



PLANNING BETWEEN POWER

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The inability to plan for and manage urbanisation is compromising the potential of many cities to be the facilitators of prosperity

“The City is the Home of Prosperity. It is the place where human beings find satisfaction of basic needs and access to essential public goods. The city is also where ambitions, aspirations and other material and immaterial aspects of life are realized, providing contentment and happiness. It is a locus at which the prospects of prosperity and individual and collective well-being can be increased.”

This is what the United Nations-Habitat says on its website as an introduction to the 2012/2013 State of the World's Cities report.

The importance of cities is well recognized for the opportunities they bring to residents and societies in general but the research undertaken by UN-Habitat indicates that the inability to plan for and manage urbanisation effectively is compromising the potential of many cities around the world to be the facilitators of equitably shared prosperity.

The theme set for this 51st ISOCARP congress - “Cities Save the World. Let's Reinvent Planning”, is therefore very important and relevant. It suggests, as the UN-Habitat research does, that better planning will be the catalyst or savior for positioning cities as the platforms for prosperity. But is it the reinvention of Planning that is required as much as the Reinvention of the way planners operate within the political and power dynamics of the societies in which they are located?

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Planners have to start addressing root causes of problems and confront the forces that undermine growth, equity and sustainable development.

Planning has been under reinvention for some time but it has been undermined - What about Planners?

The fact is that Planning has been under reinvention for some time. In my home country South Africa for example, a new post-apartheid strategic and participatory planning paradigm of integrated development planning has been well established since the mid-1990s. Much of this was aligned to the global paradigm shifts towards sustainable development encouraging more holistic and locally sensitive approaches combining the economic, social and environmental pillars of development.

Taking into account the deeply divisive past with its embedded spatial segregationist policies and practices there has been massive developmental progress in South Africa since the dawn of democracy in 1994. This progress is marked in terms of investment in infrastructure, access to basic services and housing, rising income levels including a growing middle-class, and significant social safety nets for the poor covering almost 30% of the population or some 16 million people. Yet the task of spatial transformation for planners to help create truly integrated communities and more functional and efficient towns, cities, neighbourhoods and rural areas is huge. This will require much more political-technical alignment, deeper collaboration between social actors, and more serious engagement between state and capital on long-term strategic planning and land development and utilization.

As far back as 2006, the Global Planners Network presented a position paper supplementing the Vancouver World Planners Congress declaration entitled: "Reinventing Planning: A New Governance Paradigm for managing Human Settlements". The paper called for a more proactive way of addressing urbanisation indicating that according to current trends (2006) by 2020 some 45-50% of the world's urban population will be living in poverty, that is a staggering 1,6 billion people. This more proactive way of addressing urbanisation is referred to as New Urban Planning which according to the paper means "being proactive, focused on sustainability, and making the connections between people, economic opportunity and the environment".

The globally set Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are all located within this new paradigm. Indeed there has been significant progress world-wide in reducing poverty and increasing access to basic services. But the challenges in terms of unemployment and inequality (especially income inequality) are still too huge and the need for building competitive, inclusive and sustainable cities are enormous. Progress in this regard is limited it seems, but why is this so in an age where there is abundance of information, knowledge, learning exchanges, and innovation?

Worse still, many parts of the world are wrecked with instability and hyper conflict. Extremism and militarism from all sides seems to be on steroids. How do we even talk of Cities saving the world to the children of war torn areas? What is happening with global politics? Are we capable of creating global peace and stability as the forerunner for competitive, inclusive and sustainable cities? How and when will we embrace the fact that we have a common destiny as humanity? We have a common home – Planet Earth. When will we start living the legacy of Nelson Mandela and embrace dialogue, negotiation, multilateralism, multi-culturalism, diversity, sharing and engagement?

So planning has been under reinvention for some time at both a theoretical and practical level but has been undermined at the practical level due to heightened contestation around resources and development. Planning has also been under threat from conservative political and market forces.

Contestation for political power linked to electoral cycles often overrides long term planning and resource commitments. Contestation between sectors and departments often compromises a focus on priority issues and integrated outcomes. Similarly the contestation between state and capital is seldom rationally managed around visionary spatial transformation and development. In many cases the lure of investment and lobbying by developers or investors triumphs inclusive development objectives without consideration for proper cost-benefit analysis.

Planning & Prosperity vs Narrow Economic Growth

The lure of investment at all cost is often driving what the UN-Habitat State of Cities Report refers to as a narrow focus on economic growth. The report posits that a narrow focus on economic growth has compromised the prosperity of city residents and calls for a new way of measuring success. It introduces the City Prosperity Index that focuses on five things that successful cities ought to provide. These are (i) Productivity, (ii) Infrastructure Development, (iii) Quality of Life, (iv) Equity and Social Cohesion, and (v) Environmental Sustainability.

In this framework we cannot any longer do either or. We have to make competitive, inclusive and sustainable cities at the same time in a cooperative and negotiated way because of the interdependencies and systemic linkages between growth, equity and sustainability. But we have to apply it in context to the different trajectories of developed and developing countries. The nuances, emphasis, and application of different elements will differ across different countries. The way cooperative and negotiated processes evolve will also differ based on the traditions and dynamics of different societies. Informal and indigenous knowledge and cultural systems have to be acknowledged, embraced and built into a fabric of mutually reinforcing coexistence with modern institution building.

Many developing countries are faced with the opportunity for economic growth whilst at the same time having the opportunity to make new cities or revive or

restructure their cities. The narrower focus on economic growth in developing countries coming off a low economic base is often driven by the pressure of change whilst building institutional capacity at the same time to nurture and create broad-based outcomes. It is not ideal but it is the reality. There are never perfect conditions before markets and economies take off, or before low earners want to progress in the market.

As Firoz Khan suggests in his paper “Contemporary Statecraft for Sustained and Sustainable Growth” that was presented at the 2012 Planning Africa conference – the road is often made while walking. The ‘good governance’ agenda can place an undue bureaucratic burden on developing countries further impacting negatively on inequality by slowing growth. The developed world in many cases never had these “rigidities” as they grew their economies and generated collective wealth. The consolidation of modern states in Europe took close to a millennium to play itself out.

Arguably today with all the growing accountability measures and world standards placed on developing countries, true accountability is still lacking and sustainable development outcomes and long lasting solutions remain elusive.

The City Prosperity Index nevertheless is critically important and provides a compelling organizing framework for growth and development of cities, and for Planners both in developed and developing counties as they meander between the idealism and realities of development.

What influence are Planners having on the way Cities are developing?

The State of the Cities report makes two important points about urban planning. First it states that modern urban planning has failed to “nurture shared socioeconomic advancement”, it has been unable to address the challenges of urbanisation including environmental consequences and integration of the urban poor into the socioeconomic fabric of the city.

Second, it states that whatever the planning approach, powerful political and economic interests keep interfering with the design and implementation of strategic plans and the pursuit of urban prosperity for all.

It prompts the following questions. What influence are Planners having on the way cities are developing? Are Planners primarily influencing change or is change (good or bad) being driven by a multiplicity of other forces? What is the balance of forces that determines the way different cities get positioned, or not, as competitive, inclusive and sustainable spaces? What are the balance of forces between state and market led development?

Planners in this context refer to the practitioners and professionals (You and I) engaged in spatial and land development planning and management with the aim of

seeing to the structure, form and functionality of cities as a bedrock for economic competitiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability.

We should be asking ourselves three critical questions:

1. How are we assisting or contributing in converting the location or comparative advantages of our cities into competitive advantages?
2. How are we making cities more inclusive?
3. How are we making cities more sustainable?

The biggest issue confronting Cities is the creation of affordable living. Affordability enables inclusion which is necessary for sustainability.

How is Planning Positioned? For the State, Against the State or Part of the State?

There must be recognition that Planning does not happen in a vacuum and neither is Planning neutral. It is always in advancement of an interest. This ought to be the noble interest of promoting the public good but is often challenged or even subverted by various opposing and divergent interests. Are planners playing in the real-politic of city-making or merely in the shadows of power? Or even, are Planners part of the ideological framework of the States that they operate in? Others would argue are States these days clear about what they want to achieve and what needs to be prioritized? There is often a huge gap between ideological or policy objectives and practice.

Neither are Planners all the same driving a common agenda. The role and interventions of Planners are shaped by where they are located and their own outlooks be it political, ideological or philosophical. Planners themselves operate in the public or private sectors often driving opposing objectives. Planners also operate at different scales from street level and neighbourhood scales to city-wide, regional, national and even trans-national scales.

The economist, Thomas Piketty, in his book “Capital in the Twenty-First Century”, challenges economic determinism and makes the point that political forces, factors and choices drive levels of equality within countries. It can similarly be argued that levels of competitiveness or of spatial equity and inclusivity within cities can be influenced more robustly by political consideration and choices. When Planning works as a rational part of the vision creating and choice making process then there is a better chance of higher quality outcomes? In many countries it seems that Planning is working as a technical activity aside from the political decision-making processes. Why is this so, and how can it be remedied?

Jabulani Sikhakhane makes the point in the title of his newspaper article (Sunday Times, South Africa, September 6 2015) - “Economy? It’s the politics, stupid”. He state that, “policy reports are useful, but does anyone in power ever follow them?” He questions the way economists present arguments and solutions to politicians. As

sound as they are, often they do not take into account the political context and landscape within which decisions and tradeoffs have to be made.

This echoes the daily complaint of many Planners who don't find traction for the reports, innovations and suggestions put forward to people in leadership of cities. Planners, like the economists, are often not heard. Why is this so? Unless Planners can go beyond offering professional advice and solutions, and make such solutions amenable and workable to political realities, it will be difficult to extend any sort of influence. Besides, if planning is not fundamentally contained as an instrument for the ideological advancement of State objectives with regard to positive spatial change and transformation then there is a serious problem and this seems to be the case in many developing countries. How do we locate Planning at the center of governance and political decision-making?

In the current global context and especially in developing countries the role of Urban/City/Town & Regional Planning and the role of Planners in shaping cities is less clear. Unless Planning is politically supported with strongly embedded progressive values and located as an anchor in mediating the multiplicity of forces shaping cities, it can only tinker at the margins in respect of resolving the big issues – creating equity and prosperity in the urbanized future that is unfolding globally.

The reinvention of Planning or rather the reinvention of Planners is an important process in evolving from the roots of modern urban Planning towards more complex notions of Planning in the current context of Power relations where different forces and interest are shaping and vigorously contesting change in our cities. These forces are in the form of state, market, capital, technological, and ecological. There are numerous nuances within and between each of these categories. In addition there are private and personal interests across these categories that often cloud the waters. Pursuance of the public good is often relegated against expediency factors, and worse still when it is relegated against narrow or personal interests.

Planning Power

So Planners in the 21st century have no choice but to be immersed within the power dynamics of the societies they operate in to make great cities that work for all who live in them. As acute as the traditional technical planning capacity constraints are in developing countries - as the inaugural African Planning report of the African Planning Association indicates - this traditional capacity alone is insufficient which makes the challenge even bigger. The current dynamics in many developing countries requires Planners with capabilities that can robustly influence the mobilization and shifting of resources towards sustainable development, and with capabilities to mediate and meander through powerful interests. This requires Planners that have advanced capabilities in cost-benefit analysis and investment appraisal, property and land development economics, spatial and land analytics, and strong communication and negotiation skills.

Planners have to engage Power in three areas: (i) Professional Power – Planners have to influence multi-disciplinary processes and lead spatial change taking a holistic and integrated approach; (ii) Political Power – Planners have to influence decision-making amongst government (politicians and officials) and a variety of social actors; (iii) Community Power – Planners have to work at community level empowering people to know and organize their local areas better and to drive spatial change and improvements themselves.

Cities in the developing world are becoming places of increasing intensity and contestation due to rising urbanization. Will our cities become inclusive and sustainable spaces of excellence and prosperity or will they resemble segregation, mediocrity and poverty?

The answer to this question partly depends on the extent to which leaders across the public and private sectors are prepared to rethink and reimagine the role and function of cities. How do we get cities to function better for the mass of people living and working in them? How do they remain affordable to live in and move around in? How do they become more integrated and how can public space making be better activated?

All this points to the preparedness for doing long term planning and strategic investment aimed at the development of a more people-based, integrated and ecologically driven built environment. It also points to new ways of governing that shifts from control to citizen-based regulation and development of neighbourhoods, trading places and public spaces. Cities have to engender vibrancy and expression of diverse voices. They have to be beacons of cultural progress and opportunity. They have to enable the development of their residents from the perspective of their lived circumstances and realities.

Are Planners relinquishing their Power? And why? Facilitators or Shapers? Preferred Future Makers?

City Planning has become too vague a function over the years under the guise of integrated approaches. The roots of planning being the spatial/physical elements have been overshadowed. It has to be reclaimed since it is the physical structuring of our cities, the physical land use and rights allocations, and the regulation of the physical space that in a large part enables economic competitiveness, inclusivity and sustainability. It goes without saying that it has to be done in a people-centered and economic development facilitation manner rather than in a development control form. In fact it should proactively and rigorously facilitate inclusive and ecologically driven growth and development. And it has to be done well if we are to position cities better especially in the developing world.

The way spaces and places are organised and connected is a key ingredient for economic success. The form, organisation and connectivity of spaces and places enables the physical manifestation of economic strategy and determines the extent of productivity, opportunity and equity that the City will offer.

Spatial governance and planning shapes the land markets. If done right it protects land value, creates new value and increases value. It must also distribute land value equitably by directing where and how public and private sector investment ought to manifest spatially.

Spatial transformation in developing countries must be aimed at providing the physical structure for a new modernized and technological economy and for a modernised industrialisation programme. Planning must facilitate this through smart and fast processes, and through a more realistic notions of Cities as multi polar and multi nodal sophisticated urban systems and complexes.

The main role of Planning going forward will be a catalytic one to position the developing Cities for rapid economic growth and development, focussed on sustainable prosperity for all.

Planning approvals must be streamlined for faster mediation of interests and assessment of development impacts. Spatial frameworks, for example, ought to grade environmentally sensitive areas and detailed assessments should be required only for development applications in highly sensitive zones.

More importantly, Environment should be treated as a key resource for development and economic growth. There has to be greater emphasis on sustainable engineering solutions and urban management.

City Planning is often led by professionals with backgrounds in engineering, organizational development, architecture and management consulting, etc. They all add tremendous value, no doubt, but often without taking a holistic systems approach to city development, and ensuring that the natural and built environments are synced into dynamic and vibrant living and movement spaces for people. They also often do not consider more definitively the future demand and needs and the implications on space, densities, movement capacities, infrastructure carrying capacities, and ecological carrying capacities to sustain human life. In this regard the connectivity of cities to their wider regions is often not fully appreciated or considered. How do cities receive/generate and sustain their bulk water and power requirements, how do they project future demand and integrate innovative means and technologies to meet long term needs. How do they ensure access and affordability to services and decent housing in integrated neighbourhoods or mixed-use zones?

A range of factors including the macro and micro economic policy environments and efficiencies are crucial for the success of cities but it is the spatial structuring and management of the built environment that gives cities the competitive edge, the attractiveness and the livability. Do we not need to refocus on the founding elements of urban or town and regional planning – the spatial/physical elements of designing and managing living environments that enable integrated sustainable

outcomes *or* what we commonly refer to as, economic, social and environmental coagulation and harmony.

Place-making (places made **with** and **for** people) is **the** success factor in converting the comparative advantage of a city into a competitive advantage.

The anticipated new economy and new opportunities must be the driver and the centrifugal force around which the spatial restructuring of Cities has to be based.

Technology and innovation offers massive opportunities for reorganising and restructuring the economy so that the children and youth of today will be engaged as productive players and socially caring and conscious citizens.

The economy of the future will not be one where the value of production is an end in itself but where all production is subservient to generating well-being for all. This will be the basis for what I term the “replacement” economy where everything that is produced today will be questioned and improved or replaced with a better way of production. This will drive new production value chains that considers the life cycle of produced goods, the environmental impact of the goods, and the health consequences for users and society.

Healthy, high quality living will have to be the determining factor in reorganising production value chains generating new opportunities for jobs and relieving the massive health, social and environmental costs for government. Creating sustainable communities, and investing in community infrastructure and urban services itself will be a factor of production. The quality of life provided is a competitive advantage for Cities and must be managed more explicitly as an economic factor and not just as a social issue.

Repositioning of Planners

Planners must regain the center stage with respect to City Making – be shapers and future makers, not mere facilitators. Planners must lead and enable the following?

1. Create and Instill Values of “Planetism” – Bigger Purpose. “Unified World”. Common Humanity and Destiny. Without inclusive Values how can we make inclusive places?
2. Embed a Vision driven culture - Facilitate Preferred Future Making drawing on the work of Peter Ellyard contained in his book: Designing 2050 – Pathways to Sustainable Prosperity on Spaceship Earth.
3. Focus on core competence – spatial planning and land use management. Enable competitiveness, inclusivity and sustainability of places.
4. Prepare Master plans and associated engineering that must be framed more definitively (developing countries) – skeletal system and superstructure of the city – enable more organic and innovative and creative place-making within this framing.

5. Facilitate, mediate, and create solutions out of strategic, professional, technical, and community knowledge – systems and networks of innovation operating within a bigger cooperatively framed city system.
6. Mission-driven positioning of the city: convert comparative advantage into competitive advantage through inclusive and ecologically driven place-making (inclusive equals sustainable): Promote and create access, affordability, and fit for purpose and resilient places.