Planning Africa 2008

Conference Report[1]

Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa, 16 April 2008

Introduction

This conference has responded admirably to the intended outcomes of:

- Fundamentally shaping and influencing thought leadership in planning and development across the continent with a view to improving the livelihoods of inhabitants on the continent;

- Revisiting the role and contribution of planning and governance in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

- Strengthening the ongoing dialogue and debate on planning and governance issues that have bearing on the future development of the continent; and

- Formulating a sufficiently shared perspective on planning innovation to feed into an international discourse.

This report cannot do justice to the impressive quality of papers presented in all sessions as well as the richness of debate and the depth of discussion that has been the hallmark of the conference. It is an interpretation of key themes and threads that have emerged in the course of deliberations at this high level, engaging gathering of planners from 26 countries.

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[1] Compiled by conference report committee including Yusuf Patel, Yondela Silimela, Stephen Berrisford, Tanya Zack and Alan Mabin. The committee acknowledges inputs and reflections from session chairs. The report does not purport to be a summary of the conference papers, but an interpretation of key threads that have emerged through the conference.

Forces Shaping African Cities

It seems fair enough to suggest that in line with its theme "Shaping the Future", Planning Africa 2008 was seized with a fundamental question: "What kind of towns and cities do Africans in the 21st century want to live in?

This question is posed against the backdrop of significant progress made across the continent in respect of democratisation and economic growth over the past few years. Notwithstanding a number of individual cases, in general Africa with a current economic growth rate averaging about 5 per cent per year is in an "Age of Hope" where new possibilities and opportunities are opening up to address poverty and to foster development.

At the same time the Planning Africa 2008 conference took place amidst global concern for rising fuel and food prices, and fears of a resource crunch coupled with climate change that will impact on Africa most severely. The food riots and demonstrations that took place in several countries across the world this week brought into sharp focus the need for decisive action on poverty and growing global inequality. The mood of delegates at Planning Africa 2008 echoed these sentiments, that is, a growing impatience with lack of implementation and an inability to adopt a solution focussed approach to development.

In addressing the question, "What kind of towns and cities do Africans in the 21st century want to live in?", it is important to acknowledge the problem that for a long time ordinary Africans have not been at the forefront of shaping the towns and cities they live in and will live in. Currently 38% of Africans live in urban areas. This is projected to increase to over 50% in the next three decades according to Ernest Harsch (*Africa Recovery, Vol.15 #1-2, page 30*) making the issue of place shaping in both urban and rural contexts extremely significant.

Africans have grown used to accepting whatever has been forced upon them or are comfortable with allowing their towns and cities to develop in whatever

fashion. Colonialism reversed African place shaping and forced new settlement landscapes and configurations onto ordinary Africans, often excluding them from certain spaces. Francois Menguele in his paper on African Renaissance and Planning reminds us about the importance of acknowledging the glories of pre-colonial Africa as we look into the future. Said Almi reminded us of the history of the French School of Urbanism and its impact on African Cities

In general post-colonial African governments have not done much to reintroduce rigour and thoughtfulness in town and city planning that is inclusive and responsive to urbanisation and economic growth but that also in itself shapes the built environment fabric that is necessary to generate and sustain accelerated growth and development. Or, should we rather say that many post-colonial African states have not managed to put in place the macro-economic preconditions for sub-national planning and development. Where are the Developmental States in Africa?

> "Although different scholars define 'developmental state' differently, it tends to be treated as synonymous with 'state led development'. For example, Loriaux (1999) speaks of a developmental state as a 'kind of capitalist political economy that is characterised by the preponderance of a certain kind of ambition using a certain kind of power'. The actor referred to here is the state bureaucracy. Chang (1999) holds the view that '[e]conomic development requires a state which can create and regulate the economic and political relationship that can support sustained industrialisation – or in short, a developmental state." (Charles Machethe, New Agenda, Issue 28, Fourth Quarter)

Ebrahim Fakir, in his keynote address to the conference, speaks of five critical dimensions of bureaucratic state capacity of a developmental state. Planning is a key lever in each of these components of state capacity, namely:

- The regulatory framework in which the state acts to enforce the laws and contacts to protect property rights. Fakir reminds us that in the

absence of these frameworks predatory interests undermine the needs of the poor in relation to property.

- Technical capacity: If the state lacks the technical capacity to deliver effective services, it faces an erosion of legitimacy and authority
- Administrative capacity: Where the state requires appropriately skilled and oriented human resources to execute its functions and this is a precondition for countering corruption and mismanagement
- Extractive capacity: The states capacity to generate revenue is fundamental to the states capacity to meet all of its obligations. It talks to issues of sovereignty and is a prominent concern in a context of donor-sourced and donor- driven budgets in Africa.
- Coercion and enforcement capacity: This speaks to the importance of the legitimate use of state power to create predictability and to ensure that public interest will be protected against wrongdoing.

Coupled often with inaction or inappropriate government action, the main forces at play in 21st century African city shaping are a combination of real estate and property development led by big capital and informal activity driven by survival needs of the poor. Vanessa Watson brought this out in her paper which responded to the UN's (Anna Tibijuka) assertion that planning has not kept up with the demands of urbanisation especially in the global south. Powerful case studies such as those presented by Richard Dobson of innovative means of integrating the informal economy in the inner city reinforced these messages. Similarly Aim Kamete alerted us to spatial unruliness and the need for planning not to close down space where other people can operate. We are left to ponder on Anna Tibijuka's title of the paper she delivered at the last World Urban Forum: Does the Planned City sweep the poor away?

However, whilst informality is a reality that has to be better understood and integrated, are we not becoming too accommodating of informality as if it is automatically acceptable and desirable for Africa? Some responses to the questions of informality caution against a misled romanticism associated with

informality in Africa as if Africans deserve lower standards – as if African city identity necessarily excludes the best of science and technology the modern world has to offer – as if Africans have not contributed significantly to modern world technology. These concerns highlighted the unfinished business of effective urban land use regulations and land use management in our cities which is grappling with and has not provided yet the tool for proactive absorption of the poor into well managed urban areas. Ebrahim Fakir reminded us that Africa is both particular and universal. Dan Smit focuses our attention on the multiple and competing rationalities that face planning decisions and action in South Africa.

It is however not necessary that our vision for African cities has to embrace the overdone grandeur and exuberance of some new world cities as Gotz and Harrison argue in their imagery of Joburg 2024. We do have the opportunity to shape our cities that accommodates a multi-class society in a seamless rather than separated way. (The rich are enclaving within cities) We also have the opportunity in Africa to shape ecologically synergised and energy efficient cities which if pursued in a deliberate manner by bold leadership (as Adrian Masson reminds us in his compelling paper on peak oil implications for city planning) can enable new industries and employment opportunities.

Who is shaping the future? Do we appreciate the scale of the challenge? Is planning too ambitious as Baskin points out in showing us the inappropriateness of early plans for renewal in Alexandra, Johannesburg, or the sweeping plans for declining mining towns as Nigel Tapela illustrated in his paper on Welkom? Or have we been too reluctant and incapable of imagining desirable "end states" and hopeless at mobilising will and leadership in the context of a developmental state with the fabric to implement and deliver?

Both papers and comments from the floor have reiterated the difficulty of planning reaching implementation across Africa. In the 21st century, are we understanding the scale at which planning has to operate. The massive populations, the massive scale of poverty is overwhelming. Yet our orientation

so often is incremental, small scale and confined to visions in documents. Are we satisfied to work with what we have or will we be bold in thought leadership and action? To what extent will the voices of ordinary Africans be heard in our quest for shaping future urban spaces? To what extent are they agents of their own change?

The reality is that in a number of African cities, the poor are no longer the marginalised, at least not in numbers. Planners in Africa need to embrace the poor as integral elements of what it takes to make African cities work. If the wealthy are abandoning the idea of a shared city, how then does the profession position itself in this polarity?

Planning has played decisive roles in reconstruction throughout history. Can we do this again when we are faced with the looming crises of our time, or will we go forward on the margins? Will we accept continued poverty, continued disparities and extremes and throw our hands up and say planning cannot impact on these things, or will we actively work to change, transform and revolutionise Africa.

This approach requires that planning see itself not as an aside but as integral to governance and development.

Planning, Governance and Development

The "Shaping the Future" theme for Planning Africa 2008 evolved out of the first Planning Africa conference held in 2002 where the prospective role of planning in Africa's rebirth and growth was raised.

It seems that since 2002 planners across the continent have become bolder – less preoccupied with the question, "Is Planning Relevant?", and more enthused with imagining a different future and accepting unashamedly the central role of planning. There also seems to be greater clarity now about the fact that the spatial and built environment roots of planning should remain the

defining entry point for planners as they engage with strategic integrated development processes at one level and/or with land development facilitation and administration at another level.

Admittedly, whilst planners are often still pretty much stuck in their own world view of shaping the future, Planning Africa 2008 has demonstrated the greater openness that Ebrahim Fakir placed as a challenge to conference delegates in his keynote address. He said that if planners realise that almost every facet of our lives are touched by planning they would be less self-serving and more embracing and engaging with civil society views, market forces, and politics.

Similarly, Lechesa Tsenoli reminded us in his key note address that the making of the future is directly and indirectly in our hands. We have to recognise the fact that planning work happens in a governance context. This context consists of both community aspirations and the priorities of different levels of government.

Context is critical especially when considering Dan Smit's argument that governance is often the root cause of planning failure. Perhaps, to move forward, we have to accept that planning is part of governance and governance has to be driven by developmental objectives. To shape the future, planners can no longer negate their responsibility by continuously raising the "us" and "them" game as if there are hard boundaries between the technical and the political. We have to be more challenging with all the forces shaping the future, by being more robust about the futures we imagine and the implementation instruments and methodologies required. We also have to be more rigorous with information and data rather than opinion-based planning. Subhrajit Guhathakurta, Stan Geertman and Sharon Bierman showed us the critical importance of data as well as how this is an area in which planning has indeed innovated and is able to strengthen its arm. New tools such as visual modelling and remote sensing have come to the fore which can assist us. These instruments need to be complemented with the evidence based planning methods such as those shown by Josiah Lodi's research in the Sekukune district, focusing on youth development in the

context of tradition and modernity as well as Stacey Leigh Jones's reflections on how spatial development impacts critically on the livelihoods and treatment of people living with HIV.

Several papers have highlighted public participation but we have moved from the mere tropes of 'the community must be included in planning' or' plan with the people' to a real conviction that planning cannot proceed without this engagement. Edgar Pieterse talked about weak civil society structures, about how we need to move from protest based structures who are waiting for delivery towards structures which are active agents of their own self-development and active in plan-making and strategising the future. Zukiswa Matolengwe and Nicolene Rose-Innes showed us how citizens are working in a constructive way with government to build their owned houses with Homeless People's Federation. Andrew Barker outlined the complexity of stakeholder processes in regenerating mining activity in Johannesburg while Ismail Vawda sketched the multiple and competing forces of NIMBY and economic pressures in Ethekwini's South Basin.

Glynn Davies, Nancy Odendaal and James Duminy - in an important session entitled 'planning for cities or planning with cities' - focused on our imaginaries of cities and the space economy. The conference has focused strongly on the challenges of urbanisation and the need to plan effectively in urban areas. Less resolved is where we allocate our limited resources. What decisions do we make that bring out the best of our space economy? The calls for a need to stimulate growth and efficiency in urban areas through focussing planning and investment in urban areas and within those on transport corridors and nodes, were juxtaposed with calls for rural areas to be addressed. In this regard we have been called upon to focus also on rural development, on issues of food security as well as on the growing dense settlements of poverty in rural areas. Where are our towns and where is our settlement planning for rural areas? The rural and urban are intertwined for overall national economic performance.

The ecological footprint of our increasingly sprawling cities combined with the rising costs of infrastructure has put the relationship between land use and transport planning firmly into the agenda. Several papers called for a renewed focus on public transport as the backbone of public space making. In this regard, it is critical to ensure that we develop at densities that can support sustainable public transport, but here too, we need to go beyond the jargon of the compact city, nodes and corridors, which has not translated into spatial restructuring. We need to take bold spatial decisions and have a consistency between the concepts, policy and implementation.

Almost every session was characterised by a call to action. Philip Harrison underlined this for us in noting that the profession of planning gains its legitimacy and relevance through being implementation oriented. There is a new space for credibility in the profession both in the light of global crises and in the new democratic spaces that are being carved in many areas of Africa. But we will lose that credibility if we do not implement.

The importance of sustainability science in planning was raised in our opening plenaries by Christine Platt and carried through in several sessions. Alex Aylet usefully dealt with how we negotiate about sustainability. This is vital to bringing these themes into the centre of our planning processes. Chrisna du Plessis providences with a theoretical lens for taking sustainability on board in our planning frameworks.

Likewise, politicians and officials have to recognise the importance of planning in making deliberative choices towards firmly set targets such as in the South Korean example that Mark Oranje used. This is in contrast to the reactive nature of many governments across the African continent where there is often a vagueness about intended outcomes and a tentativeness about taking responsibility for shaping the future, as the parallel session on contrasting planning theory and practice across Africa highlighted (see Kaimbigi and Mukunga, Phiri, and Awour-Hayangah).

The paper by Gotz and Harrison on Joburg 2024 show the possibilities for more forthright planning through a vision setting and growth management approach. Whilst the approach still needs to be tested across city-wide stakeholders, and for the extent to which it will resolve the inclusivity challenge, it does suggest a new boldness that places the city at the centre of place shaping rather than market forces alone.

The conference has allowed for the sharing of innovative experiences. Mohammed Zniber illustrated the sophistication and diversity of an urban renewal approach in Morocco which has successfully reduced the shack developments. Nicholas Buchaoud offered us many highlights of reshaping the urban fabric in African Cities.

What is to be Done?

Some of the key things coming out of this conference must certainly impact what we do as planners and institutions beyond the confines of the safe space provided by this venue.

A dramatic change from the Cape Town conference has been that virtually every paper, in every theme, has touched on or even taking as a starting point the effects on planning of **resource limits** imposed by peaking oil prices and electricity shortages. This is extraordinary, and reflects the need for planners to engage urgently with these issues. They are no longer nice-to-haves but are a central part of our work.

Contrary to the uncertainty and doubt that has characterised previous Planning Africas is a strong sense that planners now need to **do**. The profession now has to take on the responsibility of delivering high quality professional services that meet the massive challenges of rapid urbanisation and peaking poverty.

Planning Africa 2008 was an opportunity for planners to reflect on their role and contribution in place-making in Africa. What emerged from the

discussions is the need for planners to be more connective with civil society, other professions, politics and the various sources of power. This relationship between the profession and the organs of political **power** has emerged as a key challenge. On the one hand planners have to operate within the relevant political and institutional frameworks but on the other they have to assert professional independence robustly and confidently. This is a challenge to planners in democratic societies. To planners in undemocratic societies it is a fundamentally more difficult challenge.

The issues that we are dealing with have no respect for boundaries, yet we often confine our thinking and implementation of interventions to our city, provincial and national boundaries. Planning as a practice needs to embrace the notion of **Regionalism**.

Shirley Robinson and Maria Coetzee reminded of the importance of good quality **data** on the quality of planning and subsequently decisions taken. We need to increase the information base of our decision making and downscale the opinion-based decision making. At the same time, we need to recognise the diversity of spaces and to thread with caution when we apply modelling techniques as our spaces are not homogenous.

Infrastructure and resources limitations are becoming key structuring elements of space. Planners need to confront this reality and move to allow for spatial logic to lead infrastructure investment. The reality of planning during an era of resources' crises must be addressed and new planning approaches adopted to make sure that this pressure does not move us away from the goal of creating just cities.

Planning education has to address **capacity building** and produce these connective planners. We have had enough of sceptics, cynicism and we need practitioners focused on solutions. Obviously, this is not exclusively the task of planning education. It requires that Planning Schools be more engaged with

other stakeholders. In addition, planning education needs to be taking lessons and solutions from African experiences.

Planning Associations across the continent have to keep planners current and **professionally astute**. We need to build the **identity** of planners and keep them central in shaping public interest outcomes.

But Planning Africa 2008 went beyond Planners talking to each other about planning. **Key messages have emerged out of this conference for global, national and local leaders.**

Global decision makers have to mobilise the resources to deal with the scale of shaping a future of settlements that are conduits for moving the poor out of poverty. Reconstruction and development at a global scale and a commitment to massive capacity building to grow African towns and cities is a responsibility that a new breed of global leadership must shoulder.

States and national government have to rise to the challenge of carving policy frameworks required for unleashing local partnerships to reshape the towns and cities. This state must take direct responsibility for supporting the re-emergence of strong civil society.

At a local level, **local leaders** must take issues of urban management, good administration and deepening local democracy more seriously. The building of strong civil society needs to be shouldered by local leaders and organs of state.

At every level, leaders, decision makers and planners must confront the sustainability management challenge as well as the challenges of mobility, public transportation and infrastructure development and access for the majority of urban users.

There is of course the unfinished business of dealing with urban land use regulation and land use systems that are both coherent and responsive to the diversity of our urban spaces and the realities of informality.

The conference has not been blind to the theoretical and conceptual imperatives of planning. Many papers have called for us to be reflective planners, to carve spaces where African responses can find expression. We need to recognise that reflective planners create a possibility for practice to inform theory.

On a light note, this would not have been a planning conference if there were no new terms, from the "celebridisation of development", to "Rurbal" and "globalafricanisation". We trust that you found this conference as engaging and stimulating as it was intended to be.

Conclusion

As we move towards Planning Africa 2010 we hope to celebrate more of the best practices emerging across the continent and decisive implementation by planners who are acting effectively within a planning and governance collective in both public and private practice.

We will also look forward to dramatic progress in the operations of the African Planning Association. There is great potential for continental coherence and mutual support in the implementation of this Conference's resolutions.