Planning Africa 2006
Making the Connections

REPORT ON THE PLANNING AFRICA 2006 CONFERENCE

A. REPORT ON THE PLANNING AFRICA CONFERENCE 2006

The Planning Africa Conference 2006 was convened by the Western Cape Branch of the South Africa Planning Institute and was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in Cape Town from 22 – 24 March 2006. It was attended by approximately 375 people, with all sectors of planning represented.

B. REPORT ON TO THE FINAL PLENARY SESSION ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE:

'MAKING THE CONNECTIONS': REFLECTIONS ON PLANNING AFRICA 2006

Philip Harrison

Introduction

Planning Africa 2002 has been referred to in this conference as a seminal moment in the development of the planning profession in (post-apartheid) South Africa, and justifiably so. For me a defining contribution of the 2002 gathering was the link it forged between planners in South Africa and other parts of the African continent. This is a link that has developed and matured, and that has been symbolically restated in the signing ceremony at the opening plenary of this conference. It was also reinforced at this conference in the sub-plenary session on Nepad and planning.

The question for us now is what is the contribution of Planning Africa 2006? How will this conference be remembered? Since the Planning Africa conferences are an important indicator of the state of planning and planning thought in South Africa, and even in Africa more generally, it is worthwhile spending some time reflecting on the themes, emphases, trends (and also the silences) of each conference. We don't yet have adequate perspective on Planning Africa 2006, but I can at least offer a personal perspective supported by the insights and comments of session co-ordinators.

I have identified seven main impressions from Planning Africa 2006: -

1. The extent to which the Conference directed our attention to the links between planning and urbanism in Africa;

2. The ways in which the Conference reflected a new confidence in thinking (and theorizing) from Africa;

3. The reconnection of planning with the normative agendas of a transforming society;

4. The extent to which the Conference revealed significant recent intellectual shifts within planning scholarship in Africa

5. The significant *disconnections* revealed during the Conference;

6. The deep-seated anxiety around capacity which was evident at the Conference;

7. The very evident pragmatic concern with getting our systems rights and making things work better.

I shall discuss each of these themes below.

1. The link between planning and urbanism in Africa

For me, the most powerful impression I have from this conference is the extent to which our attention has been directed to the relationship between planning and urbanism in Africa. This, I would venture, may be the defining characteristic of Planning Africa 2006.

Over the past ten years or so we, in South Africa, at least, have directed considerable energy into the development of new planning systems – and we have enjoyed some success in this area – but we may have neglected the object of planning or the substance of planning – the actual places that are being created and recreated at the intersection of multiple rationalities: the rationalities of planners, or private capital, of state agencies, and of ordinary people. The plenary session involving Achille Mbembe, Dave Dewar and Edgar Pieterse was an expression of an urban scholarship that has the potential to reconstitute the conceptual foundations of planning thought and practice in Africa. This session was reinforced by other contributions including, for example, Alan Mabin's 'provocation about future urbanism' and Cliff Hague's insistence that 'the surge in urbanization should be the central focus of planning today'.

Edgar Pieterse suggested that 'we are on the threshold of an exciting era of indigenous theorizing that seeks to use innovative theoretical ideas to re-imagine the horizon of pragmatic interventions into profoundly brutal, complex and challenging urban environments across Africa'. I hope he is right. I hope that somewhere between the constructs of Western rationalism that have informed much of our planning practice to date and our emerging awareness of the routines and practices of everyday life in African cities a new vocabulary will emerge that will enable us as planners to act more contextually, sensitively, intelligently, and effectively within the African context. As Mbembe put it, 'we don't have the vocabulary yet. Our language is still too poor for us to read what is going on around us'. But, both Mbembe and Pieterse suggest that the outline of a new language is gradually becoming apparent.

This new vocabulary poses both a risk and a challenge for planning. As Pieterse explained, a recasting of planning in terms of emerging theoretical insights 'presupposes a sober assessment of planning's in-built governmental, regulatory and disciplinary limitations'. However, as indicated previously, it may also take us towards a far more appropriate and innovative practice. Mabin challenged us to get the emergent new language on the urban inside our planning systems and processes – inside the IDP, for example. I hope that at the Planning Africa 2008 Conference we will reflect positively on the ways in which this has happened.

However, as with any discourse or language there are conceptual limits. Even at this conference the emphasis on the urban has provoked a sometimes sharp response from those who have a concern with 'the rural'. If the new discourse is not to marginalize places and communities that

are already on the edge of the map, the focus on the urban must be linked to a growing understanding of rural-urban interconnectedness – a recognition that the reason people are urbanizing has much to do with relationships to the land and also general conditions in rural areas. The concern with rural-urban linkage was, at least, addressed in papers by Peter Bikam and James Chakwira, and Pauline Morris. There were also a few contributions that spoke directly to rural concerns such as the paper on land reform by Hannes Lerm, Peter Robinson on the Wild Coast Spatial Development Framework, and Dalia Lichfield on the Niger Delta.

Perhaps there is another way of stating the role of planning within an urbanizing setting such as Africa that avoids the urban-rural dichotomy. SAPI's new brochure has a little adage on the front that may provide a way of speaking that avoids the urban-rural distinction but which provides a focus for planning: *'planning is about creating places for people'*

2. A new confidence in thinking (and theorizing) from Africa

Planning Africa 2006 has provided both strong global and indigenous perspectives on planning. From a global perspective I think, for example, of the constructive lessons we can take from Robert Upton's account of institutional transformation within the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). I think also of Cliff Hague's use of Friedmann's term 'critical globalism', and how Hague emphasized the importance of building a global coalition of planners that could, for example, influence the thinking and decisions of the World Urban Forum to be held in Vancouver in June this year.

We have benefited considerably from the insights of international experience, and have been reminded of the need to respond to the globalization of ideas and agendas, but we have also observed at this conference a growing willingness and capacity to think indigenously. Vanessa Watson's critique of universalism (using the uncritical adoption of de Soto's thesis as her case-study), and her call for a position in planning based on the particularity of context, provides a philosophical backdrop to a number of papers which draw on African experience to reflect on the meaning and role of planning. Paul Jenkins may come from Scotland but he has been immersed in an experience of African urbanism over a long period of time and his insights into land management processes in places where the bulk of the city has little formal connection to formal management systems is deeply contextual. I was also struck by Setsabi Setsabi's paper which draws on a perspective from Lesotho to explore the complex relationship between the rationalities of planners and the livelihood strategies of the poor. He described, for example, how the spatial occupation of public spaces in Africa is a livelihood or survival strategy. Dave Dewar's forceful paper spoke also of urban informality, and the need to understand and build on the vitality and ingenuity of the urban poor whilst a challenging paper by Berrisford, Klug and Ovens addressed the disjuncture between the intentions of planning and the actual realities on the ground.

The most compelling call for theorizing from an African perspective came from MEC Essop (Minister of Development Planning in the Western Cape) in her stirring opening address. For Essop we need to make the final break from a discourse and practice shaped by a colonial past by finding the narratives and practices that respond to everyday life in Africa. She called, for example, for planning to respond to a post-colonial sensibility, to an experience of multiplicity, to informality, and to the level of creativity that resides in the 'chaos' of African cities. She called for an alternative discourse, a counter-hegemony, that would upset established modes of thinking. Essop herself contributed to the emergence of this counter-hegemony by identifying strands of a 'new thinking' that draws from an understanding of our inter-connectedness, from ideas of 'earth democracy', and from a concern with 'liberating the commons'.

The question of how this emergent indigenous theorizing relates to intellectual work received from the North was the subject of some discussion at the conference, and of an insightful paper by Sogen Moodley of eThekwini Municipality.

Whilst the conference revealed a new intellectual confidence in Africa, it may also have suggested a growing willingness to think more boldly in terms of planning practice. Mirjam van Donk's *Cape Town 2025: Daring to Dream*, for example, called for a stronger and bolder approach to urban planning in Africa.

3. The reconnection of planning with the normative agendas of a transforming society

This reconnection resonated sharply in Minister Essop's address where concerns for vulnerable groups (women and the girl-child included), for identity claims, and for addressing poverty, social exclusion, and environmental crises, were at the heart of her vision for planning. Mike Sutcliffe's paper also shared this deep normative commitment - for Sutcliffe, social equity and transformation remain the central objectives of planning. Sutcliffe and others have shown how the *UN Millennium Goals* have helped keep planning (in the global South, at least) focused on a normative agenda. The concern for poverty also came through clearly in the papers by Vishal Ramduny and Tom Wilson.

Interestingly, a concern with the large environmental issues of our time was signified in a number of papers, even if there remains considerable uncertainty as to how planners should respond. Sutcliffe referred, for example, to the Peak Oil debate, which was also the theme of Adrian Masson's paper – a grim picture of a world where oil becomes increasingly scarce and where other sources of energy can provide only partial compensation. The environmental and sustainability challenge, and also its connection to poverty and social exclusion, was the topic of important contributions from Muller, Ramduny, Elford, Saleh, Thierfelder, Shippy, Mader, Mazibuko, Olivier, Hadingham, Maree, Chetty, Sim, and others. It is no exaggeration to talk of the 'greening of planning thought' in South Africa.

The one area where the conference suggested a degree of uneasiness is in the link between planning and participatory democracy. I detected a sense of weariness with participatory process, and also a belief that there is a trade-off between democracy and delivery. De Souza Brigg responded to this when he argued that we can have democracy *and* development, whilst Yusuf Patel spoke of a 'democractic developmental state'. There were a number of papers which provided new insight into participatory process. Nicolene Rose Innes, for example, spoke of the role that story-telling has in stimulating debate.

4. Significant intellectual shifts within planning scholarship in Africa

The papers illustrated at least two significant intellectual shifts or trends. The first is an 'institutional turn' in planning scholarship. This was clearly illustrated in Alison Todes' paper, which drew on the 'sociological institutionalist' approach of Healey and others. Todes distinguished between the hard infrastructure of planning, which includes the roles, tools, procedures, and competencies of planning, which have, traditionally, been the subject of planning research, and the soft infrastructure of planning, or the norms, discourses, practices, actors, and relationships between actors, which are now receiving growing attention.

This institutionalist turn was apparent in a number of other contributions. Landman, for example, focused on the social relations that drive spatial change and Lawrence and Bartel on a Regional Management Approach concerned with building networks of actors. There was also Kamete's paper on the behaviour, thought and culture of planners in Zimbabwe; Paige on the culture of local organizations; and, Odendaal on the ways in which the use of technology is mediated through associational life in African cities.

Secondly, the conference illustrated the emergence of a critical scholarship on planning in Africa. The 'loss of innocence' amongst planning scholars in Africa is an important safeguard against the abuse of planning by power. It is an antidote to a naïve belief in the goodness of planners and the virtues of planning. The critical scholarship includes, for example, Elleh and Edelman's engaging paper on power and political struggle in the Federal Capital of Abuja, Nigeria; Leduka's account of legal struggle and urban development in Lesotho; Kamete's analysis of institutional relationships in Zimbabwe; Chetty's story of sustainable development gone wrong in Durban's Southern Industrial Basin; and also papers by Mwinba and Cleoburg. Kamete cited Amin and Thrift who reminded us that 'the city is as much a means of shutting down possibility, as it is a means of opening it up'.

Thirdly, the conference illustrated a strengthened focus on 'spatial governance'. Papers by Robinson and Elford provided a critical perspective on a new generation of spatial development frameworks; Southworth presented the promising story of Cape Town's Dignified Places Programme and argued for a focus on spatial quality; Gordon and Hansmann, and Madell, reflected on processes in inner-city development; Campbell, and Mammon and Ewing, explored the processes and outcomes of corridor development; Anele Brits critiqued the process of demarcating an urban edge in Gauteng; whilst space and spatial development was also the theme and focus of papers by Landman, Lewis, Stapelberg, Nicks, Hobbs and others.

5. The *disconnections* revealed by the Conference

The theme of Planning Africa 2006 was *making the connections.* In many ways the conference did justice to this theme. It has, for example, brought together private practitioners, public officials, academics and students from across South Africa, Africa, and other parts of the world, and has contributed to the weaving of new and expanded webs of learning and mutual understanding. During the course of the conference many productive intellectual and human connections were made. However, the conference also highlighted disconnections. It revealed, for example, a disconnection between high level strategic thinking in forums within the African Union and our national government, and developments on the ground. Ambassador Duarte questioned, for example, whether political thinking may be moving too quickly. This concern also came through in the Berrisford *et al* paper. A second disconnect was between the progressive discourses of integration, sustainability, livability, and the pressures of delivery and performance management.

A third disconnect is between particular sets of practices. A specific concern highlighted by Todes and others is the complex and often disjointed relationship between planning and environmental management, a disconnection which has serious practical outcomes. Fourthly, there does appear to be a disconnection between urban and rural perspectives. As indicated previously, a number of papers made a forceful case for a stronger focus on urbanization and urbanism in Africa, but there was also a critical response from delegates who come from more rural parts of the country, especially KwaZulu-Natal. There is clearly a need to avoid a polarizing dichotomy. Fifthly, there is a disjunctures between the discourse and objectives of planners, and the strategies of ordinary people. This came through clearly, for example, in the paper by Sarah Charlton, and Berrisford, Klug and Ovens.

Finally, the conference has revealed an at least partial disconnection between the language and concerns of practitioners and of academics. There are 'different languages' being spoken and much is lost in translation. We do have an obligation to find ways of communicating effectively with each other: how may practitioners derive real benefit from the insights that may be locked up in a seemingly obscure academic language, and how may we all tap into the considerable experiential knowledge of planning practitioners? In South Africa there is more cross-over

between communities of scholarship and practice than in many other parts of the world, and so we do have the basis for overcoming this disconnection.

6. A deep-seated anxiety around capacity

Papers and discussion at the conference revealed a deep anxiety around the capacity of planners and other agents to deliver on the new insights and practices that may be emerging. Capacity was spoken of in different ways. Xavier de Souza Briggs, for example, talked of *civic capacity*, or the ability to act together to co-produce change. He argued that the critical ingredient for success is not whether planning is structured in top-down or bottom-up ways but whether the actors at the 'top' and the 'bottom' have the capacity to engage meaningfully with each other. Yusuf Patel linked capacity in planning to the capability of the developmental state whilst other speakers questioned whether the planning profession in South Africa has the capacity to deal with the challenges of an era of rapid growth. Can planning respond meaningfully in a context where national growth rates are approaching 6% and where urban growth rates may be considerably higher? Can planning provide the frameworks for sustainable, quality growth or will planning be increasingly marginalised (as Sutcliffe suggested may be the case)? The challenge of the land market, and of the shift from demand-driven to supply-negotiated delivery was the subject of Ahmedi Vawda's contribution. Other participants observed that planners are struggling to deal with the growing complexity, diffuseness and expanding role of planning, and warned that the human factor may be serious constraint on the ability of planning to deliver on its promises.

7. A pragmatic concern with getting our systems right

Despite the rhetoric of integrated development, there are still many disjunctures and fragmentations in our systems and processes, and a number of the papers explored ways to make things work better. Todes' empirical work on the complex and multi-faceted relationship between planning and environmental management is an example of empirical research that talks forcibly to policy. Patel spoke of the limitations of integrated development planning, and the attempt by government to chart new directions. Steyn and Schoeman provided a critique of ad hoc planning. Nicks and Mancheno-Gren took the debate on urban compaction to the level of detail and practicality: how do we get higher densities and how do we get mobility corridors to work? There were a number of papers which provided guidance on and critique of new methodologies. Claire Goodenough's presentation on a participatory approach economic development planning explored a methodology for translating new ideas into real practice, whilst Andre Brits discussed a method for tracking planning and implementation across regions and institutional boundaries, and Lee Rozenweig dealy with Community Asset Mapping and Mbilisation. Other papers addressed specific areas where planning systems need strengthening. Derichs and Layte, for example, highlighted the linked the link between integrated planning and the budget and provided a case-study of good practice, whilst Dayomi focused attention on financial analysis.

It is critical to ensure that a professional conference such as Planning Africa 2006 deals effectively with the theory-practice interface and papers such as those mentioned above made an important contribution in this area.

Conclusion

I am very aware that I have failed to do proper justice to the many papers presented at this conference, and that my perspective is subjective and limited. There were many other themes that emerged from Planning Africa 2006 – for example, a new and timely focus on Disaster Management which came through in papers by Van Huysteen, Phiri, and Gerrans – that deserve recognition and comment but I hope that these initial reflections will prompt your own deliberation and judgment.

As Cliff Hague has pointed out the timing of this conference is opportune, and could contribute positively to an evolving sets of ideas and practices. Internationally, Planning Africa 2006 happened in the run-up to the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, whilst, locally, the Conference followed shortly after the local government elections, at a time when municipalities were required to begin a new round of local planning, and at the inception of a major new developmental mission, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (Asgisa).

C. CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS : PLANNING AFRICA CONFERENCE 2006

We the delegates to the Planning Africa Conference held in Cape Town from 22 to 24 March 2006, noting the outcomes of the resolutions taken at the Planning Africa Conference held in 2002, specifically

- the successful establishment of the African Planning Association (APA) by the signing of the Durban Declaration by the founding signatories at the first plenary session of this conference;

- the gathering of people here in Cape Town for a second continental planning conference;

- the posting of the Planning Africa 2002 papers on the South African Planning Institute (SAPI) website for public benefit;

- the submissions made by SAPI at the highest levels of government regarding the need to align environmental management and planning practice;

- the interaction by SAPI with government to bring the outcomes of the 2002 Planning Africa Conference to the attention of the NEPAD desks within the African Union, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs and the Development Bank of Southern Africa; and

- the formal submission of the communiqué on "The role of strategic and spatial planning in the development of Africa" attached hereto as Annexure A, to the Department of Foreign Affairs for submission to the Specialised Technical Committees of the African Union,

but acknowledging that

- the "Best Practice" papers have not been forwarded to the local authorities in the country; and that

- the relevant Specialised Technical Committees of the African Union are only now being established,

Hereby resolve :

a) to convene a continental planning conference in 2008;

b) to facilitate, through SAPI as the secretariat of the African Planning Association, interaction between the constituent member organisations of the APA, as well as a meeting of the member organisations at the next continental conference;

c) to feed back through the APA constituent organisations, proceeds and lessons from this conference, and particularly those highlighted in the closing addresses;

d) to adopt the draft Communique based on the outcomes of the deliberations of this conference, as well as a review of the Communiqué prepared in 2002, which was presented at the closing session, and which is attached hereto as Annexure B,

e) to mandate SAPI to submit to the relevant Specialised Technical Committees of the African Union, this Communiqué which captures the principles for planning practice and political engagement arising from this conference, and

f) to mandate SAPI to take the outcomes of this conference to the World Planning Congress and World Urban Forum in Vancouver.

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ANNEXURE B

COMMUNIQUE TWO ON THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC AND SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE DEVELOPMENTOF AFRICA

We, the delegates to the Planning Africa 2006 Conference, meeting at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in Cape Town from 21 to 24 September 2006,

Acknowledging and endorsing the resolutions taken and the communiqué prepared by the delegates to the Planning Africa 2002 conference held in Durban on the role of strategic and spatial planning in the development of Africa, and

Recognising that the Planning Africa 2006 Conference held in Cape Town in March 2006 is an important gathering of planning professionals in Africa, who have come together for the second time to reflect on current planning practice, and

Acknowledging the progress made with the establishment of the African Planning Association, including the signing ceremony of the founding signatories and supporters held during the opening plenary session of this second Planning Africa Conference, and

Mindful that, as much work remains to be done to grow this Association, and

Noting that the founding signatories have committed themselves to jointly build and consolidate the Association in their respective economic regions of Africa, and

Acknowledging the progress made in the implementation of NEPAD, and

Cognisant that the planners of Africa need to engage with government, in all African countries, to proactively, inclusively and actively promote planning as a tool for the implementation of NEPAD, and

Mindful of the need to commit ourselves to this cause, and

Noting the report on the outcomes of this conference presented at the closing plenary session by Philip Harrison, and the presentations made by Sasha Jogi and Pamela Ayebare representing the African Planning Association,

and

Celebrating the recognition of planning as an enabler of Africa's renewal,

*Request, firstly, that the **Secretary General** of the African Union ensures that the resolutions taken at this second Planning Africa Conference are drawn to the attention of the relevant Specialised Technical Committees in order to ensure the promotion and co-ordination of planning in Africa, and*

Request again that the Secretary General ensures that the resolutions of the Planning Africa 2002 Conference are brought to the attention of the relevant Specialised Technical Committees, especially in order that such the African Planning Association might be duly accredited.