own habitat often using informal participation channels to achieve their goals.

During the research work, 28 different projects in Bogotá were studied to analyse how community participation works in community creation.

The study of community led neighbourhood development projects highlight a number of important issues:

- Public spaces are very important in low-income settlements. The houses are basic therefore the urban space replaces those facilities. Often it is the public spaces that give identity to the neighbourhoods.
- Community organisation is crucial to the success of a development project. Strong communities were found to be more able to develop better projects; on the other hand, when community links were not very developed, projects were more likely to fail.
- External technical and organisational support is essential to success.
- Building capacity is perhaps the most important accumulated resource for these initiatives. It is the “know how” that allows the community to engage in other projects that improve their urban, architectural and social life.

Finally, all of the research shows that well organised and executed community initiatives build capacity, create important relationships between people and their environments and between the people themselves.

COMMITMENT AND UNDERSTANDING AT EVERY LEVEL – MAKING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION WORK IN THE UK

ICARUS designs and facilitates UK urban planning processes that enable quality decisions to emerge in multi issue and multi stakeholder environments. Confidence, capacity and energy is frequently built in low income / low resource communities and participants are often very positive about the power of creative engagement in decision making and the delivery of key services. Direct experience of facilitating these processes has shown however that these initiatives are often ‘one offs’, not part of broader engagement strategies, find it hard to genuinely influence local and regional planning and lack any formal evaluation.

In response to these experiences and through collaborative work with Interact (a UK network of facilitators, process designers and participation specialists) Icarus is supporting the process of evidencing the benefits, possibilities and parameters of deliberative decision-making in the UK. The first step has been to draw out, from our own research, nine key challenges for national, regional and local government. These challenges are aimed at the people and agencies that manage engagement in the urban planning system.

³ From the Research Project: “Participación Comunitaria en el Hábitat Popular. Una mirada desde la Estética Social” (Community participation in low income settlements – Bogotá, Colombia-). Javeriana University.

1. **Culture**
A Planning Authority must have the courage, will and belief to convey a culture of openness to stakeholders.
2. **Commitment**
There needs to be practical commitment at every level of management to maximising the benefits of engagement. This means financial resources as well as policy and procedure.
3. **Space, time and support**
These resources must be made available within an authority to realise the opportunities for engagement. It is necessary to develop, support, train and empower staff so that they have the confidence to maximise the benefit that stakeholder engagement can deliver. Acknowledge achievements and promote good practice examples.
4. **Know your stakeholders**
The role and contribution of each stakeholder must be known. Segment and classify stakeholders according to their key value to the authority's decision making. Develop a methodology that makes it clear what benefit the Authority is seeking to achieve in its connection with a particular stakeholder. Establish clear lines of communication and those responsible for making that communication work.
5. **Plan your relationship**
Engage at a level that maximises the efficiency and effectiveness for the Authority and the stakeholder. Ensure that the 'level' of engagement is 'fit for purpose' and that inefficient and ineffective stakeholder relationships are quickly reviewed.
6. **Take risks and learn**
Take the risk, try out new ways of working and learn from the experience. Review and evaluate at all levels of stakeholder engagement activity to establish the efficiency and effectiveness of each engagement initiative.
7. **Joined up programming**
Individuals, staff teams and services share information about their engagement strategies (vertically and horizontally) and seek opportunities internally and externally to join up engagement work where beneficial.
8. **Skills and confidence**
Build skills and confidence across the organisation to ensure effective delivery
9. **Route map to the right place**
Ensure that the workings of the Authority are widely understood and easy to access.

CONCLUSIONS.

Although the requirement to engage is built into Colombian and UK Urban Planning legislation the quality of engagement in delivery is often poor. There would seem to be a number of learning points that could apply in both contexts that would improve the outcomes not only for the communities in question but also for the Authorities responsible for both supporting and controlling settlement creation and development.

- **Get connected** – there needs to be excellent communication between government policy, elected representatives, senior management, middle managers and operational staff. The culture of engagement has got to be embedded in everyones work. Managers need to understand the benefits and the skills needed to carry out engagement work effectively. Operational staff need the skills to design and deliver engagement but must also have the confidence and support of their Authority.
- **Front load and resource** – Engagement can't be delivered on a shoestring budget. Good participation requires resources, usually weighted toward the early deliberative stages of participative decision-making processes. Communities need resources and support to be able to participate effectively as much as the Authority.
- **Be bold** – Well managed and delivered participation won't result in unreasonable demands or over budget and undeliverable projects. If Authority members and officers work honestly and genuinely with key stakeholders then better, more sustainable solutions will emerge.
- **The long view** – Success won't be achieved overnight. Authorities have to commit support and resources to 'doing better engagement' in the long term. Community capacity cannot be built through 'one hit wonders'. Trust has to be built and integrity and results demonstrated over a long time.

- **Develop your own capacity** – Authorities need the capacity to deliver engagement as much as communities. Invest in the training of staff at every level.

The findings in both in Colombia and UK demonstrate that when ‘top down’ meets ‘bottom up’ more integrated, effective and creative ways of working can emerge. Clearly the challenge of creating a successful built environment is as much to do with people as buildings. Both practitioners and participants need to be fully involved in seeking ways of working that will address the silo and risk averse culture of local authorities and the barriers to engagement communities experience. There is much work to do to facilitate a dialogue between ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’. The political, intellectual, organisational and practical challenges have been stated, the imperative now is to deliver solutions.