

Defining the concept of civic interest in post-apartheid South Africa: A question of administrative philosophy in the making

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Abstract

The article seeks to engage readers in questioning the realisation of civic interest in practice, as well as reviewing the academic implications of the concept in theoretical terms. The relevance of this phenomenon in a post-apartheid period is also discussed. The post-1994 period in South Africa will be seen in the history of this country as a turning point in promoting civil popular governance characterised by civil liberties, universal franchise and unconditional opportunities of public participation. This reflects a shift in thinking from that of the apartheid era, when police were viewed with suspicion by the very communities whom they were supposed to serve. Necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence and survival of the civic interest are also discussed. To this end the actions of public officials are measured according to this phenomenon, where public decisions are made by those in power in the name of the majority. To a large extent the actions of public officials are justified in the name of the public interest.

I. Introduction

The South African society has witnessed the birth of what has been heralded as a miracle, the realisation of a democratic dispensation where the rights and freedom of the populace are guaranteed. Democratic government structures have been put in place with clear policies and guidelines on how to sustain the culture of democracy. To this end, processes such as elections at local, provincial and national level have been observed wherein elected politicians have been put in power. Thus a mandate was given to them to rule this country, a process justified in the name of civic interest, at least according to the author.

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also discussed. The post-1994 period in South Africa will be seen in the history of this country as a turning point in promoting civil popular governance characterised by civil liberties, universal franchise and unconditional opportunities of public participation. This reflects a shift in thinking from that of the apartheid era, when police were viewed with suspicion by the very communities whom they were supposed to serve.

In view of the above discussion, it is imperative to discuss the meaning of civic interest and subsequently, a discussion on the phenomenon of civic interest is outlined.

2. Historical background to the concept of civic interest: Rousseau's perspective

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the famous eighteenth-century French philosopher, who provided a foundation for the concept of civic interest as used in this dissertation. He accomplished this through his publication in 1762 of the *Social Contract*, in which he established and explored the theory of The General Will, which represented a unique feature of communities within a given territory (Kain 1990, 315).

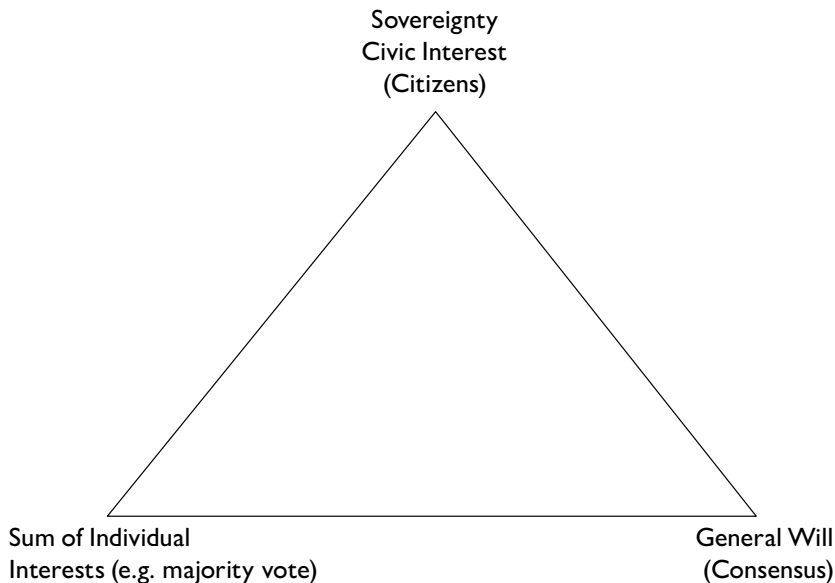
According to Kain (1990, 315), Rousseau argues that there is a clear mechanism by means of which the general will can be realised, that is, through a set of institutions and procedures. To understand the general will, Rousseau maintains that there is a need to first understand the concept of sovereignty. The term implies that that which is sovereign is the highest power and authority and it cannot be limited by any external force. The mandate of the sovereign is therefore to express the general will, that which is always right and never unjust, that which always tends to the common good, the welfare of the whole and equality for all (Kain 1990, 316).

Rousseau believed that the general will cannot be misinterpreted as the aggregation of private interests. Rather, the aggregation of private interests should be perceived as the sum total of particular interests of the citizens, for instance that which is registered in any ordinary majority vote, and which is not necessarily good for the community. The general will, then, is not the vote of the majority which is explained as the largest number of, for example, votes when there is a choice between two or more candidates in an election (quantitative differences in votes) (p. 316).

However, the general will should not be viewed as disembodied, an abstraction, unconnected to the individual and arising from some mystical source. Instead, the general will should be perceived as the will of individuals. Rousseau's idea manifests itself in the African context in a form of consensus defined as a condition of agreement within a political community on the goals or procedures used to arrive at authoritative decisions. However, consensus cannot be precisely measured and indications of its decline are normally observed as a form of political violence, decline in political participation and the growth of support for anti-establishment

movements (Roberts and Edwards 1991, 26). For example, the establishment of militant rebel movements such as Unita in Angola reflects the decline of consensus in Africa.

Kain (1990, 317) maintains that, according to Rousseau, individuals normally have two wills: firstly, a general and secondly, a particular will. This is similar to saying that while individuals have private interests, they can also be concerned with the general interest, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Source: Adapted from Kain (1990, 317)

Figure 1: The private interest and general will

3. The meaning of the concept *civic interest*

For theoretical purposes and analysis the concept of the general will as proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau has a different meaning to the concept of civic interest as discussed here. The meaning of civic interest as a concept within, inter alia, the realm of public participation and public policy formulation, is open to diverse interpretation. The researcher holds the position that the civic interest concept should be seen as that which concerns, or is of total benefit to society in general. However, one has to be alive to the reality that the phenomenon of civic interest may at times not reflect the benefits that the total population may derive from, say, a prevailing political or even economic system.

Therefore, the civic interest cannot always be to the benefit of all members of society. This was the case with the introduction and preservation of the apartheid policy of segregation and separate development from the period of 1924 until the

early 1990s which benefited only the white minority in South Africa. As a result, the majority of the black population was subjected to racial prejudice and other forms of injustice. The dilemma that the civic interest as a phenomenon presents, according to the researcher, is that it finds its basis for argument in a philosophical viewpoint. In his book *Republic and Laws*, Cicero, one of the founding political theorists of the Roman Republic, was of the view that the state depends on the recognition of rights and mutual obligations that bind citizens together. For this reason he referred to the state (sovereignty) as the *res populi* or the *res publica*, meaning ‘the affairs of the people’ (Sabine and Thorson 1973, 163).

However, Cicero maintained that a state (sovereign) may at times become tyrannous (consider in this case the socio-political situation in South Africa in the middle of the twentieth century; for example, the introduction of the apartheid government) and rule its subjects (given the above consideration in South Africa, for example the black population) by brute force, but in the extent to which it does so, loses the true character of a state. This proves that moral law does not make immorality impossible (Sabine and Thorson 1973, 163).

On the other hand, the general will is the process and the result of political activity among individuals and groups of people. Such political activity includes, among others, the formation of interest groups (as was, and still is the case with regard to the Sanco branch in Soweto) and the consolidation of its very survival within the socio-political environment.

Civic interest as a political activity also encompasses the role played by interest groups in the articulation of the general interests and aspirations of its members. Thus interest groups will always strive or endeavour to articulate the interests of their members as their prime operational function (Hanekom 1987, 32).

As such it can be observed that the concept of civic interest can best be regarded as the general will of a given broader community or society within a particular socio-political environment. It is the researcher’s opinion that it is important to comment on the distinction between individual interest and (common) civic interest in order to avoid ambiguity. Civic interest can be explained as the individual interests that members of the community share and which represents the common good. In the researcher’s opinion, without the element of the individual interests – consensus and the common good – the concept of civic interest cannot take shape and be understood. For instance, members of an interest group have to establish an understanding of priority issues at hand and must reach consensus upon such issues.

This process assists in creating harmony among the interest group’s members. As a result, a common ground is established which is aimed at promoting the survival of what is considered good for the well-being of the community. Such instances of civic interest include or can be cited as a workable monetary system, arrangements for minimal standards of health and welfare, education, housing, economic considerations and to a certain extent also national security and defence.

It is sometimes argued that the existence and functioning of a governmental system as a whole is in the interest of all citizens, hence everything that the government system does is in the civic interest (Held 1970, 99). The question asked in this regard is, how can the common good be determined? In the researcher's opinion, the common good should be perceived as part and parcel of the civic interest. The common good derives its meaning from the medieval applications of the concept of the common good (or 'common weal' as it was then known).

According to Roos (1997, 34), it was Thomas Aquinas (1225–1275) who argued in his *Summa Theologica* that there is a concept called own good of the community (*bonum commune*). He emphasised that in the nature of the human will, a higher good must exist which can be pursued as a goal and not as a means. In the researcher's opinion the own good of the community can be equated with the contemporary concept of the common good. Both concepts accept certain goals that must be achieved in the realisation of the civic interest. These goals can only be achieved through a combination of activities of individuals and of groups within the community. Thus, the concept of own good of the community (*bonum commune*) is not the sum total of the personal goods (*bona*) of the persons.

The researcher endorses the above position that civic interest (inclusive of a workable monetary system, minimal standards of health, education, housing and economic considerations) is usually reflected in policies such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and would not exist if government was not concerned with the welfare of the South African society. In this regard, government has an obligation to satisfy some needs, wants and demands of society. Such an obligation can be undertaken on the condition that government has the capacity (limited resources) to do so (African National Congress 1994, 14–16). For theoretical purposes and analysis, a distinction, according to the researcher, can be made between the civic interest and Rousseau's concept of the general will, as illustrated in table 1:

Table 1: The differences between civic interest and the general will

The general will (Jean-Jacques Rousseau)	The concept of civic interest
Survives through a set of institutions and procedures. The general will should be 'general'.	Survives through the presence of majority vote and a set of institutions. It is based on the existence of the common good.
<p>Similarities between the general will and civic interest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There must be a sovereign body with a set of institutions and procedures. ● Both differ from individual private interests. ● Laws must relate equally to all members of society. 	

It is the researcher's opinion that as much as the concept of civic interest owes its theoretical influence to Rousseau's concept of the general will, there are distinctions that may be drawn between the two. Similarities between the two concepts of the general will and civic interest can also be marked, as illustrated in Table 1. It is, however, the concept of civic interest that the researcher will focus on, as it is part of the topic of this article. In this article the concept of civic interest is used as a tool to determine the degree to which interest group(s) in a given place can assist in the promotion of the welfare of the people of that area. Similarly, the concept of civic interest may be utilised to determine the extent to which government is able to promote the general welfare of society, namely, the provision of necessary public goods and services.

As explained in Table 1, the concept of civic interest survives through the presence of majority vote and a set of institutions and not through a set of private or individual interests. Such institutions are from either the public or private sector. In addition, the concept of civic interest is also based on the existence of the common good as ideal, defined by Cloete (1995, 20) as a condition in which the social and the material interests of members of the population are satisfactory.

In a situation where interest groups are established that are able to articulate the interests of their members, the civic interest may be observed and upheld, particularly in most democratic government systems where the civic interest is taken into account when policies are drawn up and implemented. To a large extent it is impossible to promote the democratic system of rule where the total will of citizens is suppressed. Thus the rights and liberties of citizens must be respected by the authorities.

In Rousseau's account of the development of social man in his *Discourse on the origin and foundations of inequality among men*, the moral authority of government is derived from the wills of its members (Kain 1990, 317). Thus, individuals are under obligation only to legitimate powers, and the legitimacy of government is derived from the legitimacy of a collectivity of individual wills, seeking that which is good. In his analysis, Kain (1990, 317) maintains that Rousseau proposes that for the general will to survive, there must be four basic conditions aimed at preserving the general will. The first condition is that all citizens must sit on the sovereign body – the legislature – and must vote on all issues and not as factions, associations or parties likely to entertain corporate interests, but as citizens who are able to express their opinions and views independently. However, if it is impossible to eliminate factions, Rousseau maintains that many factions can then be established on an equal footing. As a result all citizens would then have to be adequately informed so that factions and corporate interests do not predominate (Kain 1990, 318).

The second condition is that the general will should then be general, in its object as well as in its essence. That is, all citizens must be able to arrive at questions that are abstract and universal (objective) before the sovereign body. The third condition is that laws must relate equally to all members of the state, as Rousseau stated that

‘when a law is proposed in the assembly of the people, what they are being asked is not whether they approve or reject the proposal, but whether it does or does not conform to the general will that is theirs. Each one expresses his or her ‘preference’ by means of voting, and the declaration of the general will is drawn from the counting of votes (Kain 1990, 317).

When citizens are asked to cast a vote they are usually not being asked to express their particular interests, but rather to engage in a reflective, rational and intellectual inquiry (Kain 1990, 318). The fourth and final condition is that all stated laws must be rigorously and equally enforced and all citizens must be able to realise that they are bound by such laws. When they vote, they should take great care to see to it that it is right and equal for all. This was unfortunately not the case during the apartheid period as alluded to earlier, where the system tended to favour the interests of the white minority. Only whites could vote.

Rousseau’s theory perceives a community as a starting point of analysis characterised by a collective good (perceived in this article to be same as a public good) that is not the same as the private interests of its members (Sabine and Thorson 1973, 541). In essence, the right which each individual has to his or her own estate is always subordinate to the right which the community has overall. Such individual rights include liberty, equality and property.

4. Kenneth Arrow’s General Possibility Theorem

At the end of section 2, the phenomenon of private (individual) interests was mentioned, which requires elucidation. It is imperative to provide the meaning of individual or private interests, perceived in this article to be the interests of individuals in society as well as those which are opposed to group interests and/or civic interest. In view of the above definition of the individual or private interests, Kenneth Arrow’s General Possibility Theorem is utilised with the aim of providing clarity on the meaning of private or individual interests. In his work, *Social choice and individual values*, Arrow (1963, 29) is of the opinion that individual interests are usually manifested in what he referred to as ‘preference orderings’ – preferences that individuals have, and which are selected and arranged in order of importance. This means that certain individual interests would receive more attention and priority than others. For instance, an individual may prefer to satisfy the need for housing as a higher priority over other needs such as clothing and security.

Notwithstanding the above situation, individual interests are diverse and are usually manifested in individual choices. Thus one man’s choice of interest may be different in content and character from that of his fellow citizens. Consequently, the intertwining of the social welfare function (the capacity to fulfil every citizen’s desires) is subjected to possible collapse without fruitful results. According to Cullis and Jones in Pauw (1999, 63), the problem is to aggregate these individual

preferences to guide a collective choice, but there is no satisfactory constitutional rule by which individual preferences may be aggregated and this creates an important obstacle for decision-making in the public sector.

Brown and Jackson in Pauw (1999, 63) are of the view that the fact that an ethically satisfactory social choice is barred on formal logical grounds is an important result for the analysis of non-market decision-making and government decision-making in particular. It was also an important result for welfare economics, since it affects the very foundation of the social welfare function (Pauw 1999, 63). As society is made up of different communities, each community has its own unique needs, demands, expectations and, most essentially, interests. Therefore different communities will have different interests. Inevitably such differences can also be influenced by factors such as race, social class, creed and possible levels of education. For instance, the interests of the enlightened members of society, who by virtue of their social standing, assume middle-class status in society, would differ from the interests of the less enlightened members of society. Therefore, it remains important that the civic interest not be determined by one individual disregarding the preference orderings of other individuals within the state.

The choice of fulfilling the most preferred desires is usually presented to society as a set of alternative choices. In elucidating the problem in question, Arrow revived the ‘paradox of voting’ to illustrate the aggregation of individual preference ordering and choice-making (Held 1970, 72). Suppose three individuals, as voters, have the following preferences:

Table 2: Private/individual interests and preferences

Individuals	Alternative in order of preference		
A	L	M	S
B	M	S	L
C	S	L	M

Source: Adapted from Black, Calitz and Steenekamp (1999, 63)

The above case is illustrated by considering the three voters, A, B, and C, each of whom has to choose between three alternative budgets, i.e. a large budget (denoted by L), a moderate budget (denoted by M) and a small budget (denoted by S). Reading the preferences from left to right, individual A, inter alia, prefers alternative L to S; individual B prefers M to L and individual C prefers S to M. It is clear from this example that, if alternative budgets are voted for in pairs, a majority of the voters (individual A and individual B) would prefer M to S. Arrow’s theory crucially depends on a number of ethical conditions which he set for an ‘acceptable’ social choice rule. One such condition is the transitivity condition, that is:

If $X > Y$ and $Y > Z$ then $X > Z$

This in turn means that if X is preferred to Y , and Y is preferred to Z , then X must be preferred to Z (Black et al. 1999, 63).

Therefore, by the rule of the transitivity condition, we then say that a majority should prefer L to S . But, from the chart, it is apparent that the majority, individuals B and C , prefer S to L as the majority preference. As a result there is the inconsistency (or intransitive outcome) in arriving at collective choices from individual ones (Black et al. 1999, 63). The reason for this outcome may be explained in that individual/voter C has extreme preferences. He or she prefers a small budget to a large one but also prefers the large one to a moderate one. Such a voter does not, when given the choice between any two budgets, consistently prefer a larger budget to a smaller budget, or vice versa (Black et al. 1999, 63).

Consequently, it becomes impossible to deduce a consistent winner amongst voters. While the preferences of individual voters may be consistent, their combined – or the community's – preferences (as reflected in their voting) will not be consistent if the group of voters includes people with extreme preferences. This phenomenon is referred to as the voting paradox (Black et al. 1999, 64). This assumes that individual choices on personal issues and circumstances will be different in character and content. It illustrates that voting on preferences easily leads to paradoxes. Therefore, preferences cannot be aggregated.

In making choices, individuals will always strive to satisfy their immediate goals and preferences rather than the collective good. Despite the debate about community and social interests, individual interests or choices play a crucial role in eventually establishing both community and societal interests. However, to arrive at collective (common) choices (interests), individual choices will always be an influencing factor in determining firstly, the community choices (interests) and then societal choices (interests) (Black et al. 1999, 64).

5. Why is there a civic interest in civil society?

Certain concerns raised by academics such as Auriacombe and de Beer (1995, 145) in *Public Administration* include, for example, the question of whether there is a civic interest in civil society today. How is civic interest expressed in the South African public domain? Is civic interest a reality or a myth? Can civic interest be measured or quantified in relative terms with other concepts used in *Public Administration* and the field of work, such as public policy, accountability and others? If civic interest in civil society can then be defined as the will of the aggregate masses of the people within a defined jurisdiction, one may safely say that such civic interest really exists. This, however, is not the definition proposed by the researcher in this article. A broader meaning of the concept should be encouraged.

However, it becomes equally important to look at what society is, as accommodative of the will of its citizens. According to the German philosophical tradition as represented by Tonnies, Hegel and Max Weber, there are two forms of society: a *Gemeinschaft* and a *Gesellschaft* (Kain 1990, 232). In a *Gemeinschaft*, individuals are linked to each other by internal bonds of feelings based upon custom, tradition, habit and religion. They only develop as human beings in and through the social community. The nature of society in this sense is basic and primary in character. As a result, a *Gemeinschaft* precedes individuals at least conceptually. On the other hand, a *Gesellschaft* is characterised by the acceptance of individuals as basic, primary and natural. Society is perceived as artificial, secondary and derivative, and that it must satisfy the interests and liberties of all individuals. As a result, individuals precede society at least conceptually (Kain 1990, 323).

From the above discussion it is the researcher's opinion that in order for the civic interest to exist and sustain itself, a *Gemeinschaft* society must prevail in order to realise the existence and survival of the civic interest. The existence of the civic interest is owed to the characteristics that the *Gesellschaft* type of society offers, namely, that interests of individuals are or must be guaranteed. This is arguably linked to the significance of the existence of necessary and sufficient conditions for the civic interest, as discussed in section 2.

According to the researcher, there are a number of reasons for the need for civic interest within the South African civil society. These reasons may be summarised as follows:

1. The deterioration of community life in South Africa is becoming more prominent.
2. The difficulties that citizens have in joining together to combat long-standing systemic problems such as crime, poverty, unemployment and others are still being experienced.
3. Government and non-governmental agencies are faced with new complex challenges and problems such as a lack of financial resources and other facilities. Without such resources and facilities government and non-governmental agencies are threatened with the possibility of non-existence. These agencies (including non-governmental organisations) supply the public with solutions through facilitating communication between themselves and government structures using modern public relations techniques. For instance, organisations such as Sanco Soweto can use the Internet and electronic media such as televisions to reach out to residents of Soweto on any public issue that affects their lives. Thus, channels of communication may be used successfully by non-governmental agencies to convey their standpoints on various issues to the public, other non-governmental agencies and government institutions (Du Toit and van der Waldt 1997, 295). Channels of communication also determine the effectiveness of the flow of information between nongovernmental agencies, governmental institutions and the public.

4. Because of the first three points, it is a fundamental need for citizens to participate in an organised manner in the broad general or public affairs. The establishment of civic organisations such as Sanco in South African urban and peri-urban areas primarily served such purpose.
5. The need for state intervention through the establishment of statutory bodies is a significant step undertaken by government in order to protect the interests and rights of citizens. To give a few examples in this regard, the office of the Public Protector established in terms of section 5(1) of the Public Protector Act 23 of 1994, serves as a statutory body in providing state intervention where it is required. Provisions are made that the Public Protector may receive, investigate and publish his or her findings regarding certain complaints lodged by citizens against corrupt public officials. Furthermore, it is the duty of the Public Protector to detect any possible abuse of power, maladministration and corruption and to safeguard the rights and interests of all communities (Craythorne 1997, 200–201).

Arguably, there are identifiable, necessary and sufficient conditions of civic interest in support of the realisation of civic interest. These conditions are discussed in the next section.

6. Necessary conditions of civic interest in an administrative environment

Civic interest as a phenomenon is usually dependent on a number of necessary conditions. Such conditions include, *inter alia*, the elements of space, time and order. Therefore, where civic interest exists, it exists in a place, at a time and within a particular order. Crucial to note is that such conditions can in themselves be perceived as interdependent in practice, particularly when influencing the observation of the phenomenon of civic interest. Alternatively, each condition may be perceived independently as determining aspects of this phenomenon.

6.1 Space as a necessary condition of civic interest

Civic interest as a phenomenon cannot exist in a vacuum. In most circumstances it is determined by a number of variables. Chief amongst these is the question of 'space'. Such space is geographic in nature, which in essence dictates what local government and non-governmental organisations should provide as far as public goods and services are concerned. Such provision of goods and services differs from one local government institution to another. This means that service delivery differs between rural, peri-urban and urbanised local areas in response to divergent demands and basic needs (Auriacombe and de Beer 1995, 146). This may be illustrated clearly by the population distribution of Soweto today. According to most estimates the population of Greater Soweto is well over one

million. A case in mind is the Human Science and Research Council's (HSRC) survey conducted in 1993, which exposed the considerable rise in the number of individuals born in Soweto or estimated new arrivals in the city/township from elsewhere. These individuals have diverse needs and interests which the authority will have to provide for and satisfy (Mears and Levin 1996, 634).

6.2 Time as a necessary condition of civic interest

The second notable necessary condition of civic interest is pluralistic in nature and assumes a characteristic of 'time'. This can best be explained by the socio-political belief that today's interest is not necessarily that of tomorrow due to the evolutionary nature of human demands, needs and aspirations over both short and long periods. Needs and interests that characterised the South African society during the apartheid era have changed due to the transformation of government that has taken place since 1994. Thus the need to conduct this investigation for the period spanning 1989 to 1998 as outlined previously.

The necessary condition of time may be illustrated by the then pressing need to transform local government structures from the old system of segregated development to that of an integrated system of transitional metropolitan councils and their substructures for urban and peri-urban areas and transitional local councils, district councils, transitional rural councils and representative councils for rural areas. This kind of transformation and democratisation of local government was determined by the Local Government Transition Act, 1993 (Act 209 of 1993) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 1993 (Act 200 of 1993). The above transformation took place between 1994 and 1998.

6.3 Order as a necessary condition of civic interest

The third necessary condition of civic interest is the element of order. It results from a multiplicity of social and political interests. These include the need for the majority of citizens to be explicitly satisfied with such order. On the other hand, such order serves as a precondition for the actions of the authorities and the functioning of the public services (Auriacombe and de Beer 1995, 146). Without the sustainability of public order, it is always difficult for governments to initiate economic and socio-political programmes, development projects such as the RDP and the Service Delivery Improvement Programme aimed at facilitating effective service delivery by all needy police stations (Bokaba 1999, 14). Thus it becomes important that destabilisation processes such as civil wars, establishment of militant right-wing groups, frequent labour unrest and the occurrence of violence should be discouraged with a view of providing a stable environment for realising the civic interest.

7. Sufficient conditions of civic interest in an administrative environment

The realisation of the civic interest is also dependent on a number of sufficient conditions. Such include public participation, service delivery, economic development and stability, ethics and morality, and labour relations. These conditions will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

7.1 Public participation as a sufficient condition of civic interest

The term 'public participation' encompasses the notion of a two-way exchange of information between the people/communities and the legitimate government. This is in line with section 152(1)(a) and (e) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which emphasises that communities as stakeholders in the local government sphere must be encouraged to participate in the matters of local government. The question asked is, what then is the relationship between civic interest and public participation?

If it is accepted that civic interest can be explained as the individual interests which members of the community share and form a consensus upon and is reflected as the common good that the community members share, community awareness and involvement (participation) in matters of government (welfare of citizens), is fundamental. The potential of interest groups to supply public officials with indispensable information in order to formulate policy cannot be ignored. Such information expresses the desires, needs and aspirations of the general public that may then be viewed as the aggregate interest of the public. Through conducting surveys, interviews and talking to? people holding community meetings, public officials as representatives of the legitimate government can assess the content of civic interest and establish and implement informed decisions within a particular sphere (Brynard 1998, 198).

Public participation offers a multiplicity of benefits, including the provision of valuable information about the needs and aspirations of local people to public authorities in order to initiate and implement informed decisions. Participation also offers a platform through which to express civic interest with the aim of influencing public managers (as well as councillors) to adopt a particular direction of thinking. Through public participation the general public is informed, involved and educated. As a result, the educated person is enabled to exercise his or her independent judgement and thus made aware of the societal problems and difficulties in finding solutions to life's challenges. In this context communal responsibility is promoted. Public participation as the promoter of the realisation of civic interest has the capacity to enhance and consolidate the democratic culture of any aspiring nation. Participation by citizens in local government affairs is the very backbone of a democratic form of government.

On the other hand, through participation, opportunities to influence public affairs and even policy planning as a process are encouraged and sustained. Public participation also has the capacity to balance the demands of central government against those of local government and provincial administration (Brynard 1998, 3).

Through public participation, community institutions are created which will enable citizens to bridge the existing gap between themselves and public authorities. Such institutions can take the form of ratepayers' associations, neighbourhood watch groups, social groupings such as stokvel movements in predominantly black residential areas and women's clubs. The Moroka Community Policing Forum is one such institution in which there is significant involvement of both the Moroka–Soweto Police Service and the community as partners against crime. Through this initiative, the community of the greater Moroka area (i.e., Mapetla, Phiri, Senoane, Chiawelo, Molapo, Jabavu, Mofolo Central and South, Dhlamini and Klipspruit Extension 5) was able to identify the 'crime flashpoints'. This allowed the crime unit of the Moroka police station to react with the intention to combat crime and enforce the law (Bokaba 1999, 14).

Public participation is also instrumental in that it consolidates democratic beliefs (commitment), practices and principles that would otherwise not be observed by the majority of citizens in a democratic state. If by participating, citizens are able to satisfy their needs, desires and even demands by observing the rules of democracy, it is all the more reason to support and indeed nurture it.

In practice, public participation constantly reaffirms one's identity and feeling of self-worth and dignity as a citizen, thereby giving effect to the principle of basic equality (Lawrence and Stanton 1999, 236). Public participation may also serve as a pacifier to accommodate interest groups that might otherwise be militant in their endeavour to achieve what they believe is beneficial to society. Therefore, public participation can be accepted as the cornerstone of the realisation of civic interest if needs, demands and aspirations of citizens are to be satisfied by the legitimate authorities. As modern and postmodern societies become organised, civic formations like Sanco have a crucial role to play, ensuring that through their participation, the shared interests of citizens are observed and held in a democratic government system (Shubane and Madiba 1994, 8).

8. Conclusion

From the discussion thus far, one can deduce that the phenomenon of civic interest survives through the presence of a set of government and non-governmental institutions and procedures. Civic interest depends on the existence of identifiable, necessary and sufficient conditions within the administrative environment. Such necessary conditions form the basis or foundation (primary) and can be observed in the realisation of the civic interest. The elements of space, time and order are part and parcel of the necessary conditions. The element of public participation is also required for the realisation of civic interest.

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