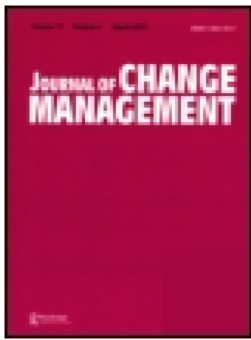

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Place Leadership in Social Accountability Initiatives

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores how social movement and civic actors enact and contribute to place leadership. It does so by examining how social movement organizations in South Africa use social audits to investigate and challenge government accountability and service delivery failures. The paper describes the meaning-making practices evident in social audit reports, and detail how social audit actors construct issues and positions through three framings – rights, regulations and lived realities. In this process, they leverage rights discourses and governance arrangements to legitimize their place leadership, and draw on multiple aspects and experiences of place to expose failures of governance and in the realization of rights. Through the dynamic interplay between legitimizing and exposing, they translate embodied realities and relations in and of place into a sense of purpose and direction for mobilizing a wider network of governance actors. On this basis, the paper contributes a social accountability perspective to place leadership studies.

KEYWORDS
Place leadership; social accountability; meaning-making; direction; governance

MAD statement
This paper aims to Make a Difference (MAD) by exploring how social movement actors contribute to collective place leadership through constructing and contesting the meanings of local governance issues and relationships. The paper highlights how social movement actors illuminate place as the objective and measurable built environment, and as subjectively experienced and constituted as places of heritage and community but also dislocation and trauma. That they use social audits to interrogate governance failures and legitimize communities' situated knowledge suggests such social accountability initiatives offer a space for place leadership outside of but also interacting with broader governance networks.

Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to understanding how social movement and civic actors enact place leadership. Studies of place-based leadership explore how political, administrative and civic actors contribute to the collective leadership of place. This literature highlights the challenges of collaboration, the need to better understand the interactions

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between different governance actors, and the role of place leadership in mobilizing, directing and coordinating across organizations and sectors (Hambleton et al., 2021; Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2019). Research into the leadership of city and regional development suggests that governance arrangements influence and potentially undermine the scope of place leadership, especially where control and accountability are directed upwards (Bentley et al., 2017; Ferry & Sandford, 2022). Less obvious from this research is how governance arrangements influence the potential place leadership of civic and social movement organizations.

The social accountability literature, however, highlights how institutional design (especially strongly centralized and hierarchical accountability) and service delivery models (such as partnering and sub-contracting) often obscure social impacts, and fragment and diminish accountability to citizens and localities (Taşan-Kok et al., 2021; Willems & van Dooren, 2011). This raises questions about both the scope for the collective leadership of place and the 'community' role therein. While studies into the civic or voluntary sector underscore the important informal leadership role of such actors (Rees et al., 2021), I am interested in whether and how social movement and civic organizations enact place leadership through social audits, which is a specific type of social accountability initiative that creates a space to engage the formal governance system. I therefore ask: how do social movement and civic actors enact and contribute to place leadership? And how do social audits enable their place leadership?

To answer these questions, I examine the publicly available reports of fourteen social audits conducted in various places across South Africa since 2013. The reports document each social audit process, which involves accessing and analyzing government documents, and comparing these 'with the realities on the ground and the experiences of the community', to determine 'whether reported expenditures and outcomes reflect the public money spent and services received by the community' (Social Audit Network, n.d.). Social audits seek to locate institutional and contractual arrangements, such as between government and service providers, within a more foundational relationship between government and its citizenry and their well-being in relation to place.

In analyzing the social audits, I draw on collective and relational leadership theory as a lens (Ospina, 2017; Ospina et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). Through this lens, leadership is conceptualized as enacted through practices of meaning-making (Carroll et al., 2008; Foldy et al., 2008; Page, 2010; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Social movement studies also examine the construction and negotiation of meaning, particularly through frames and collective framing practices, to better understand the identity, discourses and mobilizing tactics of social movements (Vijay & Kulkarni, 2012). From a leadership perspective, processes of meaning-making involve framing and re-framing issues, solutions, and relationships (Carroll & Simpson, 2012), ultimately producing direction in the ongoing organizing of social relations (Crevani et al., 2010; Crevani, 2018).

Place leadership can therefore be defined as the making and shaping of specific localities such as cities or regions (Collinge et al., 2010), and understood theoretically as enacted through meaning-making practices that attempt to frame place, and issues and relationships in relation to place, in particular ways. It is simultaneously co-constituted by place insofar as place provides the 'relational ground' and 'frame of reference' that 'render meanings intelligible' (Sutherland et al., 2022). To inquire into the place leadership of social movement and civic actors is therefore also an inquiry into their

meaning-making practices and how they construct issues and positions in and through place.

In the next section, I situate the paper at the intersection of place, place leadership and social accountability. I then develop the theoretical framework of place leadership as the production of direction through practices of meaning-making. Thereafter, I describe the social audit initiatives in South Africa and the research method I followed in analyzing the social audit reports. In my analysis, I identified three framings employed across the reports through which the social audit actors construct issues and contest positions: (1) the normative discourse of rights and liberal democracy; (2) the formal policy, regulatory and contractual obligations on government and service providers; and (3) the place-specific lived realities of residents and communities. Through these framings and the interplay between them, the social audit actors' leadership involves both legitimizing and exposing. While they draw on place (lived realities) to expose rights failures and governance and accountability shortcomings, they must also legitimize community experiences and the social audit as place leadership, doing so by legitimizing existing discourses and the governance system. In the final section of the paper, I unpack the theoretical contribution of the paper to studies of place leadership.

Place, Leadership and Social Accountability

Before unpacking the relationship between place leadership and social accountability, it is important to clarify the concept of 'place'. Though definitions vary, place has been defined as socially constructed in practice; 'a space invested with meaning in the context of power' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 12). It is objective and measurable as a geographical locale and the built environment, but it is also the material site of social interaction, experienced and 'known' subjectively in practice; as a 'felt and cared for center of meaning', place engenders affective attachments or what Agnew (1987) calls, 'sense of place' (Cresswell, 2004, p. 38). For Cresswell (2004), understanding place as lived and practiced provides the grounds for a 'politics of place'. Place is never finished but always being constructed and contested in and through practice. This echoes geographer Doreen Massey's (1994) conceptualization of place as open and processual rather than rooted in authentic identity. Place is where the 'constellation of social relations' across scales intersects and weaves together (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Place leadership thus entails the constitution of place through meaning-making practices shaping and shaped by social relations, including struggles over the meaning and purpose of place.

In the social construction of place, place leadership is said to generate direction and purpose (Jackson, 2019; Sotarauta et al., 2017). As a type of leadership, it has been explored in city and regional development studies in processes concerned with the making and shaping of specific localities (Collinge et al., 2010).

Considering place in public policy can improve government effectiveness (Hambleton et al., 2021). This requires attention to the circumstances of a particular locality, as well as the issues of concern (Beer et al., 2019). Such issues are not only defined through top-down policy, however, and places do not only develop through technical intervention, but via processes and practices that 'shap[e] the decisions and interpretations of what is, and is not, possible' (Grint, 2010, p. 366). As Beer et al. (2019, p. 172) aptly ask, 'who and/or what provides the collective development efforts with future directions, if the

"policy wisdom" does not reside only on the top?' Understanding place leadership thus requires insight into how people experience and 'live' place, and how they shape the issues of a locality, especially insofar as place and space can generate social belonging and well-being, but also disconnection and conflict (Smolović Jones et al., 2022).

Given the complexities of place development, place leadership is often described as collective or plural insofar as it involves political, public and civic/voluntary sector actors working within and across organizations (Ferry & Sandford, 2022). According to Sotarauta and Suvinen (2019), place leadership especially entails 'the mobilization of collective action' rather than the administration and delivery of services. Studies of place leadership thus examine how leaders draw on 'the power of place' to empower and mobilize others to act, yet gaps remain in understanding how different actors and sectors interact through and for place (Hambleton et al., 2021). This is an important research avenue to better understand how different experiences, knowledge and sense of place influence the perception of issues, and thus the direction of action.

Civic or voluntary sector actors, for instance, have been found to play a key role in surfacing place-specific issues through their situated knowledge and local networks (Rees et al., 2021). However, research of place leadership in city development suggests that governance arrangements influence and possibly undermine the scope of place leadership. These studies, inter alia, delineate how hierarchical accountability between local and national government undermine political leaders' responsiveness to the local electorate (Ferry & Sandford, 2022); how electoral systems inform mayoral place orientation and effectiveness (Hambleton et al., 2021); and how central government's mechanisms of institutional control influence the scope of sub-national agency and innovation (Bentley et al., 2017). Missing from this literature, however, is a sense of the potential for place leadership among community and civic actors given such accountability pressures.

The social accountability literature, on the other hand, highlights how the complexities of governance systems risk neglecting community contributions and experiences, therefore raising questions about both the scope for collective leadership of place and the community role therein. This literature identifies difficulties with, for instance, institutional arrangements that involve multiple relations of accountability, particularly where tasks are shared across organizations, such as in collaborative or network governance, partnerships and outsourcing (Acar & Robertson, 2004; Bovens, 2014). This creates a 'problem of many hands' (Willems & van Dooren, 2011). As responsibility becomes diluted and decision-making ambiguous, it can make it more difficult to sanction poor performance; it can also undermine the legitimacy of, and therefore trust in decisions (Jantz & Jann, 2013).

While in this paper I do not examine institutional design features as such, I am interested in how community actors engage (discursively) with questions of governance arrangements in the enactment of place leadership, and locate specific constraints or vulnerabilities. Social accountability encompasses the obligation of the state to answer to citizens for its performance, and foregrounds social purpose for studies of place leadership. A growing repertoire of civic and community-led social accountability initiatives have emerged throughout the world in response to perceived failures of traditional accountability mechanisms embedded in electoral and bureaucratic systems (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012). Although distinguished from processes of community participation,

such initiatives involve 'invented spaces' (Cornwall, 2004) of engagement. As such, they challenge government's formal 'invited' processes of participation as disempowering spaces that obscure how accountability is directed elsewhere (Vivier & Sanchez-Betancourt, 2020).

Such initiatives may therefore offer a space for community actors to expand the repertoire of place leadership practices, particularly as practices of struggle. Though not a study of social accountability, Smolović Jones et al. (2022) have, for example, analyzed the micro-sites of struggle generated through workers' movements, and identify place leadership in practices that constitute space differently, enabling workers to contest oppressive articulations of dignity and agency at work. Social audits are a type of social accountability initiative and participatory governance innovation (Fox, 2015) that involves a community-led process of monitoring government spending and service delivery (Cinnamon, 2020). The social audit examples thus direct attention to collective efforts that struggle against 'business as usual' policymaking and development approaches that exclude community voices. These are community-based actions 'emerging on the margins' yet engaging with formal governance systems in context-specific and pragmatic ways to improve outcomes for people (Robins et al., 2008; Swilling, 2014).

Although a general process can be gleaned, social accountability initiatives are not simply 'widgets' applied linearly, but involve 'the dynamic unfolding of interactions over time that reshape both states and citizens' (Joshi & Houtzager, 2012, p. 146). Such initiatives open a space through which relations are continually contested and (re)constituted. These hold a potential contribution to understandings of place leadership as the collective processes that direct, mobilize and shape the constellation of social relations in their material and geographical location.

Theoretical Framework: Place Leadership as Constructing Direction

Employed as a theoretical lens, place leadership considers how leadership and place co-constitute one another, bringing to the fore the geographical, material and spatial aspects of leadership (Ropo et al., 2013; Sutherland et al., 2022). This lens builds upon collective, relational and practice approaches which elucidate how leadership occurs and is constituted through sociomaterial practices, and how leadership practices in turn shape relations (Carroll et al., 2008; Ospina, 2017; Rees et al., 2021). In this paper, I understand place leadership as constituted through practices of meaning-making (Foldy et al., 2008; Smircich & Morgan, 1982), in relation to geography and the built environment (Smolović Jones et al., 2022), that produce direction (Crevani, 2018). The concept of producing direction has been central to distinguishing leadership work from other kinds of organizing processes (Blom & Alvesson, 2015; Drath et al., 2008). It resonates with the view of leadership as meaning-making, and studies that elucidate how leadership occurs and is constructed through discursive framing practices that give direction to action (Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Grint, 2005; Holm & Fairhurst, 2018; Page, 2010).

Carroll and Simpson (2012) employ the concept of framing to articulate the active, ongoing processes of constructing issues, situations and relationships, which is never linear and often contested. Foldy et al. (2008) similarly map how social justice organizations use framing strategies to heighten or reinterpret the importance of an issue in an effort to prompt 'cognitive shifts' in how external stakeholders view particular

problems and solutions. Such framing also does important identity work, constructing identities associated with particular positions and the relations between them (Crevani et al., 2010). Different framings may also interact dynamically, generating movement by deepening, stretching or bridging particular frames, depending on the capacity for engaging across languages and concepts (Carroll & Simpson, 2012). As Corvellec and Risberg (2007, p. 313) explain, such practices 'manage meaning by selecting and highlighting certain facts or issues over others', which orients understanding 'in a particular direction'. Notably, Smolović Jones et al. (2022) detail how workers contest meaning by re-constituting space and place through practices of 'exposing' and 're-placing'.

This literature on leadership meaning-making practices imply that the production of direction is not a linear process resulting in a cohesive outcome or single direction for action. Rather, leadership is an ongoing process of producing and contesting direction, often involving conflicts and ambiguities. Crevani's (2010, 2018) theorization of leadership as the processual construction of direction clarifies this openness and also brings the spatial dimension of direction to the fore, making it particularly relevant to the study of place leadership. Drawing on Massey (1994), Crevani (2018, p. 90) defines direction as the 'ongoing shaping of relational configurations'. This is based on the concept of space as more than a container for action but itself always 'formed out of social interrelations at all scales', where place becomes 'a particular articulation of those relations' (Massey, 1994, p. 5).

Through her analysis of how organizational members interact through talk, Crevani (2018) identifies two constructs – issues and positions – that help explain how relational configurations evolve. Both positions and issues are located in space, and at the same time produce relations in space-time. An issue, and the construction of issues, involve the directional processes of change of a phenomenon, or its 'trajectories'. As new issues emerge or existing issues are reinforced or reinterpreted, these add to and shift the ongoing development of the relational configuration. Constructing positions direct relational configurations by articulating what one is supposed to do and be, thus generating a 'repertoire of practices' and locating these in relation to other positions. Crevani (2018, p. 102) proposes the concept of 'clearing for action' to capture 'the constructive, open-ended but bounded character of leadership work' enacted in the production of issues and positions. I build on this conceptualization by exploring the meaning-making practices of social audit actors as they construct issues and positions, and show how they attempt to influence the space of action by mobilizing yet constraining the relational configurations implicated in collective place leadership.

Research Context and Methods

Research Context: Social Audits in South Africa

In South Africa, apartheid spatial planning produced highly divided and unequal cities. Nearly 30 years post-apartheid, socioeconomic and racial inequalities continue to map onto geographic patterns of infrastructure development and participatory opportunities (Lemanski, 2017). Addressing spatial inequalities through local urban development remains a priority for place leadership, and a matter of social justice and human dignity (Cinnamon, 2020). At the same time, it is worth noting that public sector

reforms in South Africa have followed trends elsewhere, especially in the US and UK, operating as a 'contract state' which relies on sub-contracting and performance management to instil accountability for the delivery of services (Brunette et al., 2014).

Social audits emerged in South Africa via the work of the Social Justice Coalition (SJC), a grassroots social movement based in Khayelitsha, the largest township in Cape Town. Since its formation in 2008, the SJC has employed a 'mixture of engagement and opposition' in its campaign for 'safe, healthy and dignified communities' (Storey, 2014). This includes both sanitation and budget monitoring, often in collaboration with other organizations. Their efforts to engage the City of Cape Town through various sanitation campaigns form the backdrop to their turn to social audits (see Rossouw, 2015).

In early 2013, the SJC conducted the first social audit in South Africa. This was inspired by experiences from India, as well as supported through engagements with activists involved in social audits in India, which is where the initiative first emerged (Ramkumar & Wehner, 2008). The SJC's 2013 social audit focused on the delivery and monitoring of communal toilets in Khayelitsha, called Mshengu chemical toilets to reflect the name of the service provider contracted by the municipality. Over 60 participants inspected 256 chemical toilets and interviewed 270 residents across 4 informal settlements (SJC, 2013a). The audit revealed systemic problems in the delivery, payment, maintenance and monitoring of the service. These included over half (54%) of the toilets being deemed unusable, two thirds in need of repair, 90 missing, as well as non-fulfilment of various other contractual obligations by the local contractor despite being paid in full for services rendered (SJC, 2013a). This also marked the start of a wider interest in social audits as an innovative approach, drawing in other civil society organizations to pilot the method in their own communities, but also getting attention from funders and government departments such as National Treasury and the National Department for Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation (Rossouw, 2015, p. 23). In fact, the SJC used the audit findings to submit a complaint to the South African Human Rights Commission.

Since 2013, fourteen audits have been conducted by various organizations throughout the country. These are summarized chronologically in Table 1 below. These have tackled critical issues, from access to water and sanitation in communities and schools, the relocation and housing of communities (Ndifuna Ukwazi, hereafter NU, 2015), to the social impacts and responsibilities of mining companies (Action Aid, 2018). In 2016, a national Social Audit Network (SAN) was formally established with the aim of 'incrementally expanding the use of social audits as a legitimate and effective form of community monitoring and participation tool (SAN, n.d.).

Despite the specificity of issues and contexts, the social audits generally follow the same principles and steps. It begins with mobilizing local residents to participate as auditors, and requesting documents from the relevant government department, employing the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) where necessary. Such documents have included Service Delivery Agreements (SDAs), tender specifications, invoices, proof of payments, and delivery notes. Participants then develop questionnaires and verification sheets based on their collective analysis of the documents, and fill these through physical checks and interviews with residents and workers. The process concludes with a public hearing in the relevant communities, where social audit actors present their findings and recommendations for action to both community and government attendees.

Table 1. Summary of Social Audits and reports in South Africa.

Social Audit report*	Issue and location
Social Justice Coalition (SJC) (2013). Report of the Khayelitsha 'Mshengu' Toilet Social Audit.	Chemical toilets in Khayelitsha, Cape Town
Social Justice Coalition (SJC) (2013). Wasteful Expenditure: Report of the Khayelitsha refuse removal and area cleansing social audit.	Refuse removal and area cleaning, Khayelitsha, Cape Town
Social Justice Coalition (2014). Our Toilets are Dirty: Report of the social audit into the Janitorial Service for communal flush toilets in Khayelitsha, Cape Town.	Janitorial service, Khayelitsha, Cape Town
Equal Education (2015). The Schools Social Audit Summit.	Education infrastructure (buildings and sanitation), Gauteng Province
Social Justice Coalition (2015). Green Point Social Audit.	Chemical toilets, Khayelitsha, Cape Town
Ndifuna Ukwazi (2015). Wolwerivier Social Audit Report.	Fulfilment of community relocation & housing plans, Wolwerivier, Cape Town
Planact (2016). Report on the Spring Valley Social Audit.	Water provision by trucks, Emalahleni
Social Justice Coalition (2016). Monwabisi Park (Endlovini) Social Audit.	Sanitation, Endlovini, Cape Town
Equal Education (2016). Of loose papers and vague allegations: A social audit report on the safety and sanitation crisis in Western Cape Schools.	Education infrastructure and safety, Western Cape Province
Planact (2017). Watville Social Audit Report.	Chemical toilets, City of Ekurhuleni
Afesis-Corplan (2018). Social Audit Report and Assessment report of the Glenmore Sports Facility.	Sports facilities, Glenmore, Eastern Cape
Planact (2018a). Thembelihle Social Audit Report.	Desludging of pits and Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) toilets, Thembelihle, Johannesburg
Planact (2018b). Scaled-up Sanitation Social Audit.	Sanitation, Ekurhuleni.
Action Aid (2018). Mpukunyoni social audit report: Tendele coal mining.	Fulfilment of social labour plans by mining company, Mpukunyoni, KwaZulu-Natal province

*All reports can be found at: https://socialaudits.org.za/.

Research Methods

The social audit offers a typical case of social accountability initiatives. I turned to the social audit as an instrumental and exploratory case study (Stake, 1995) to better understand the place leadership of social movement and civic place leadership. Social audits are interesting because they are conducted outside formal governance spaces yet aim to interact or engage such spaces. I selected the social audits in South Africa based on my prior knowledge, and the availability of the social audit reports. These provide insight into the discursive strategies used by social audit actors, of their perceptions of the governance and place contexts in which the audits were conducted, and therefore of the discursive work needed to influence these contexts.

While I had the privilege of participating in one of the Cape Town social audits as a participant observer in 2013, my direct experience of the social audits has been limited, and at that time focused on the potential of similar community-based monitoring methods to deepen government-community engagement. In this latter work, colleagues and I have worked with municipal officials to trial such approaches (Sanchez-Betancourt & Vivier, 2019), and have reflected on the challenges, shortcomings, and potential institutional improvements for government-led participation within local service delivery (Vivier, De Jongh, & Thompson, 2021). These projects, however, contrast with the social audits as community-led, managed and driven, the power of which was palpable and inspiring in my experience of the process.

The analysis is restricted to the content provided in publicly available social audit reports as well as secondary and academic literature on the social audits in both South

Africa and India. The objective is not to comprehensively detail each social audit process, nor to presume to retell others' stories as if to speak for or provide an objective account of those experiences. As Rossouw (2015) reflects, power relations are inherent in retelling others' stories. The analysis presented here accepts the content in the reports as evidence of how the report writers (as social audit actors) understood and framed the issues for themselves and others. While I apply content analysis, the interpretation of the social audits and the report contents is still subjectively informed by my theoretical assumptions and interest in meaning-making practices of place leadership.

Table 1 above lists the documents selected and analyzed. Documentary materials are commonly recognized sources for research and analysis, including previous literature/ studies (Bowen, 2009). Such documents are not taken as 'precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events' (Bowen, 2009, p. 33), but as part of the work and process of social accountability. The production of reports operates as an important step or action in the process – i.e. the articulation and dissemination of social audit processes and findings, and a space and tool for meaning-making. Questions that informed the analysis included: What do the reports 'do'? How do the reports frame the social audit process, the issues they seek to address, and the findings? What does it tell us about how social audit actors attempted to influence (whether mobilize, coordinate or collaborate with) other actors? What do the reports reveal about the processes, relationships and strategies they used?

I followed a thematic content analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I identified specific ideas and concepts (e.g. rights, policies), compared these across documents (e.g. is this report similar to, or different from the others?), and then scrutinized how these different ideas and concepts connect with one another. Hence, I identified a pattern in how social audit actors/reports frame issues, and developed an interpretive map of how these different frames inform one another and operate together. In this process, I moved iteratively between reports and the secondary and academic literature on social audits. This allowed me to compare my analysis with themes and findings within the literature. This literature also provided insights into the local institutional, political and place-specific contexts of the social audits, which helped me to further contextualize my codes and interpretation. I also moved iteratively between this documentary data and the literature on place leadership, which allowed me to interpret and theorize place leadership as the interplay between rights claims, accountability and compliance demands, and place-based lived realities. In analyzing the relationships between these framings, I further theorized the discursive work of place leadership in the dynamics between legitimizing and exposing.

Findings: Social Audit Framings in the Construction of Issues and Positions

Three Framings

Three framings were evident across all social audit reports. The first, which I have labelled as the 'rights' framing, draws on broad human rights and liberal democratic discourses, offering a normative vision as shared purpose to underpin service provision. The second prominent framing refers to policy, regulation and legislation, as well as various

tender and service delivery agreements, which I collectively describe as framing around 'regulations'. This framing speaks to the governance arrangements, accountability relations and compliance standards that inform the delivery and management of services and infrastructure development projects.

The third and perhaps most crucial framing I have termed 'lived realities'. This framing draws on multiple aspects of place (including experiences and sense of place as well as the measurable built environment) to contribute to the construction of issues and positions as part of the collective leadership of place. Through this framing, the social audits construct issues and positions around rights and governance failures, doing so through the collected data and personal testimonies of residents and workers. This discursive leadership work emerges, in my analysis, in the dynamic interplay between the different framings.

In the interplay between framings, the social audits *legitimize* the rights and regulations framings, while these framings in turn help to *legitimize* the social audits as a space and mechanism of place leadership. At the same time, the articulations of lived realities help to *expose* the shortcomings of current governance and accountability systems in the realization of those rights. This 'legitimizing-exposing' dynamic unfolds as social audit actors navigate political, institutional and community contexts and attempt to mobilize a wider network of governance actors. In what follows, I present these findings with a focus on how issues and positions are constructed at the intersection of rights and lived realities, on the one hand, and regulations and lived realities, on the other.

Framing Rights in Relation to Lived Realities

References to rights and their legislative authority does specific work within the social audit narratives in constructing both issues and positions. Often, such rights are explicitly located within the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights, and the guarantees it makes to 'the rights of all people to life, dignity, safety, health, and a clean and safe environment' (SJC, 2014, p. 10). Rights specific to the issue under focus in each audit are also articulated, including the right to adequate housing (NU, 2015), equal and quality education (Equal Education, 2015), and basic sanitation (SJC, 2014).

The rights framing aims to construct the realization of rights as an *issue*, offering a normative foundation and direction for state-society relations. It is on this basis that the various findings identified through the social audits are presented as rights violations, in particular the violation of 'the right to human dignity' (NU, 2015; SJC, 2013), but also the right to information (Afesis-Corplan, 2018). Two key discursive moves seem to make this possible. First, *exposing* rights violations through stories and experiences of place that articulate place as lived and practiced. Second, *legitimizing* the social audits (and community engagement through the audits) as embedded in, and an enactment of, democratic rights.

Stories of residents and communities being disconnected from place in terms of well-being, heritage, and sense of community pervade the social audit reports. These stories draw out the specificities of each place, situating the audits (and services under investigation) in their historical, geographical and material contexts. In Wolwerivier, a camp built for the relocation of residents from an informal settlement, the trauma of relocation isolate the community, while the lack of community spaces, churches and streetlights

undermine a sense of community or safety (NU, 2015). In framing this issue, the report shares residents' personal testimonies of how the move has affected them, including naming and picturing them. In the Mpukunyoni mining community, the social audit conducted on Tendele Coal Mining contextualizes the audit by recounting the experiences of residents 'being forced to move from their land – the source of their livelihoods and where their ancestors are buried', also describing this as a 'violation of human rights' (Action Aid, 2018, p. 4). And in Glenmore, the significance of a failed sports field regeneration project is presented in relation to the political history and geography of the place:

> The people of Glenmore still have fresh wounds from forced removals of the past and having to create a community in the middle of nowhere with no ancestral backing from the land on which they now live. […] Glenmore Sports field was the glue that held the community together amidst all the other challenges. (Afesis-Corplan, 2018, p. 22)

While the rights framing *legitimizes* these experiences as an issue, these experiences also 're-place' those rights into their embodied contexts, thereby *exposing* the failures and constructing the issue as one of rights violations. Indeed, the social audits constitute the connection to and wellbeing of place as an essential component of rights to life, dignity and safe environments. Such issues are likely to remain invisible within state programmes and delivery processes preoccupied with scale (Aakella & Kidambi, 2007b).

Engaging communities and capturing personal experiences and testimonies is essential to the work of exposing and goes beyond the reports. Social audit participants '[take] notes of their observations' as they converse with residents and workers, recording the details of everyday lived realities alongside the condition of each service (e.g. a communal water tap or toilet block) (Storey, 2014). Testimonies also constitute a large part of the 'public hearing' where findings are shared with residents and institutional actors. Both participants and residents share their individual stories, again 're-placing' the collated data 'back' in the streets and cement blocks and bodies of individual human beings who live and work in specific localities. This is more than a platform for sharing personal stories, however. Its value, Storey (2014) argues, is evident in how it surfaces 'situated knowledge':

> It was framed to prioritize everyday experience as the most legitimate information about the delivery of services and, second, that residents were positioned as those who should collect and present data from the wider community. (Storey, 2014, p. 413)

The social audit is thus a process of positioning residents and their everyday experiences in and of place as a source of knowledge and information for better services. In effect, claiming and enacting the position of residents (and social audit participants) in the collective leadership of place.

However, to be recognized as valuable contributors of situated knowledge is not a given. The difficulties experienced by social audit actors in accessing government information and in garnering a receptive response from government underscores the importance and challenge of securing legitimacy. The rights framing therefore does further *legitimizing* work for the social audits. They do so by drawing on liberal democratic discourses of participatory governance and active citizenship, also enshrined in the Constitution and legislation governing the municipal sphere. The social audits are presented as a mechanism and space for community participation, 'build[ing] community power, deepening the culture of participatory democracy and public deliberations' (Action Aid,

2018), 'ensuring that residents exercise their constitutional rights', including the right to 'democratic participation and accountable government' (Planact, 2016, p. 11). This work of legitimizing the social audits involves constructing the relational positions between citizens and communities on the one hand, and government on the other.

Some reports locate this position historically, noting South Africa's political transformation to democracy and, by implication, liberation from the oppressive apartheid state. The SJC (2013a, p. 4) for instance describe the social audits as an assertion of the 'fundamental and hard-fought right to hold our leaders accountable in advancing the basic rights of all people, but particularly those in historically disenfranchized communities' (SJC, 2013a, p. 4). In their 2016 report, they describe 'a gruesome picture of a people being denied the most basic rights […] all of this is taking place in post-apartheid South Africa, 22 years after our democracy' (SJC, 2016, p. 28). Constructing the position of government as democratic vis-à-vis communities and the social audit is thus part of this legitimizing work. A similar framing is employed in relation to the private sector in the Action Aid (2018) report, which positions social audits as a mechanism that 'empowers' communities 'to claim and realize their constitutional rights to a transparent and accountable mining company' (2018, p. 3).

By framing their initiatives around rights, the social audits make a normative claim on various stakeholders, with implicit and explicit indications of what this ought to mean in practice. Some, for example, refer to specific sections of the Constitution that call for all three spheres of government (municipal, provincial, and national) to prioritize 'the progressive realization of these rights for the most vulnerable in society' (SJC, 2013b). On this basis, they expand the 'network' of governance institutions implicated by their findings, and construct *positions* (and responsibilities attached to them) across those institutions. This is illustrated most prominently by the SJC's demand that the South African Human Rights Commission to 'launch an immediate investigation into possible human rights violations arising from the poor quality of chemical toilets provided by Mshengu Services' (SJC, 2013a, p. 26).

Whether this positioning locates social audits as a form of collaboration or contestation varies across reports and social audit experiences. Strategic choices in implementing the social audit suggest that legitimizing their position is a key challenge, and one that is managed through a careful balancing act between practices geared towards legitimizing or exposing. This is particularly evident in the variety of iterations of the 'public hearing' where findings are shared. Experiences from India confirm that the process is not without challenges, including power struggles and manipulation, but the public hearing is deemed an essential 'cleansing' moment to re-establish the community-government relationship (Aakella & Kidambi, 2007a).

In South Africa, power dynamics and disparities inform the strategic choices of social audit actors. Planact, for instance, has continually sought to collaborate with local government officials and politicians in its social audits. This collaborative orientation is evident throughout their reports, which position government agencies as 'partners' and the social audits as spaces of 'constructive dialogue' that 'reduces antagonism' (Planact, 2018a). In Watville, Planact (2017) deemed the public hearing too risky due to community unrest around housing and electricity issues, and opted instead to meet directly with the municipal director for water and sanitation, who then took remedial actions based on their findings.

Conversely, in the first two social audits in Khayelitsha, public hearings were at first well-attended by city and provincial leaders, as well as other national and civil society organizations. This enabled the social audit actors to expand the governance network deemed relevant to the issue (evident in the recommendations made to a range of institutions). In a later social audit, however, the City of Cape Town refused to attend the public hearing, indicating their unwillingness to recognize the SJC as a legitimate interlocutor. According to Rossouw (2015, p. 23), the legitimacy of the social audit in Cape Town became 'bitterly contested' and the SJC framed as a party-driven organization. This, he explains, was due in part to national political contestation between the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party and the Democratic Alliance as the main opposition party, which found footing in sanitation issues in Cape Town as the only city and province at the time not under ANC rule. For Rossouw (2015, p. 24), this suggests contestation is inevitable, and even necessary, in any attempts to hold officials publicly accountable. For this paper, it illustrates how contestation over issues and positions interweave and is shaped by the specificities of place.

Framing Regulations in Relation to Lived Realities

Through the regulations framing, the social audits draw on relevant policies, legislation, regulation, tender documents and service delivery agreements to leverage accountability and compliance objectives of the governance system. In most of the audits, they accept and work within government's performance measures and tender/contract specifications, thus *legitimizing* the service delivery models and governance arrangements in place to achieve these objectives. These include, inter alia, reference to the policies and legislation related to water and sanitation services, minimum norms and standards for school infrastructure, as well as other government documents such as environmental impact assessments and local government audit outcome reports.

As with the rights framings, presenting and articulating place-based realities help to *expose* the gaps in service delivery, but in this case constructing the *issue* as one of governance and accountability failures. Each social audit initiative details the service conditions set out, whether in national policy, municipal performance objectives or in tenders/contracts and even payment records with service providers. In conjunction, the reports analyze performance against these objectives through the collection of local data. While individual testimonies remain pertinent, this data primarily captures the objective, measurable and quantifiable aspects of place, relying on physical verifications of infrastructure and interviews with residents and workers. The reports are thus replete with descriptive statistics, tables, graphs, maps and textual interpretation.

The various reports provide data on, for example: the number of toilets within a community, how many are usable, lockable, how often they are cleaned; whether workers have contracts, are paid, are provided with safety equipment; whether residents know of or use a promised borehole, agricultural hub, school infrastructure improvements; and whether residents have access to work or housing. Such survey data buttress the personal narratives that give voice to place as lived and felt, and bridge individual lived experiences with systemic issues in the collective governance and leadership of place. It is through this *exposing* work that social audit participants mobilize discourses of good governance and accountability to construct issues as systemic, and as issues of

'wasteful expenditure', 'egregious maladministration', failures to fulfil 'contractual obligations' (Planact, 2018b; SJC, 2013b).

In his analysis of the social audits, Cinnamon (2020, p. 629) argues that this kind of data can help make social injustice visible. He also notes how many of the reports take on a kind of technocratic rationality, reflecting the effort to provide data as scientific evidence that would *legitimize* their knowledge claims. Just as the rights framing aims to legitimize the social audit as a space of democratic engagement, the regulations framing intends to do so by *positioning* the social audits as providers of useful and reliable data to support government efficiency and effectiveness. In one of the reports, for instance, the authors explicitly claim that the pronouncements in the draft national sanitation policy that set out minimum conditions and standards for sanitation services, specifically '*justifies* the community's demand for social accountability in service delivery' (Planact, 2017, p. 6, emphasis added).

By collecting detailed data on the quality of services and whether contract specifications are being met, the social audits interrogate (and shift) the relational configurations between government leaders, service providers and communities, thereby contributing to the construction of *positions* within this system. The main concern across the social audits is the failure by government to properly manage and monitor contractors and service delivery programmes. Though they differ in the level of detail provided, the reports give insight into how positions are contested in multiple ways, including how positions are specified and enacted but also under- or un-specified. Thus, they challenge the political leadership of local ward councillors for not adequately representing the community's interests of the community vis-à-vis contractors; they highlight the challenging role of community leaders in reporting service failures; they emphasize the importance of the community project steering committee in monitoring project processes; and they detail the responsibilities of contractors in the delivery of services.

These efforts to construct positions across the local governance network depend upon the *legitimacy* garnered through the regulations framing and the provision of data that *exposes* the service delivery gaps. The contestation over positions (including the roles and relations between different actors) also contributes to the construction of the issue. In other words, by contesting how positions are enacted and defined, the social audits illuminate the relational accountability disconnects within the local governance system.

Even as they contest how particular positions are understood and enacted within the immediate local governance network, the social audits employ the regulations framing to attempt to mobilize a wider range of institutions within vertical and horizontal systems of accountability. This is evident, for instance, in the range of 'recommendations' and 'demands' that conclude the social audit reports, which call upon not only the immediate government institution involved (e.g. the City of Cape Town), but also the Auditor General, the Public Protector, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Western Cape Provincial Government, the national department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and National Treasury.

Paradoxically, it may be precisely such institutionalized accountability relations that disconnect governance from place. While metro governments in South Africa such as Cape Town and Ekurhuleni enjoy considerable discretion, reporting requirements drive accountability upwards. And, according to Cinnamon (2020, p. 632), the culture of reporting generates and maintains a 'data sausage machine' simply 'to fill in national indicator

spreadsheets'. While social audit actors (again) position themselves and communities as providers of valuable data and situated knowledge, they simultaneously seek to expose these kinds of shortcomings within the governance system.

Again, the discursive work of the social audits illuminates the tensions between legitimizing and exposing, and the balancing act required from the social audit actors to leverage these together. While this paper has not examined how government institutions received the social audits (or whether they could be deemed a 'success' and for whom), it is worth noting some of the challenges that have been documented. Cinnamon (2020, p. 631) underscores how governments in South Africa 'have aggressively disputed findings', specifically by attacking the data, criticizing the methodologies, challenging the sampling methods, dismissing all embodied knowledge, and shifting the blame to communities, ultimately constructing the issues as failures of community 'responsibility'. Rossouw (2015) offers a similar account. Reflecting on the evolution of the social audit approach of the SJC, he notes how a push towards more quantitative data might have effaced the audit's resonance with affective embodied experiences, without necessarily securing stronger acceptance of data legitimacy from government.

Discussion

This paper has investigated how social movement actors enact place leadership through meaning-making practices. In the findings presented above, the social audits provide a space and mechanism for social audit actors (and communities) to engage local governance networks by discursively constructing and contesting issues and positions through three prominent framings (rights, regulations and lived realities). In this process, they leverage lived realities in and of place to give direction to rights and regulations. The three framings and leadership work involved in their dynamic interplay, i.e. navigating between legitimizing and exposing, gives insight into how they attempt to translate embodied realities and relations in and of place into a sense of purpose and direction for mobilizing a wider network of governance actors.

This research contributes to studies of place leadership and its relation to governance (Jackson, 2019) and the effects of institutional design on the scope and effectiveness of place leadership (Bentley et al., 2017; Ferry & Sandford, 2022; Hambleton et al., 2021). By fore fronting how social movement and civic actors interrogate and attempt to engage with governance and accountability arrangements, I contribute the identification of invented spaces (Cornwall, 2004) such as the social audit as a crucial area where place leadership emerges and is shaped. Their place leadership thus unfolds in specific localities and their geographic and material realities, and in the discursive and sociomaterial spaces opened up through the audit reports, site visits, physical verifications, interviews and public hearings. In this process, social movement actors constitute place as a 'spatial unit for the exercise of democracy and rights' (Hambleton et al., 2021), but extend this 'spatial unit' beyond administrative demarcations of a locality and formal electoral systems of representation through which more traditional forms of leadership operate.

Social accountability initiatives, but potentially other community-generated spaces of engagement as well, might constitute a forum for place leadership bridging the 'invited spaces' of formal governance actors and informal leading 'on the ground'. The social audits also provide a space for social movement and civic actors to surface issues and

constraints within the governance system, with potential to inform understandings of how institutional design might indeed affect place leadership. For example, in the case of the South African social audits, a major issue so identified is the ambiguities within contract agreements and how roles and responsibilities between contractors, community leadership structures and local councillors are defined.

To studies of the meaning-making practices of place leadership (Carroll & Simpson, 2012; Crevani, 2018; Foldy et al., 2008; Holm & Fairhurst, 2018), I contribute the identification of three framings and their interplay, which give insight into how different aspects of place may be 'leveraged' within discursive strategies. In the articulation of affective experiences and personal testimonies, and through the various audit processes that involve physical presence in and thus visibility of place, the social audits attempt to 'give flesh' and specificity to intangible discourses and technocratic perspectives, putting these 'in place'. Drawing upon existing rights and democratic discourses are also 'of place', however, as the positioning of issues in relation to post-apartheid, democratic South Africa make most clear. Place as 'frame of reference' (Sutherland et al., 2022) thus span the micro (a specific toilet, for instance) to the macro, providing an embodied account as well as discursive 'glue' for social movement actors to articulate governance failures in the realization of rights. The social audits thus provide a space where social movement actors leverage extrasubjective discourses in their intersubjective framings.

This analysis confirms extant literature on voluntary sector actors' place leadership, which identifies their situated knowledge as key to their place leadership, to their contribution to the interaction between different sectors and organizations, and yet in need of legitimation (Rees et al., 2021). To this literature, I contribute the conceptualization of the interplay between the three frames and the ongoing effort to legitimize but also leverage their situated knowledge as a core part of their place leadership practice. This suggests it is not only their situated knowledge that contributes to their place leadership, but also their ability to mobilize relevant broader discourses (e.g. around rights and liberal democracy) and governance arrangements (as embedded in the policy, legislation and service delivery landscape). A kind of 'political astuteness' or 'savvy' (Hartley et al., 2019) may therefore also inform the place leadership of community actors.

The negotiation between legitimizing and exposing gives insight into the discursive strategies constituting relational and collective leadership, which remain under-researched, and the dynamics of which remain 'intangible and often obscure' (Carroll & Simpson, 2012, p. 1301). In the contexts of the social audits, the legitimizing-exposing interplay at the centre of meaning-making practices emerges as a pivotal dynamic constituting the process of producing direction as a process of mobilizing. It is precisely in the combination of legitimizing and exposing through which they attempt to influence the 'relational configurations' (Crevani, 2018) relevant to a specific phenomenon (a service or project, and ultimately place), and thereby to impel action by repositioning specific agencies within those relations. This leadership work produces (and enacts) a 'clearing for action' as conceptualized by Crevani (2018) as open-ended yet bounded.

In the work of legitimizing, the social audit actors employ key discourses as scaffolding and multiple aspects of place as anchor points. This aims to generate a sense of shared social purpose that align and coordinate, at least broadly, across spheres of government and sectors of society, thus expanding the space of action. In the work of exposing, they map out the vulnerabilities in local governance systems and make claims and

recommendations regarding specific positions. In doing so, they interrogate and attempt to direct the repertoire of practices and relations across the system. These present as relational constraints, thus containing the space of action. The process and work of mobilizing can therefore be theorized as an ongoing process of both contestation in producing direction, and the (potential) anchoring of a sense of shared purpose, in this case around the realization of rights and well-being in and of place. For studies of place leadership, this offers 'a more nuanced picture' of how place provides leadership with purpose (By, 2021; Kempster & Jackson, 2021; Naslund & Norrman, 2022), and how 'better' outcomes rather than strong 'consensus' might emerge from more inclusive and democratic approaches (Mullins & van Bortel, 2010, p. 426). Insofar as this sense of purpose is normatively, institutionally and materially embedded via the three framings, a framing of purpose emerges where material realities expose the gaps between 'vision' and 'implementation' (or leadership and governance).

Conclusion

In the collective leadership of place, social movement and civic actors contribute an important experience, knowledge and care of place. Their efforts to engage other place leaders and governance networks through innovative spaces of their own might indicate that more formalized, government-led spaces by themselves do not sufficiently elicit this contribution. Place leadership scholars have much to gain in exploring the field and practice of social movement work and of civic and community actors generally. Social accountability initiatives such as social audits also alert us to the importance of good administrative functioning and governance for realizing social purpose and well-being of place. However, the delivery and management of services involves political action and contestation as much as technical and administrative knowledge. In tackling the complex sustainable development challenges that are upon us, it may very well be that place leadership becomes a right and reality of all.

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Notes on Contributor

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