The Story of Citopoly

Citopoly was born out of experimenting with ways of getting city practitioners more engaged in knowledge generation and application. The research team for the Built Environment Integration Practice study sought to package the findings to promote engagement and interaction. The dialogue interviews contained so many practitioner quotes that illustrated the realities of practice across the city institutional environment, but not all of these quotes could be included in the report. Therefore, the team explored gaming as a fun and interactive way to pull the quotes together and share the insights.

In synthesising and analysing the interview transcripts, what became clear was that municipal practitioners are often faced with a tough ultimatum: comply with organisational performance parameters, knowing that their actions will not deliver community impact, or compromise organisation performance by going out of the box to achieve developmental outcomes for communities and beneficiaries. Sadly, but understandably, more often than not the tendency is to focus on delivering organisational value, often to the detriment of the community development outcomes intended by the projects.

The verbatim practitioner quotes provided the basis of a game that illustrated the conundrum of building organisational value vs. societal value. Quotes by practitioners expressed the behaviours, thoughts and experiences that build either organisational value or societal value. The research team then developed specific consequences for gaining or losing these values, as represented by the quotes. Enter the idea of building two towers, and having the looming threat of these towers collapse at any stage.

A basic prototype of the game was piloted with SACN colleagues and, after a few tweaks, in July 2019, the first official playing of Citopoly took place at the BEITT's retreat in Ficksburg at Earthrise Mountain Lodge. Thereafter, the prototype game was played by city practitioners across South Africa, as a basis for engaging the draft version of this report, reflecting on practice and co-developing a set of priority recommendations.

An official Citopoly game has been produced and will continue to encourage discussion and reflection on current municipal practice within and beyond the built environment.