Forms of Participation in Urban Redevelopment Projects

The differing roles of public and stakeholder contributions to design decision making processes

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Abstract: This paper examines how political commitment to participatory design within the context of a major urban redevelopment project was translated into a strategy and a course of action for achieving effective participation within a demanding project timeframe. The project in question involves a new transport interchange for the city of Auckland (New Zealand), the redevelopment of a number of heritage buildings, and the introduction of new buildings to create a mixed use precinct covering three city blocks.

The project, currently being implemented, has involved extensive public consultation and stakeholder participation as it has proceeded through the stages of project visioning, an open public design competition, and the development of the competition winning design. The paper draws a distinction between the contributions of stakeholders versus the public at large to the decision-making process, outlines the different kinds of participatory processes adopted by the local authority (Auckland City Council) to effectively engage and involve these two different groups and the stages in the evolution of the project at which these different contributions were introduced.

The model of 'open design' proposed by van Gunsteren and van Loon is used as a basis for explaining the success of multi-stakeholder inputs at a crucial stage in project development. The paper concludes by examining the limits of applicability of the 'open design' model in the context of urban redevelopment projects in which there is broad public interest, and by suggesting a number of design decision support guidelines for the management of participatory processes.

1.   AN OVERVIEW OF THE BRITOMART PROJECT

In her seminal contribution to the issue of citizen participation, Arnstein (1969) offers a typology of eight levels of participation, arranged as rungs in a 'ladder' of participation. These range from forms of non-participation in which citizens are merely advised of project intentions and their assumed benefits, to forms of participation based on significant degrees of citizen involvement in decision-making. Midway on this ladder is 'consultation', in which citizens both hear and are heard, but without the power to ensure that their views will be heeded by decision-makers.

The history of the Britomart redevelopment project reveals significant shifts in the kinds of participation included in the design decision-making process. A proposal prepared in 1994 included forms of participation located in the bottom half of Arnstein's ladder, while a subsequent proposal (currently being implemented) has been based upon forms of participation occupying the top half of Arnstein's ladder. These dramatic shifts in both design direction and in the accompanying forms of participation are briefly outlined below, as background to a fuller discussion of participatory initiatives in the current project.

The Britomart precinct comprises a strategically significant 5.2 hectare downtown site with an interesting and problematic history as part of Auckland's historic waterfront port, as the site of the city's original railway station, and subsequently as a bus terminal. In 1994 the Auckland City Council completed its purchase of the land and heritage buildings within the precinct, and through its own property division the Council prepared a comprehensive redevelopment proposal based on a number of tower blocks rising from a large pedestrian plaza, with a five level transport interchange below. Of the sixteen heritage buildings only two were retained, together with the facades of a further six. Widespread public opposition to this loss of heritage buildings, and the lack of effective public consultation on the proposal as a whole, sparked a public reaction that brought the project to a halt and was a significant factor in precipitating the demise of the mayor and key city councillors in local government elections in 1998.

The incoming mayor and council, elected in part on their promise to rethink the project, initiated an extensive process of public consultation, and in 2000 initiated a public design competition as the basis for establishing the form that future development of the precinct should take. From the 153 designs submitted in the initial stage, seven were selected for development in a second stage. The outcome of this two-stage process was a unanimously selected proposal that differed radically from the initial 1994 design. In the winning design the historic pattern of city streets was reinstated, and all the heritage buildings were retained. A number of functions of the transport

interchange were woven into this pattern of streets, rather than being located entirely below ground. New buildings were to be of a scale and character compatible with the heritage buildings. Positive urban open spaces replaced the amorphous character of spaces between the high rise towers of the earlier design. While in one sense the competition-winning proposal relied upon traditional patterns of city making, in another sense it was innovative in its integration of these traditional patterns with the requirements of a multi-modal transport interchange

2. FORMS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE BRITOMART PROJECT

In analysing the participatory processes that underpin the current design proposal, a clear distinction may be made between the roles of the public at large and project stakeholders in the design decision-making process. In this section of the paper the different ways in which these two groups were drawn into the decision making process are outlined and diagrammatically summarized. These are traced through a typical project development sequence, involving project visioning and the formulation of project objectives, preparation of the design brief, and an iterative process of design generation and evaluation at increasing levels of detail.

2.1 Public Participation

For several years prior to the commencement of the Britomart project the City Council had conducted a number of public participation exercises, focussing on broader waterfront redevelopment issues. A significant aspect of this process was the use of focus groups, in which participants imaginatively envisioned the future waterfront, and on this basis developed a number of broad goals and principles.

Immediately prior to the inception of the Britomart design competition, these principles, together with the working assumptions that the City Council had adopted for the project, were tested via a public questionnaire. This questionnaire was supported with an exhibition of information regarding broader decisions already taken for waterfront redevelopment, and regional and city transport strategies (of which the Britomart project would become a critical element.) More than 1400 questionnaires were completed and analysed and the results of this analysis were included in the design brief for the open first stage of the design competition. In addition to focus groups and a public questionnaire, members of the public were also invited to submit entries for the first stage of the competition, in which a single A1

drawing was required. In order to maximize opportunities for public participation in what was, in fact, a complex and challenging urban design problem, entrants were invited to submit proposals for the whole project, for the building sites only, or for public open spaces within the precinct. Of the 153 design submissions received, relatively few were from entrants who were not qualified design professionals, suggesting that this form of public participation lacked broad appeal. Nevertheless, considerable public exposure was given through the media to the range of ideas included in the Stage 1 designs.

At the conclusion of this first stage the public at large had an opportunity to contribute further to the decision-making process, by visiting the exhibition of Stage 1 designs, selecting up to 5 'preferred' designs and recording their reasons for this selection. Approximately 11,000 people visited the exhibition and over 600 questionnaires were completed. These responses were analysed in terms of the reasons given for the preferences (rather than the preferred designs themselves), and responses were grouped into a number broad themes. This analysis was conveyed to the Stage 1 judging panel and included in the Design Brief for the second stage of the competition. These themes could be summarized as development that is 'distinctively of our place', a people-friendly environment with a strong waterfront presence while also providing an inviting and efficient interchange, and with existing heritage buildings an integral part of the redevelopment.

In this way a broad ranging set of public responses became a significant source of design direction for the seven teams selected to take part in the second stage of the design competition. The final step in the process of public participation was the opportunity for the public to select their three most preferred Stage 2 designs and to rate each on a 1 to 5 scale, for each of twelve key project objectives. Approximately 400 responses were received and a summary of these responses was conveyed to the judging panel. Interestingly, the panel had difficulty in reconciling a number of these public evaluations with its own, perhaps as a result of the increasingly complex and technical nature of the Stage 2 designs.

2.2   Stakeholder Participation

This second strand of the participatory process ran concurrently with, and continued beyond, the processes of public participation. The extensive and varied involvements of stakeholders throughout the early phases of the Britomart project reflects the diverse set of interests that intersect in such a major urban redevelopment project, and the recognition that each of these interests might potentially have a significant impact upon the viability of the

design outcome. For this reason each of the stakeholder groups needs to be involved in the decision-making process at those point where it's interests can be most effectively accommodated.

The first step in the process of stakeholder involvement was a series of presentations by the project sponsor, outlining the principles and working assumptions for the project. Thirty six stakeholder groups were consulted in this way, including land owners and property interests that might be affected by the redevelopment of the precinct, design and development professional institutes, civic and heritage groups, and organisations representing each of the public transport modes (rail, buses, ferries, taxis, and tourist coaches) that would use the interchange. By involving each stakeholder group at the outset of the process it became possible to establish the most effective way to involve each of these groups in the design decision-making process. Broadly speaking, these groups would assume either an advisory role (in which they would they would be kept informed of design developments and have the opportunity to comment - in other words, to 'hear and be heard'), or a decision-making role (in which they would have direct access to the design consultants and exert influence in the design decision-making process.) Within this second category a core of key stakeholders whose interests were critical to the success of the project were identified, and invited onto the design competition judging panel. Included were organisations representing the city's bus and coach operators, property development interests within the city (the Britomart project being the single largest property development in the city's history), and the local Maori iwi (the indigenous people of the central Auckland area with whom the City Council had a collaborative agreement.) The judging panel also included the Mayor and several senior city councillors. The remaining members of the nine person panel were three independent architects and urban designers, including the panel chair.

A second tier of stakeholders assisted the judging panel with a variety of technical evaluations of the design submissions. These included representatives from the Historic Places Trust (a national organisation responsible for overseeing the protection and redevelopment of historic buildings), the city retailers association, experts in the provision of heavy and light rail transport modes, ferry service providers, and representatives of departments within the City Council's own organisation that would have project delivery responsibilities. Each of these stakeholder representatives was responsible for ensuring that appropriate others whom they represented made their own assessment of design submissions at both stages of the competition, and discussed their views with their stakeholder representative. This key stakeholder role in the competition judging process represents the second step in the process of stakeholder involvement.

The outcome of the competition was the unanimous selection of a single submission at the end of the second stage. In order to facilitate the implementation of this winning design the City Council established a key stakeholder Reference Group that would meet on a monthly basis with the winning design team during the one year technical design development phase that followed the second stage of the competition. This was the third step in the process of stakeholder involvement. This Reference Group comprised members of the judging panel, together with key City Council staff responsible for various aspects of the statutory approvals process that would precede construction work. Several stakeholder groups that had been represented at the second tier during the design competition process also joined this Reference Group – namely the Historic Places Trust and the city retailers association. This reflected the growing importance of these interests at the technical design development stage. The Reference Group was charged with ensuring that the vision embodied in the competition winning design was retained during its development, and that the requirements of each stakeholder group were also met. Significantly, the meetings of this group provided a forum in which competing stakeholder interests could also be debated and resolved.

These roles indicate that the members of this Reference Group were now working in partnership with the City Council and its design consultants – a step on the ladder of participation that Arnstein (1969, p217) characterises in terms of opportunities to negotiate and to engage in trade-offs. At these Reference Group meetings the design consultants would present their design development work, followed by discussion and the preparation of a number of recommendations. A review of the recorded outcomes of these meetings indicates a high level of agreement amongst the various stakeholder representatives in respect of all issues except one. In fact as a consensus-building exercise the process appeared to be very successful. It is also possible to trace the way in which this group shaped the direction of design development, particularly via the search for alternative design solutions when pragmatic and technical demands began to undermine the very clear vision on which the competition-winning design had been based. In this way these stakeholder representatives contributed directly to the creative process by which the innovation embodied in the competition-winning design was maintained and enhanced.

2.3   Public versus Stakeholder Participation

From the above review it is apparent that a clear distinction can be drawn between public and stakeholder contributions to the design decision-making process. While the public were given a number of opportunities to influence

the direction and content of the decision-making process they were not involved directly in the processes of negotiation by which design decisions were made. This would seem to be a reasonable and realistic strategy – reasonable because such voluntary public involvement cannot be assumed to be truly representative of the public at large, and realistic because of the limitations to the number of individuals that might be effectively included in the decision-making process, and the technical nature of many of these decisions[1].

In respect of stakeholder participation, the levels of participation varied considerably amongst stakeholder groups, as noted above. However, even where key stakeholders were included directly in the decision-making process, their involvement was not as design collaborators – as full participants in the creative processes by which multi-disciplinary design teams typically develop and refine their design proposals[2]. Given the natural limits to the size of such a core design team, and the diverse range of design professionals comprising design teams for major urban redevelopment projects, this would also seem to be a reasonable and realistic position. Rather than direct creative involvement, the role of key stakeholders becomes primarily evaluative, but with the opportunity to suggest design elements or configurations that would fulfil their individual stakeholder expectations or requirements.

From the perspective of participatory processes in urban projects, Arnstein's ladder of participation offers some useful distinctions (although Arnstein herself favours citizen participation at the upper levels of decision making power.) The Britomart experience suggests that in order to be effective, public participation should take a number of forms, but that in each case the focus should be on developing insight and understanding regarding the aspirations and expectations of the public at large, for the project in question. This requires that the public 'hear and be heard' – the distinguishing characteristic of the mid-level of participation that Arnstein labels 'consultation'. In respect of key stakeholder participation, this ranged from Arnstein's 'consultation' to 'partnership' within design decision

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[1] For example, public responses favoured declamation of part of the site, and the intro-
duction of canals, boat basins and such like. However, this presented a number of signi-
ficant technical and cost problems.

[2] In regard to design collaboration, Cys and Ward (2003) suggest that true collaboration
occurs when practitioners consciously step beyond their boundaries and engage in a new
process of design that is informed by their collaborators from other professional areas,
while Papastergiadis (2004, p. 160) suggests that 'collaboration is a way of receiving
others, involving both the recognition of where they are coming from, and the projection
of a new horizon line towards which the combined practice will head'.

making, with key stakeholders involved in negotiations and trade-offs around key design decisions.

A diagrammatic summary of these differing kinds of participation over the duration of the project process is provided in *Figure 1*. The one-directional arrows represent processes of consultation, while two-directional arrows indicate an involvement based on negotiation. The diagram provides a basis for project sponsor decision in respect of participatory processes for projects of this kind.
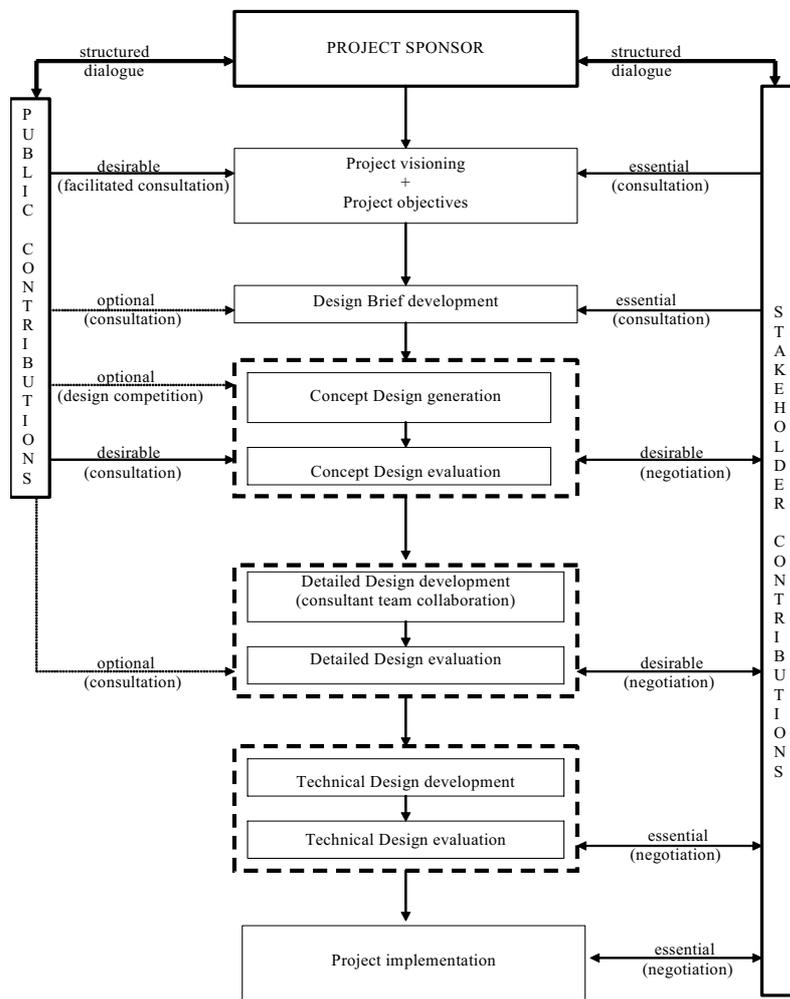

Figure 1. Participatory processes for the Britomart project.

3.   NEGOTIATION, CONSENSUS AND COMPROMISE: PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE

3.1   Perspectives on Multi-stakeholder Negotiation Processes

If negotiation is the hallmark of stakeholder involvement in design decision-making then arguably the most interesting and critical aspect of the Britomart participatory process was the role of stakeholder members of both the competition judging panel and the Reference Group established to guide the development of the competition-winning design. Both processes served as a forum for debate amongst competing stakeholder interests, allowing each of the stakeholders to become aware of the needs and interests of the others, and to temper their individual positions and expectations accordingly. For example, during the judging process transport-related stakeholders came to accept the urban design merits of an on-street arrangement for buses, rather than a transport terminal facility occupying development sites within the precinct. Property development representatives came to realise the urban design merits of a development that was compatible with the scale of existing heritage buildings, rather than maximising development floor area. During the ten half-day workshops in which key stakeholders engaged with the design consultants as part of the Reference Group process, heritage stakeholders came to accept the need for significant change to the principal historic building within the precinct, in order to achieve the larger goal of a pleasant and efficient transport interchange. How might this crucial aspect of effective participatory processes be understood?

The literature in planning includes an extensive examination of participatory processes, although there is little on the particulars of participatory processes within urban design projects. In the context of planning and and urban design Forester depicts the process as one of negotiation, in which each of the stakeholders "take advantage of their differing priorities in order to realise joint gain" (Forester, 1998, p. 8). He observes that this requires stakeholders to come to understand their different priorities in the first place, and to then negotiate well rather that reaching what he refers to as "lousy compromise". Bishop and Bonner suggest that such compromises typically result from unresolved conflicts, in which "the lowest common denominator emerges because nobody has taken hold of and properly managed the partnership process in a proactive, coherent and principled manner" (Bishop and Bonner, 1995, p. 210). They argue that a key feature of consensus building is providing a framework within which people with

different views can come together interactively, working towards a mutually satisfactory solution.

Van Gunsteren and van Loon offer a more detailed explanation of multi-stakeholder interactions, pointing out that each individual shapes his or her order of preferred outcomes at the moment of decision. They note that "this implies that where individuals have to take a decision together, something which on paper could be considered a dilemma between them will not necessarily turn out to be so. Conversely, what appears to be a problem-free issue may well prove to be a dilemma in practice" (van Gunsteren and van Loon, 2000, p.16). To explain what guides the process of negotiation and decision-making they invoke Pareto's Criterion: namely that collective welfare is at optimum as soon as it is no longer possible to increase the welfare of one or more individuals without decreasing that of one or more of the others. In the context of multi-stakeholder design decision-making, van Gunsteren and van Loon (2000, p.17) observe that any decision is at an optimum when it can no longer be improved to the benefit of one or more individuals without diminishing the benefits enjoyed by one or more of the others. It is this goal that shapes the direction of the collective decision-making process.

It remains to ask in arriving at such an optimum outcome whether differences of views amongst individuals need to be relinquished. Hillier suggests that this is not necessary, noting Mouffe's (1992) position that "decisions taken in a conflicted field generally imply the repression of some representations" (Hillier, 2002, p. 225). On this basis Hillier argues for a meaning of consensus as con-sensus: as feeling and sensing together, but not necessarily implying agreement.

3.2   The Experience of Multi-stakeholder Negotiations within the Britomart Project Reference Group Process

The above noted perspectives offer an explanation of why the diversity of stakeholder interests comprising the Britomart project Reference Group managed to reach a consensus view on so many of the issues that confronted it. However, as previously noted, there was one issue on which some members of the Panel remained divided, and for which a solution was unable to be reached without separate mediation. This issue went to the heart of the future success of the development, and its resolution provides an example of how innovative design ideas are at risk during design development in multi-stakeholder projects.

The issue in question was the extent to which the former Chief Post Office (CPO) building, being the most important of the heritage buildings

within the precinct and the most strategically located, might become an integral part of the experience and operation of the transport interchange. The competition-winning design had proposed that the ground floor of this building would become a giant public vestibule to the interchange, providing ticketing and waiting areas for commuters, and with direct linkages to bus stops, ferry services, and the below-ground rail station. (This feature of the competition winning design is illustrated in *Figure 2*.)
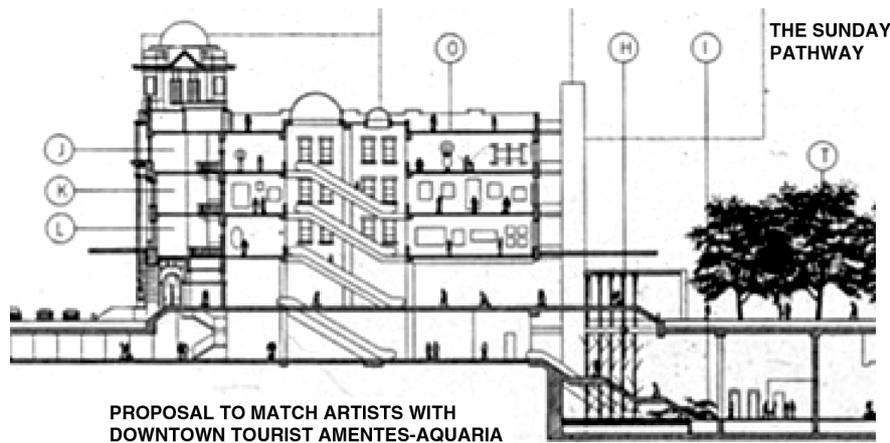

THE SUNDAY
PATHWAY

PROPOSAL TO MATCH ARTISTS WITH
DOWNTOWN TOURIST AMENTES-AQUARIA

Figure 2. Competition winning design proposal.

To provide a focal public space, it was proposed that the stained glass domed ceiling above the ground floor would be raised three floors to the top of the building, thus transforming the existing central light-well above these domes into a public atrium. Escalators would rise though this space to provide access to upper floors, and descend to the first basement level, where a public concourse would lead to the nearby ferry terminal and descend a further level, to the rail station. In this way commuters and visitors to the city would arrive into this central atrium space. This innovative idea was extended in early meetings with the Reference Group, by proposing to lower the original ground floor level of the building to street level, in order to strengthen connections between the interior and surrounding streets.

A key objective in achieving an efficient interchange was to concentrate bus stops around the former CPO building, thus strengthening its role as a nodal point in the interchange. A loop-based bus circulation system within the precinct was proposed by the design consultants, allowing easy access for buses to three sides of the building. Glass-roofed bus shelters would be introduced alongside the building, in order to provide minimum visual interruption to its heritage features.

At this point in the design development process it became apparent that these proposals were in direct conflict with the interests of the Historic Places Trust, and their desire to have the former CPO building remain as little changed as possible. In particular, their representatives opposed any changes to the ground floor level, and the raising of the domed ceiling of the former banking chamber. Additionally, they indicated a preference to keep buses and bus stops away from the streets immediately alongside the building. These differences of view were not merely in respect of how the building might be used and hence redeveloped, but stemmed from fundamentally different visions of the significance of the CPO building within the overall development of the precinct. Intense negotiations followed in order to resolve these differences within the limited time frame imposed by the project completion date. The negotiated solution was to retain the historic main entry steps and tiled entry vestibule, and to use this as the principal access to upper floor levels of the building. The former public banking chamber ceiling with its stained glass domes would remain intact, while the floor level would be partially lowered, but remain several steps above the remainder of the ground floor, in order to demark the extent of the original chamber. Elsewhere, the floor would be lowered to street level, and buses and bus shelters would be permitted alongside the building. Commuters would now arrive from the rail station at the eastern edge of the building rather than at its centre (as proposed in the competition-winning scheme). These design changes are indicated in *Figure 3* below.
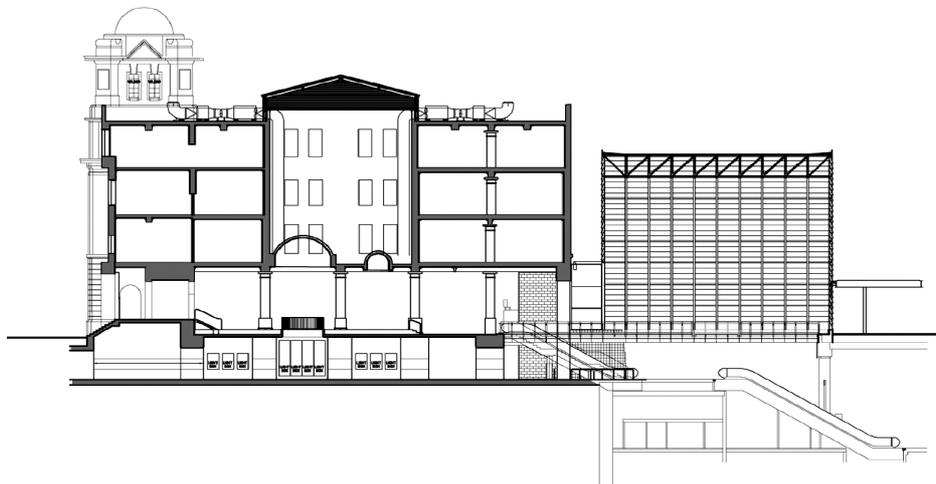

Figure 3. Stakeholder-negotiated design solution.

This instance of negotiated consensus, while experienced by the affected stakeholders as less than ideal, was nevertheless a form of agreement based upon Hillier's (2002) particular interpretation as 'con-sensus' noted above, and ensured that the former CPO building would be an integral part of the transport interchange. However, this con-sensus solution also had wider ramifications, with the need to reposition the below-ground station eastwards, and to introduce a much larger entry structure (the so-called 'glasshouse') to the interchange, alongside the eastern face of the CPO building. This in turn has significantly reduced the size of the public open space (Station Square) that formed an important ground level link between the interchange and the remainder of the development, and which was a distinctive feature of the competition-winning design. *Figure 4* illustrates the design arrangement achieved through negotiated agreement amongst the stakeholders, including the 'glasshouse' structure alongside the Station Square frontage of the CPO building.

Figure 4. As-built relationship between below-ground station and former CPO building.

This example illustrates not only the high degree of interdependence amongst design decisions that is typical of urban design projects, but in addition the need for the consequences of decisions taken by stakeholder groups to be fully explored at the time that they are first promulgated, and any necessary trade-offs agreed. In this sense these key stakeholders become active participants in the creative process by which design innovation may be either achieved, or retained during the design development phase.

4.   CONCLUSIONS: DECISION SUPPORT GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Barlow (1995, p.1) identifies three key factors that shape the process of participation: the types of techniques employed, the types of participants, and the stage in the planning/design process in which these participants become involved. In examining the politics of urban development he notes that participation may have a number of objectives: to provide information, to test opinions or assumptions, to invite new ideas, and to help to achieve participant aims. He also observes that in developing participatory strategies planners will need to both gain public support and retain sufficient control in order to deliver on the promises of the public agencies that they represent (Barlow, 1995, p. 59).

The Britomart project illustrates these points quite clearly. Participation techniques were selected to suit both the expertise of the participants and the points in the process at which this expertise could be most effectively used. Each of the techniques sought to inform, to test assumptions, and/or to invite new ideas, while all techniques sought to achieve an outcome that would meet participant aims. Control of the process remained with the planners and other City Council staff, in order to meet project timeframes and other aspects of the political commitments made by the new City Council to the public at large.

The experience of the Britomart project suggests that in deciding on participatory processes within urban redevelopment projects, a key decision becomes the balance between consultation and partnership (as these terms are used by Arnstein, 1969), and the extent to which stakeholders are given decision-making powers. Stakeholders may have an advisory role, be empowered to participate in negotiations around design decisions, or have full design collaboration roles. The character or 'profile' of the participatory process will be determined to a large extent by which stakeholder groups are accorded what level of decision-making involvement.

Arnstein favours forms of participation based on partnership, delegated power and citizen control (being the top three rungs on her 'ladder of participation'). Levels of participation below these she disparagingly refers to as 'tokenism' and 'non-participation'. However, this paper questions whether such levels of public involvement are achievable in urban redevelopment projects. In particular the complex and often technical nature of design decision-making would seem to preclude the close involvement of lay persons. Key stakeholders may need to participate in these decision-making processes, but in many instances these stakeholders will not have the skills to engage directly in the processes of design manipulation that

characterize the involvement of design collaborators[3]. So is the 'open design' model outlined by van Gunsteren and van Loon fully applicable in urban development projects that impact upon the public realm and therefore upon public interests at large? Interestingly, these authors provide an example of 'open design' in an urban planning context, but it would appear to be atypical of urban development projects, since it involved the selection between two competing design proposals by two stakeholder groups – future residents of the proposal, and the local housing association. The potential exists for such stakeholders to be involved in a truly representative way, in contrast to public interests at large, which cannot be so represented in the decision making process. This in turn suggests the need for forms of participation that lie outside of those on which the 'open design' model is based, if the public at large are to have an effective involvement.

The Britomart project clearly demonstrates that participatory processes can and should be an integral part of design decision support strategies for urban redevelopment projects. Specifically this project suggests the following guidelines for the management of participatory design decision making:

1. That public participation should be focussed on early project visioning stages, and may need the facilitated involvement of members of the public at large, in order to avoid superficial consultation outcomes.

2. That open invitations for the public to evaluate project objectives and design proposals are likely to be more effective than direct involvement in design-generative activities.

3. Public involvement in design-generative activities raises questions of the representativeness of participants and of skills needed to make decisions in the face of competing interests. However, designing as an envisioning activity is a potentially effective way for members of the public to articulate aspirations and visions, without the need to address project- specific technical issues.

4. The distinction between public and stakeholder interests is fundamental in developing a strategy for participation.

5. Stakeholders will represent diverse and sometimes competing interests. Those interests which are critical to the success to of the project need to be distinguished from those that are merely important for the project.

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[3] Achten (2002, p. 7) identifies the opportunity for all participants to manipulate the design at certain moments as one of the defining characteristics of collaborative design.

6. The involvement of key stakeholders in processes of negotiation and trade-offs during design decision making is both highly desirable and achievable.

7. The need for the project sponsor or commissioning agency to retain control over the participatory process is a realistic constraint that need not undermine the integrity of participatory processes.

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