

ENGAGING CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES FOR CREATING RESPONSIVE URBAN LANDSCAPES: A CASE STUDY OF CALEB UNIVERSITY MAIN CAMPUS

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Abstract

Vibrant urban landscapes demand citizen participation. Co-creation, which is a collaborative design approach, empowers residents to shape their environments. This research explores co-creation, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives for inclusive and sustainable urban landscapes. Using Caleb University as a real-world case study to explore successful co-creation strategies that leverage citizen involvement the research explores citizen experiences with campus development. Employing a qualitative research design, the research delved into the experiences, perceptions, and preferences of staff and students regarding Caleb University's campus development. Data were collected using collection involved a structured questionnaire distributed to a randomly-sampled residents, ensuring representation across all demographics. Findings reveal a generally positive attitude towards participation. The research also highlights the importance of diverse perspectives. Diverse opinions on campus aesthetics highlight the importance of inclusive design. The research emphasizes the resident's preference for green spaces reflects successful co-creation. The research also highlights the desire for multiple avenues of participation, with preferences for campus meetings, workshops, and online forums. Co-creation, free from participation barriers, empowers residents to shape responsive and inclusive urban landscapes, transforming cities into vibrant expressions of their collective vision for a sustainable future.

Keywords: Co-creation, Inclusive, Sustainable, Empowerment, Responsive

1.0 Introduction

Today's urban environments are constantly changing, accommodating ever-growing populations while striving for sustainable development (Seto et al., 2012). In response, "responsive urban landscapes" have emerged as a powerful tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN-Habitat, 2017). These dynamic landscapes adapt to the evolving needs of residents, fostering circularity, inclusivity, sustainability, and resilience (Evans, 2020). However, cities worldwide grapple with challenges in creating responsive landscapes, including the exclusion of vulnerable demographics from planning processes (Angelov et al., 2019), the digital divide that can limit participation (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021), and a lack of

general awareness about urban design processes, leading to disenfranchisement (Evans, 2020). Co-creation offers a promising approach to overcoming these obstacles. It transcends traditional top-down planning by empowering citizens to actively shape their environments from the ground up (Voss and Bauknecht, 2019). A co-creative and inclusive approach fosters a sense of ownership among communities, empowering them to address their needs (Sandercock et al., 2017). This collaborative process can bridge the digital divide, facilitate problem identification, raise awareness of urban design issues, and ultimately enhance participation and inclusivity in the planning process (UN-Habitat, 2020). Co-creation aligns well with several SDGs, including Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, which emphasizes inclusive and participatory approaches to urban development (United Nations, 2015). It also connects with Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, by ensuring everyone has a voice in shaping their environment, and Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, by promoting collaboration and fostering a sense of community ownership. This paper will explore successful co-creation strategies that leverage citizen involvement to address existing challenges and pave the way for truly responsive urban landscapes that benefit everyone.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Citizen Engagement and Co-Creation in Responsive Urban Landscapes

Creating sustainable and inclusive cities requires active citizen participation in urban planning. This literature review explores the importance of citizen engagement and examines innovative approaches, like co-creation, to enhance participatory processes in urban design. Citizen engagement in urban planning is crucial for several reasons. Studies by (Mendes et al. 2021) highlight how citizen participation in urban planning can lead to cost savings and improved project efficiency by identifying potential issues early in the process (Mendes et al., 2021). Research by Smith et al. (2019) emphasizes that involving citizens in decision-making processes leads to more responsive urban landscapes that meet the diverse needs of communities. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among residents, enhancing social cohesion and promoting a shared vision for urban development (Smith et al., 2019). Citizen participation also helps identify local priorities and challenges that might be overlooked by traditional top-down approaches. Studies (Johnson, 2020) highlight the importance of engaging citizens in planning processes. By involving residents in the design and implementation of urban projects, planners can ensure that interventions are contextually relevant and address the real needs of the community (Johnson, 2020). This can lead to more effective and equitable outcomes that benefit all residents.

Beyond the social benefits, citizen engagement can also contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined by the United Nations Agenda 2030. Specifically, SDG 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities," emphasizes the need for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban development (United Nations, 2015). Citizen participation aligns with this goal by ensuring diverse voices are heard in planning decisions, promoting social equity and inclusivity (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities). Citizen engagement can contribute to achieving other SDGs, such as SDG

3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by promoting healthier urban environments and SDG 13 (Climate Action) by fostering more sustainable design practices. While traditional models of citizen participation, such as public forums and surveys, offer some value, they have limitations. These models often lack the scope, inclusivity, and collaborative spirit needed for co-creation to flourish. Public forums, for example, can be dominated by vocal participants, neglecting quieter voices (Puerari et al., 2020). Online surveys, while offering wider reach, face issues like the digital divide and limited opportunities for in-depth discussion (Puerari et al., 2020). Existing models often have a limited scope, focusing on specific projects or stages of the planning process, hindering a holistic co-creation process (Puerari et al., 2020). Traditional models often rely on one-way communication, with citizens providing input but lacking true co-decision-making power (Puerari et al., 2020, p. 348). This undermines the collaborative spirit of co-creation and can lead to feelings of frustration and disenfranchisement among citizens who participate.

2.2 Co-Creation: A Collaborative Approach

Co-creation emerges as a powerful solution to overcome the limitations of traditional models. Co-creation fosters a collaborative space where citizens and decision-makers work hand-in-hand to design and develop urban landscapes. This approach offers several benefits: Co-creation is a powerful tool for urban planning that moves beyond just collecting public opinion. It empowers residents by giving them ownership and a say in how their city develops. This fosters a more engaged citizenry. By using a variety of participation methods, both online and offline, co-creation ensures that everyone has a chance to be heard, promoting inclusivity in the decision-making process. It taps into the local knowledge and expertise of residents, leading to better informed planning choices. This collaborative process also strengthens the community by equipping residents with new skills and knowledge about urban planning, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the city's future. (Basu & Banerjee, 2020; Brand et al., 2021)

2.3 Challenges of Co-Creation

Co-creation, despite its promise for citizen engagement in urban planning, faces some challenges. A significant hurdle lies in ensuring equitable participation. Marginalized communities and those lacking access to technology or facing language barriers may struggle to participate effectively. Research by Lang and Wiedemann (2021) suggested a multi-modal approach that combines online platforms with offline methods like workshops, pop-up events, and translated materials to reach diverse audiences. This approach can help overcome these barriers and ensure a more inclusive co-creation process. Managing expectations is another hurdle. Co-creation is a collaborative process, but it doesn't guarantee complete citizen control over decision-making. Planners still need to consider technical feasibility, budgetary constraints, and regulatory frameworks (Scharpf, 2019). Transparency throughout the process is crucial to manage expectations effectively.

Building capacity for co-creation is also important. Not everyone has prior experience with urban planning concepts or complex decision-making processes. Providing training

workshops and resources can empower citizens to participate more meaningfully (Al-Kodmani et al., 2023). This not only increases the quality of citizen input but also fosters a sense of ownership for the co-created outcomes. Fostering collaboration and open communication is essential. Successful co-creation relies heavily on a culture of collaboration and open communication between citizens and decision-makers (Nabatchi et al., 2022). Establishing regular communication channels and clear expectations about roles and responsibilities can help build trust and ensure a productive co-creation process.

2.4 Role of Technology

While traditional citizen engagement has limitations, co-creation offers a promising alternative for collaborative urban planning. Technology plays a key role in this process by enhancing accessibility (Brand et al., 2021). Online platforms and digital tools can reach broader audiences and overcome geographical barriers, allowing more people to participate (Basu & Banerjee, 2020). These platforms also encourage collaboration by facilitating real-time communication, idea-sharing, and joint decision-making. Additionally, technology allows for efficient and comprehensive data collection through surveys, polls, and interactive tools. For instance, interactive mapping platforms enable citizens to visualize proposals and provide feedback on design (Marvin et al., 2019). Crowdsourcing platforms can gather ideas and data from diverse stakeholders, ensuring a wider range of voices are heard. Virtual reality simulations allow citizens to experience proposed projects firsthand, fostering informed participation before construction begins (Caragliu & Del Giudice, 2020).

Co-creation can address the limitations of traditional methods and lead to the development of sustainable and inclusive cities. By building capacity, fostering collaboration, and utilizing technology effectively, co-creation has the potential to transform urban environments by reflecting the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. This collaborative approach can also contribute to achieving the UN's Agenda 2030 goals, such as promoting sustainable development and reducing inequalities. As cities continue to evolve, co-creation has the potential to be a powerful tool in shaping their future.

3.0 Methodology

The research study employed a qualitative research design to explore and analyze citizen participation strategies for creating responsive urban landscapes. Adopting this design allowed for an in-depth delve into the experiences, perceptions, and insights of the various campus residents. Studies (Kassam, et al., 2020; Adnan, et al., 2024) have proven that adopting a qualitative approach for this study will help to uncover rich, context-specific information regarding the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities associated with different citizen engagement strategies in urban development projects. The data collection instrument used for this study is a questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was designed for all residents of the university campus with different

aspects covering inquiries on current levels of citizen engagement, perceptions of urban landscapes, desired improvements, and preferences for participation methods.

Random sampling was employed to select questionnaire respondents, ensuring representation from all residents of the university campus. The residents included students and staff members. The study was carried out when the university was not in full session and as such, the informed and consenting 35 respondents (fifteen (15) staff members and twenty (20) students) were randomly selected from the students who were available on campus.

The qualitative approach involved data immersion for content familiarization. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within the responses. Additionally, constant comparison techniques were utilized to refine themes and ensure consistency across the dataset.

4.0 Results and Discussions

The respondents included fifteen (15) staff members and twenty (20) students. There is a higher concentration of male respondents among the staff and students. The majority of the students have spent between three to four years (3-4 years) while the most number of years among the staff is five to six years (5-6 years). There is a higher concentration of younger individuals among students and staff between the ages of sixteen to thirty (16-30 years) and thirty-one to forty-three (31-43 years) respectively.

Table 1.0: Demography of respondents

S/N	Demographic factors		Staff	Student
1.	Age	16-30 years	2	18
		31-43 years	5	1
		44-55 years	3	1
		55+	5	0
2.	Gender	Male	10	12
		Female	5	8
3.	No. of years on campus	1-2 years	5	5
		3-4 years	3	12
		5-6 years	7	3
		7 years +	0	0

Data represented in Figure 1.0 shows that while a majority share (71%) of the respondents have participated in activities or initiatives related to urban development or planning at Caleb University, several respondents (25%) think that they have not participated in any of this activities and one person claimed uncertainly.

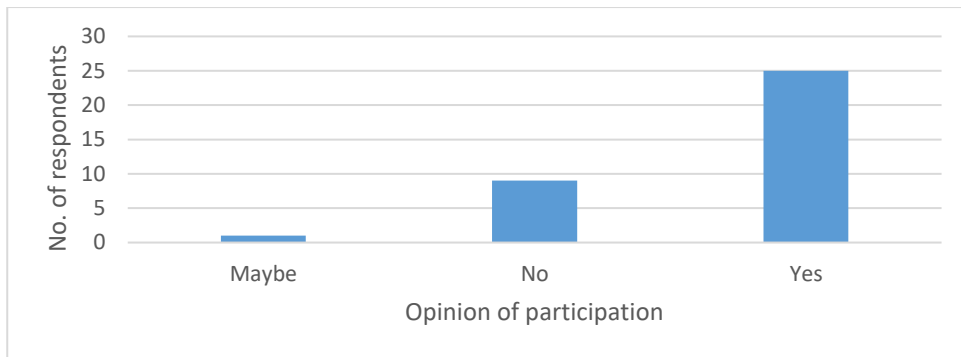


Figure 1: Participation in activities related to urban planning and development

The participation activities of the various respondents in urban planning and development of the university campus encompass a diverse range of roles and responsibilities. Some respondents engage in advisory capacities, providing insights and recommendations to the necessary authorities involved in decision-making processes. Additionally, certain respondents actively involve themselves in the physical realization of development projects, such as building construction and the installation of hardscape elements like sit-outs.

Other modes of participation noted were planting of trees for the re-development of the university landscape, rehabilitation of campus roads by filling potholes, redesign of the university master plan, design of gardens, organization, and participation in trade fairs. On the perception of the campus landscape, the larger part of the respondents, as shown in Figure 2 including staff and students agree that the campus landscape is vibrant. Similarly, a good amount of people referred to the landscape as dull. Well-planned is another term that was used to describe the university landscape. Overcrowded, another term used to describe the landscape, is an opinion majorly selected by the students.

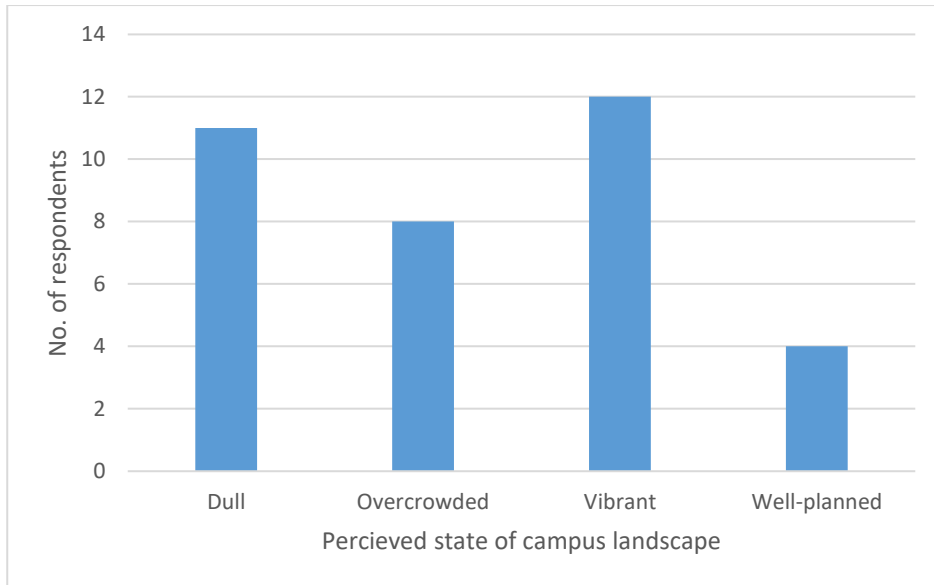


Figure 2: Perception of the state of the campus landscape

This divergence in opinions regarding the campus landscape underscores the complexity of perception and experience among both engaged and unengaged stakeholders. While those involved in campus planning and development may possess a deeper understanding of the efforts and considerations behind the landscape's design, their perspective might differ from those less acquainted with these processes. Conversely, individuals who have not actively participated in such initiatives may offer more spontaneous, unfiltered opinions, reflecting their immediate impressions. Consequently, the varied viewpoints within both groups contribute to a multifaceted assessment of the campus environment, highlighting the importance of ongoing dialogue and inclusive decision-making processes in shaping future developments (Gohari et al., 2024).

From Figure 3 there is an appreciation for gardens and lawns within the campus landscape and this underscores the significance of recreational green areas in fostering a positive and enjoyable environment for the university community. The alignment between the most valued landscape aspects and the focus of participation activities indicates a successful synergy between stakeholder input and project implementation. The fact that the work done by those claiming participation in urban planning and development largely centered on gardens, lawns, and sit-outs suggests a targeted effort to address the preferences and priorities of the campus community.

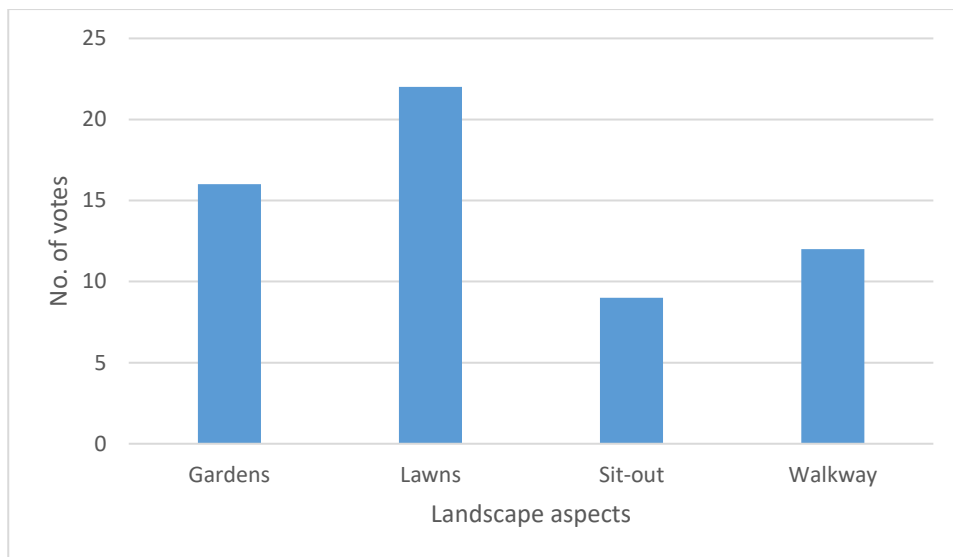


Figure 3: Appreciation for landscape elements

The observation that almost everyone is satisfied with the outcome when the co-creation of spaces is executed underscores the importance of inclusive and collaborative approaches to design and development. When stakeholders are actively involved in shaping the spaces they inhabit, there is a greater likelihood of achieving outcomes that resonate with diverse preferences and perspectives. This participatory process not only fosters a sense of ownership and pride among the community members but also results in spaces that are more responsive to their needs and conducive to their well-being (Smith et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the opinions of the respondents was sought on the preferred mode(s) by which they would like to be involved in the decision-making process of the campus landscape, and the vast majority as shown in Figure 4 expressed their desire to participate in campus meetings. Many others also pointed out participatory workshops and online surveys and forums as additional ways they would like to engage in the decision-making process. These findings highlight the importance of the use of technology and providing diverse avenues for involvement to ensure broad representation and inclusivity in shaping the campus environment (Basu and Banerjee, 2020).

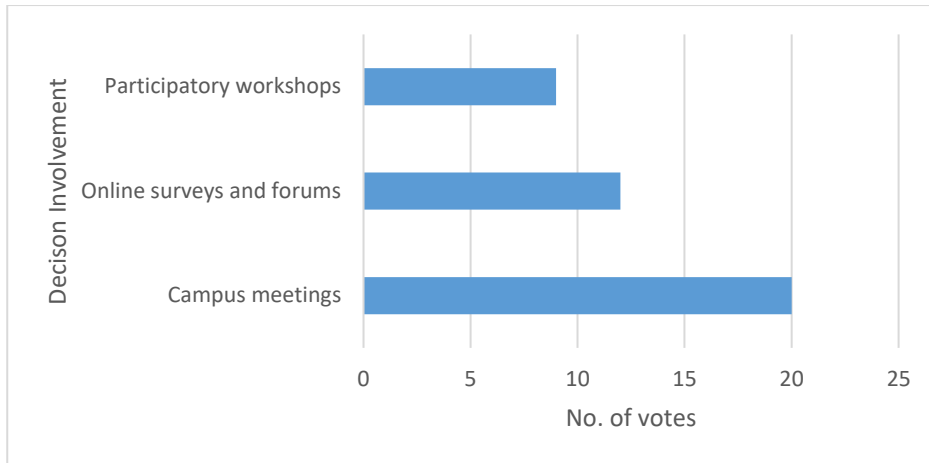


Figure 4: Modes of decision involvement

After identifying the preferred modes of each respondent, it was necessary to identify the barriers to their current involvement in the decision-making of the university landscape. The barriers identified are policies of the school and willingness to execute interactive landscape design, the rarity of decision meetings, insufficient time on the path of the student, lack of awareness of meeting time and locations, user opinions not deemed as important, and lack of funding from the stakeholders.

Finally, findings from the study reveal the huge awareness of the students and staff on the importance of citizen participation in creating responsive urban landscapes. It also reveals that the students and staff desire a bottom-top-level development and design process to assist in the creation of responsive urban landscapes.

5.0 Conclusion

From this study, respondents generally had an overall positive attitude toward participation due to the fact that the majority of them had experienced taking part in activities related to urban planning and development. These activities ranged from participation in advisory roles, active participation in development projects, to participation in activities such as tree planting and coming up with the master plan of the university. The view of the campus landscape was threefold. While some staff and students described the landscaping as vibrant and well planned, others indicated its crowdedness or dull appearance, which can be an indication of the importance of diverse perspectives in the creation of such designs. Gardens and lawns have received appreciation for green spaces, indicating the successful linkage in the participation activity between stakeholder input and project implementation. The satisfaction in co-created spaces will lead to value addition for the approaches of inclusive design. Preferred modes of participation would then be campus meetings coming first with the highest score, then participatory workshops, and lastly, online surveys/forums. This then speaks to the need of wide avenues of involvement to assure inclusivity. Such barriers to participation were identified in the university policy, in the few meetings, in the

timeline, and in the lack of awareness or the perception that the users' opinions do not count. All in all, this research foregrounds the potential for citizen participation in the making of responsive urban landscapes that indicate the needs and aspirations of the campus community. The elimination of identified barriers, along with the addition of design features that will allow multiple perspectives, will increase ownership and may lead to more dynamic and sustainable campus environments.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance citizen participation in the creation of responsive urban landscapes at Caleb University. Firstly, enhancing awareness and communication is crucial. This can be achieved through regular updates about urban planning activities via various communication channels such as emails, bulletin boards, social media, and university websites to ensure all stakeholders are informed about upcoming projects and participation opportunities. Additionally, conducting awareness campaigns to educate students and staff about the importance of their involvement in urban planning and how they can contribute effectively is essential.

Diversifying participation methods is another key recommendation. Organizing regular participatory workshops where stakeholders can engage in hands-on activities and discussions about urban planning projects is beneficial. Developing and maintaining online platforms that facilitate easy access to information and provide interactive features like surveys, discussion forums, and virtual tours of proposed projects will also encourage participation. Hosting pop-up events and information booths in high-traffic areas on campus can engage students and staff who may not typically participate in formal meetings or workshops.

Addressing barriers to participation is also critical. Scheduling meetings and workshops at various times to accommodate different schedules and ensure that more stakeholders can participate is important. Reviewing and revising university policies to remove barriers that hinder participation, such as restrictive meeting protocols or limited funding for participatory activities, can foster greater involvement. Ensuring that all participation methods are accessible to individuals with disabilities and those facing language barriers by providing necessary accommodations and translated materials will also enhance inclusivity.

Leveraging technology can significantly enhance participatory planning. Utilizing interactive mapping tools that allow stakeholders to visualize and provide input on proposed projects in real time can make the planning process more accessible and engaging. Incorporating virtual reality simulations to give participants a realistic view of potential changes to the campus landscape will help them make informed contributions. Implementing crowdsourcing platforms to gather a wide range of ideas and feedback from the campus community ensures diverse perspectives are considered.

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