

## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE VOICES OF THE POOR IN URBAN GOVERNANCE: OVERLAPPING AND COMPETING SPACES OF COMMUNITY-LEVEL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN CAPE TOWN**

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This paper explores the ways in which poor residents of Cape Town negotiate access to the municipal state in order to have their voice heard, using both bureaucratic spaces newly created by the city, as well as long-standing political spaces established by communities. The post-apartheid government has emphasised a decentralised approach to democratisation in order to engage with and meet the needs of citizens, particularly those groups disadvantaged under the apartheid regime. A key mechanism for achieving greater citizen participation has been the introduction of ward committees throughout South Africa's municipalities, implemented in the City of Cape Town as 'ward forums' and launched in 2007, providing an institutional platform for participatory urban governance. At the same scale, and with a much older pre-democratisation history, 'civic associations' are dominant in low-income areas, operating as the community representative and primary channel for communication with local authorities. This paper discusses the tensions between these 'old' and 'new' (or 'invented' and 'invited' using Cornwall's terminology) local spaces of political mobilisation, and the ways in which such competing and overlapping spaces of participation ultimately weaken the ability of the poor to influence the political agendas of the newly-democratised South African city.