



# URBAN CHALLENGES VERSUS THE REALITIES OF THE EVERYDAY PLANNING ACTIVITY AND EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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# SAPER: THE APPROPRIATENESS, USEFULNESS AND IMPACT OF THE CURRENT URBAN PLANNING CURRICULUM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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30 months project – Start date: February 2017

## UK team

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## South African team

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# SAPER...

- Investigate the social and economic value of planning education in South Africa and its challenges
- Assess the current needs of South African planning practitioners (skills and training) and the relevancy with the urban planning HE curriculum
- Decrypt the wider implications for teaching international students in the UK and maximise knowledge transfer opportunities
- First phase of data collection in SA completed with 212 questionnaires collected amongst South African planners. Main areas of queries included:
  - Education level and formation
  - Relevance of training and relationship to professional performance
  - Professional stage, expectations and accomplishment
- Ongoing second phase of data collection (January – May 2018) in key strategic locations (Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, George, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria)

# CONTEXT

- For many years South Africa has modelled its urban planning practices on Western systems, reinforced by the education and training provided to urban planning students in Higher Education institutions.
- Concerns have been raised about the relevance and applicability of these methods when planning African cities (Watson, 2003, 2009).
- Calls for decolonising the curriculum in theory and practice is resonating in current debates while being a very sensitive issue
- Drawing upon SAPER survey's results :
  - 1/ Planning education seems to be sufficiently preparing planners to work as planners in South Africa ;
  - 2/ Half of the planners seem fulfilled by their job;
  - 3/ When asked about motivations behind studying planning, the two largest answers were interest in the subject and desire to change society.

## HOWEVER... SOME MAJOR CHALLENGES

- *“Planning mainly should actually be for public interest but what I’m seeing is that in South Africa it hasn’t done much for that, it is serving a lot of private interests. Looking at the situation even twenty-three years into democracy, not much has really changed. The small changes are there, you can look how things are spatially speaking or access to certain areas for different groups, but in terms of fixing the situation from the way it was in the past, not much has been done. I think the current planners or urban managers are struggling to fix the racial division, segregation the way the cities, they’re structured in South Africa.”*

(SA planning practitioner, 2018)

# KEY CHALLENGES 1

- Heritage of apartheid and very diverse and segregated cities dating back from colonial times (Robinson, 2005; Parnell, 1997)
- Important informal sector
- Severe shortage of urban planners (public sector)
- Different planning systems simultaneously operating
- Political and economic issues
- Critical position of SACPLAN but issues of resources and CPD provision
- Very important cultural and ethnic diversity



## KEY CHALLENGES 2

- There is a perception of race bias in the field, specially from the white population (due probably to recent affirmative actions)

“Not sure if there is a future for a white male in South Africa” (white male, 25-34).

“I potentially see a limited future for myself in South Africa. Due to my race and gender I am unlikely to ever be considered for a meaningful position. Similarly, it is frustrating to work in a planning system not willing to do what a planning system must, which is to create a sustainable future for all” (white female, 25-34).

“Being a white male it is next to impossible to work in the public sector. This limits job opportunities to private sector consultancies” (white male, 25-34).

- On the other hand, still huge ethnic discrepancies in access to Universities for the majority of the population (i.e. black/coloured)

# A CALL TO FURTHER EXPLORE A RANGE OF NEXUS BETWEEN PLANNING PRACTICE / EDUCATION AND URBAN CHALLENGES

- Nexus 1: Adequacy of training
- Nexus 2: Call for decolonization?
- Nexus 3: A highly segregated urban environment
- Nexus 4: Planning for different cultures and balancing formal and informal



# NEXUS 1: ADEQUACY OF TRAINING

- Practical training versus theories hugely debated
- GIS Skills
- Still huge gap between traditional universities and universities of technologies (Technicons)
  - quality of students and training/skills gained

“The purpose of a university is to train people to think. The purpose of the profession is to inculcate in thinking youngsters, how to work and how to do the stuff. (...) There may well be weaknesses in the way theory is taught, there may be a theory being taught that's out of date, there may be all sorts of -- but that's a separate issue.” SA Planning academic 2018

“We were not taught to plan for the environment we would eventually work in - ie South Africa and not a European country. There was insufficient emphasis given to problems such as dealing with conflicts, or making difficult trade off's. The theory of public participation we were taught, suggested it was really quite simple, and in reality it is not”. SA partitionner, 2017

## NEXUS 2: CALL FOR DECOLONIZATION ?

- Significant use and acknowledgement of Global South thinkers in traditional universities
- Rhodes movement is very powerful but also leading to new (and more invisible) tensions
- In parallel: address the need to decolonise individuals' positioning

Regarding “the decolonisation movement as well, I think it’s made lecturers more aware and more cautious about how they convey information and convey theories but I also think it has also created an environment where people are scared to voice their minds or scared to have an opinion, you know if it offends or kind of causes conflict. People seem to be very conflict avoidance, they don’t want to have conflict with the fallist movements or have conflict with the kind of decolonisation movement so there’s this kind of avoidance and it’s unhealthy in my opinion.”

SA planning academic, 2018

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## ▸ Decolonising individual's positioning?

"First World experience. Working with Government Departments that function properly and effectively. For instance used to get response on e-mails within 48 hours of submitting query".

"First world examples of Non Motorised planning and implementation."

"To attain more knowledge and see planning systems in place in "First world cities/countries", compared to "Third world countries/cities)".

"I have wanted to experience working in a developed world to get that experience and replicate the same in my country upon returning".

# NEXUS 3: A HIGHLY SEGREGATED URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- Still gridded urban environments / cities
- Connection between social segregation, spatial segregation with key link with transport 'planning'



“The three words you will always hear is Apartheid and spatial planning. And when someone presents a planning lecture on Cape Town they will normally open up with a slide showing, this is where the majority of jobs in Cape Town are, that’s where we are now and this is where the majority of poor people in Cape Town live.

And the densities and just showing that, you know, for poor people this is not a nice city to live in. It’s actually really difficult, they spend an inordinate percentage of their disposable income on transport to work and (...) this is what we got from Apartheid spatial planning. (...) So even, it’s not just not a white/non-white, it goes down to a cultural of you know, this is your heritage, you’re from a different cultural background. (...) So yah, I think it’s still very much embedded in the psyche of planning”

# NEXUS 3: A HIGHLY SEGREGATED URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- Race, ethnicity and segregation: political and economic decisions versus advocacy planning

“Learning practice, it’s one-sided and I don’t want to say it is because of maybe the racial divide in the country but a lot of interest goes to the rich in terms of class and we know in South Africa in terms of dividing the classes we know the majority of the low or the, what do you call, the low income people or the very poor, they are, the majority they’re Black.

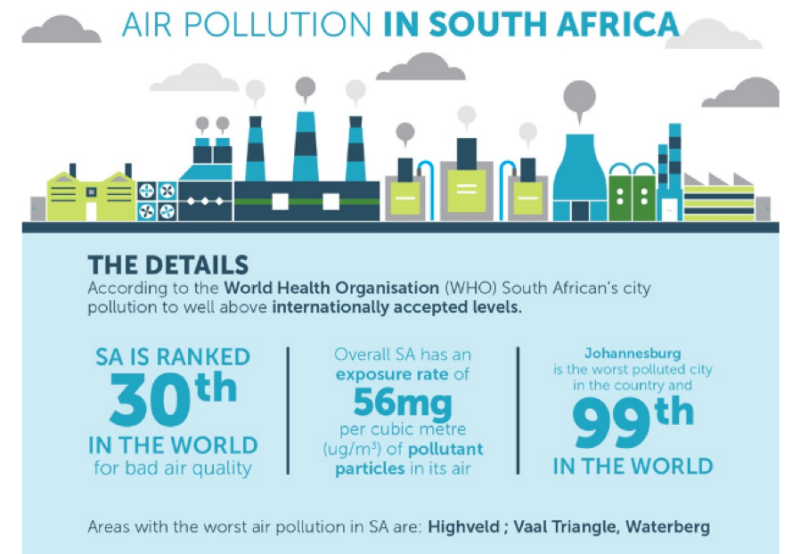
[...] And we know the other side, the rich you’ve got and the majority is White people so I feel like the system somehow continuously favours how things were in the past before we get into this thing of democracy. So for me I feel like in reality (...) there’s the inability of the people that I empower basically to actually make planning work economically and socially for the different groups and balance if they’re in the scale so to speak.”

SA planning practitioner, 2018



# NEXUS 3: A HIGHLY SEGREGATED URBAN ENVIRONMENT

- Features of segregation and legacy of apartheid leading to huge challenges as to address sustainable planning
- “No difference is being made. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The environment suffers as a result of unsustainable planning” - SA planning practitioner, 2018
- “We do not have the leadership role we need in order to be able to deliver sustainable communities and also help deliver the international agreements on sustainable development.” SA planning practitioner, 2018



# NEXUS 4: PLANNING FOR DIFFERENT CULTURES AND BALANCING FORMAL AND INFORMAL

- Not one form of planning but different forms of planning which are location and culture dependent
- Rural # Urban



“Black people have different cultural practices that you can do when you’re in the rural areas but when you come to formalised settlements you cannot practice those activities. For an example, if I’m living in a suburb I’m not allowed to have a kraal in my yard because my stand is small but if I’m in the rural areas then I’m allowed to. So it’s, in that way it’s not addressing the issues of culture”

SA planning practitioner, 2018

In the township when you slaughter, for example a cow, it’s not seen as a transgression, it’s culturally allowed, permissible. But in your more suburban areas as soon as you know you must operate then you stand a chance of facing animal rights prosecutions and all of those things. So the cultural backgrounds that exist within South Africa or the plans base are varied.

SA planning practitioner, 2018

# NEXUS 4: PLANNING FOR DIFFERENT CULTURES AND BALANCING FORMAL AND INFORMAL

- Dealing with and ‘planning’ for informality: issues of understanding its complexity and recognising its role in everyday society
- “I don’t know what planning education can do at this point in time to ensure that as soon as people have, or students have completed their studies, they continue having to do some sort of community work. (...) when you go to mainly your Black townships, planning hasn’t really been regulated in those areas. So you find, you know, spillage, overflows of sewerage or sanitation lines because there hasn’t really been an enforcement of planning in those areas”. SA planning practitioner, 2018
- “I don’t think all planners out of all professions, out of all the programs are equipped to deal with informality. However, I do think that there is a realisation, it must be across the board, that informality is something we have to plan for and with”. SA planning practitioner, 2018
- “There’s a stronger realisation of the innovativeness of informality and how so few resources can create such complex and innovative systems and in fact exciting systems and informality also gives South Africa a different flavour, you know”. SA planning practitioner, 2018

# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

- The future of the discipline and the importance of politics and power relationships

“Planning needs to be a more prominent discipline to get the respect from other professionals and policymakers that will enable them to influence process outcomes more directly.” SA planning practitioner, 2017

“I realize many of comments are concerned more with the politics of my country than planning specifically. The unfortunate reality is that planning in South Africa is mired up in political quick sand and thus cannot be treated as two separate entities.” SA planning practitioner, 2017

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- The need for planning and the timeliness of it

“I think it’s a failure of planning in South Africa and in fact if we, if planning isn’t able to effect proper change in the next ten years I think it’s going to do itself a major discredit to, as a profession, that it’ll lose legitimacy essentially in the country” SA planning practitioner, 2018

- Different priorities and urgencies: environment versus social – not ready to talk about Climate Change (?)



# THANK YOU

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