Change and Continuity in Spatial Planning

Metropolitan planning in Cape Town
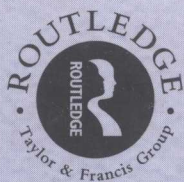under political transition

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Metropolitan planning in Cape Town under political transition

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Change and Continuity in Spatial Planning

Change and Continuity in Spatial Planning addresses a question of enduring interest to planners: can planning really bring about significant and positive change? In South Africa the process of political transition appeared to create the preconditions for planners to demonstrate how their traditional humanitarian and environmental concerns could find concrete expression in the reshaping of the built environment.

The requirement that the segregated apartheid cities be restructured, reintegrated and made accessible to the poor was high on the agenda of the new postapartheid government, even prior to their election. The story of how planners in the metropolitan area of Cape Town attempted over the last decade to address this agenda is the subject of this book. Integral to this story is how planning practices were shaped by the past, in a rapidly changing context characterized by a globalizing economy, new systems of governance, a changing political ideology, and a culture of intensifying poverty and diversity.

More broadly the book addresses the issue of how planners use power, in situations which themselves represent networks of power relations, where both planners and those they engage with operate through frames of reference fundamentally shaped by place and history.

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Preface

I returned home to South Africa from London in 1980, giving up the struggle between the desire to escape the horrors of apartheid and the desire to contribute in some way towards its demise. These were tumultuous times in Cape Town. Organizations of resistance were beginning to find their feet. Civic groups, squatter movements, trade unions and women's organizations were beginning to meet and campaign openly, and in return were attracting the wrath of the government.

As an urban planner, located within a university research institute, the scope for my involvement was wide. Planning and spatial intervention, at both urban and regional scales, were key tools of the apartheid government in their attempts to manage racial segregation. Access to the city and issues of settlement within it became prime areas of contestation between government and opposition movements. For those planners who aligned themselves with the opposition movement there was work to be done. Civic organizations demanded information: was a proposal to upgrade an informal settlement likely to benefit them, or was it a forced removal in disguise? Was it true that land for new low-income settlement was not available close to work opportunities? Was a move to increase public housing rents really justified, or were fund surpluses being hidden within the municipality? Was a reorganization of local government simply another attempt to legitimize racially defined organs of government and disenfranchisement? Endless meetings with community organizations in back rooms of township houses or in dilapidated community centres formed the night-life of those of us who chose to use our skills in this way.

And so a politics of resistance to particular urban interventions became a central plank of grassroots organizing. There was less concern here, understandably, with the form which an alternative to the apartheid city may take. For most community activists, involved in day-to-day evasion of security police, running street battles, or hastily organized meetings, thoughts of what they might do should they be in a position to control the shape of the city were remote indeed. But for planning academics within the University of Cape Town, removed from the immediate heat of battle but nonetheless deeply concerned about the future of the city, this was a central issue.

Through the late 1970s and the 1980s a position on an alternative city form

emerged through publications of the Urban Problems Research Unit of the University of Cape Town. It was a position which embodied principles of spatial equity, access and integration. It drew on the international (and particularly European) exposure of its main protagonists to urban forms which appeared to work well in other contexts. It was essentially a spatial vision, strongly informed by the design philosophy of the architects and planners involved. But its rhetoric, which posed integration and equity in opposition to separation and exclusion, was inevitably ignored by most government decision-makers involved in shaping the city.

This was to change dramatically at the end of the 1980s. Cape Town was in crisis, large township areas had been successfully 'rendered ungovernable' and Nelson Mandela walked to freedom. For the first time I and my colleagues were able to put the case for an alternative city form in official circles, and be heard. As the new ANC government came into power in 1994, it appeared, moreover, that the need to restructure the apartheid cities had been recognized at the highest level. The central ANC policy document, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, supported far-reaching public intervention in the urban realm. Ideas about creating equitable, integrated cities had found their way into this document and into new planning initiatives in the other major cities of South Africa. This was surely the time, many of us felt, that positive planning ideals could find concrete expression and demonstrate their ability directly to improve the lives of those previously marginalized and excluded.

It was not to be. Six years have passed, and Cape Town has certainly changed, but not in the direction that we perhaps naively hoped for. Today I can visit the vast new malls and theme parks (reachable only by car) in the north of the city and well away from the poverty and squalor of the townships and informal settlements. I can walk through the city centre, now clean, policed and under camera surveillance, courtesy of the new Business Improvement District initiative. I am far more reluctant to penetrate the townships and informal settlements than I was in the 1980s. Crime has spiralled out of control. In coloured townships such as Manenberg, gangs (linked to international syndicates) vie with local authority structures, controlling the allocation of public housing and collecting the rents. The sea of tin and plastic shacks in the metropolitan south-east, once seen as evidence of the apartheid government's failed attempt to control migration to the city, is still there and has grown. Recent workshops for councillors and officials to debate a metropolitan vision placed tourism promotion and global positioning as their top priorities. The metropolitan spatial planning process, born in the euphoria of the early days of transition, is now on hold.

The choice for me seemed to be either to give in to disillusionment, or to regard this as a potential learning experience. This book, which traces the rise and fall of metropolitan spatial planning in Cape Town during the 1990s, represents the latter. I remain convinced that the ideals which began this journey are right. There has been much to learn about the problems of simplistic spatial thinking and the dangers of imposing abstract ideas on a context not properly

understood. But as many planners before me have undoubtedly discovered, understanding the inextricable linking of planning and power has to form the foundation for anyone wishing to take this journey further.

Vanessa Watson
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Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
CAHAC	Cape Areas Housing Action Committee
CBD	Central Business District
CMC	Cape Metropolitan Council
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LDO	Land Development Objective
LUPO	Land Use Planning Ordinance
MDF	Metropolitan Development Framework
MDF-CWG	Metropolitan Development Framework Co-ordinating Working Group
METPLAN	Metropolitan Planning Agency
MOSS	Metropolitan Open Space System
MSDF	Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework
MSDF-CWG	Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework Co-ordinating Working Group
MSDF-SWG	Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework Statutory Working Group
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSMS	National Security Management System
PDF	Progressive Development Forum
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RSC	Regional Services Council
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANCO	South African National Civics Organization
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TMS	Transitional Municipal Structures
UDC	Urban Development Commission
UPRU	Urban Problems Research Unit
WCCA	Western Cape Civics Association

WCEDF   Western Cape Economic Development Forum
WCHDA   Western Cape Hostel Dwellers Association
WCRSC   Western Cape Regional Services Council
WECUSA   Western Cape United Squatters Association

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Introduction

South Africa in 1994 was a place of great promise, for many. A relatively peaceful transformation from authoritarian rule, based on the ideology of apartheid, to a liberal democracy had been achieved, and the ruling majority party, the African National Congress (ANC), espoused a policy of equality and democracy. For those spatial planners both within and outside government structures who had supported these ideals, it appeared as if planning could at last shake off the shackles of apartheid and begin to play an important role in building a new and better society. New ideas about spatial planning (not too different from what is now known as 'new urbanism' and the 'compact city') were gaining increasing acceptance in professional planning circles, coinciding with a demand that the towns and cities divided by racial and spatial segregation now be restructured, reintegrated and made accessible to the poor (RDP 1994). If ever the time was ripe for spatial planners to demonstrate that their traditional humanitarian and environmental concerns could find concrete expression in the shaping of the built environment to these new ends, it was during South Africa's political transition.

This book is about how one of these efforts,[1] the production of the Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (MSDF) for metropolitan Cape Town, came into being. The story of the MSDF is a lengthy one, spanning ten years of the political transition, and is one which reflects, in the various stages of its unfolding, many of the dynamics occurring both in national political negotiating chambers and on the streets of Cape Town itself. The book is also about change and continuity in efforts to promote spatial planning at the city scale. One of the most remarkable aspects of the MSDF story is that while so many facets of both the planning process and the product represent a significant break with the past, many other facets demonstrate the constraints to change in the realms of ideas and forms of practice. The period is marked by a shift from the enforcement of racial and spatial segregation through 'blueprint' planning, to an approach to planning aimed at urban integration and redistribution, and thereafter to a view of planning as integral to 'global positioning' and 'entrepreneurial' government. However, the persistence of a modernist planning philosophy provides continuity to these planning efforts. At the same time as change appears to be the defining aspiration of present planning, it also appears to be extremely difficult to achieve.

Planning is about change: either through its attempts to prevent change and preserve the status quo, or through efforts to induce change and bring about improvements, however these may be defined. A process of political or economic transition offers a unique opportunity to understand more closely the role of planning in change. This is because a transition process involves rapid and far-reaching societal change in which all kinds of fluidities are brought into being, and in which a great deal, particularly in the realm of government policy, must be reinvented to suit the new and emerging society. It is a time in which planners, the forward thinking professionals, can potentially make their mark. The extent to which the spatial planners of Cape Town's metropolitan authority were able to seize this opportunity, and the ways in which they were trapped in continuities both of their own making and those inherent in society and economy more generally, forms the fabric of this book.

South Africa's political transition

A prime factor propelling change in South Africa in the last decade has been the political transition to a liberal democracy. This was coupled with the increasing insertion of the South African economy into a globalizing international economy, giving rise to what may be considered a 'double transition'. The magnitude of these transitions may not equate with those experienced by countries undergoing a shift from communist and totalitarian regimes (such as many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe), but nonetheless, compared to the relatively stable political economies of most developed and even many developing countries, change in South Africa in the 1990s was indeed dramatic.

Political transition theorists have identified three stages which appear to characterize events in countries shifting from authoritarianism to a liberal democracy. Stepan (1986) describes these as Reforma, in which limited reforms are undertaken by the ruling authoritarian government; Reforma-pactada, in which reform is worked out with the democratic opposition; and Ruptura-pactada, in which there is a rupture with the past, negotiated with the opposition. South Africa in many respects represents a unique case of political transition (in no other context has the authoritarianism of the outgoing government been racially differentiated in quite the same way as it has been in this country), but various writings on the political transition have used Stepan's three phases as a framework within which to examine the sequence of events experienced in this country.

In South Africa, the beginnings of Reforma have to be sought in the mid-1970s, when a resurgence of conflict between government and opposition forces prompted the government to mount a large scale militarization of white society, as well as new initiatives aimed at co-opting sections of the African and coloured population. By the mid-1980s, growing economic recession and international censure of apartheid, together with local protests and violent confrontations with the police, prompted limited political reforms, a softening of

the laws which controlled the free movement of African people, and improvements in material living conditions for those considered essential to the 'white' economy. The growing strength of the opposition movements in the late 1980s within a context of increasing economic stress and political division, and the apparent inability of tactics of either reform of repression to quell the upsurge of violence, paved the way for a negotiated political settlement, or Reforma-pactada. Significantly, however, the government of the day entered these negotiations from a political position which was seriously challenged, but not defeated. The ruling National Party had been able to maintain an effective system of administration, security and defence (although these had been successfully challenged in many urban African townships), a highly developed, if regionally uneven, system of infrastructure and communication, and an operational system of tax collection and welfare for at least part of the population. The Party also retained cautious support from elements of capital and, in the first democratic elections of 1994, showed that it had the support of 20.4 per cent of the total electorate. It retained the ability, therefore, to be a powerful player in the negotiation process and to influence the path of reform significantly.

The opposition movement, in the form of the African National Congress (ANC) and its alliance partners, the powerful labour movement (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), historically had strongly socialist leanings. However, negotiations were occurring at a time when the collapse of the Soviet Union and the east bloc discredited left economic policy, and ensured that the prime international players in the transition were the United States and its allies. Inevitably, 'the price these powers demanded for disciplining the apartheid government and extending promises of material aid to the ANC was a commitment by the ANC to embrace western-style free-market principles' (Webster and Adler 1999, 369).

Analysts of the South African political transition debate the extent to which the process was shaped by elite negotiators, or by the extensive mass action which was occurring outside the negotiating chambers (Saul 1991). Przeworski (1991) has suggested that peaceful political transitions are usually negotiated by reformers from the authoritarian bloc and moderates from the prodemocracy opposition, who rein in more radical opposition groupings.[2] They seek a suboptimal solution that nonetheless allows themselves and society to survive (Adler and Webster 1995), and as such, Przeworski argues, the ensuing pact is 'inevitably conservative, socially and economically' (1991, 98). In the context of South Africa, the negotiations were highly conflictual and repeatedly threatened to derail, but in the end compromises were made on both sides. The ANC's original draft economic policy was revised to the extent that when it finally emerged, in the form of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, it was eagerly adopted by all political parties and by business. And in the negotiation process, the ANC conceded to the important 'sunset clause' which safeguarded the positions of existing civil servants. The possibility of both economic and administrative continuity was thereby greatly strengthened.

The extent, therefore, to which the first democratic elections of April 1994 represented Ruptura-pactada, or a break with the past, has been questioned. Clearly a break of some significance had been made, and the obtaining of full political rights by people of colour was not without importance. It is also possible to point to a new constitution regarded as progressive in world terms, new policies in almost every field of government, major institutional reorganization and important new legislation, particularly in the realm of labour. But the continuities (particularly in terms of the economy) are there as well. In fact in the years following the 1994 election, macro-economic policy has shifted closer to a neo-liberal position, and an emphasis on economic growth has replaced the previous concern with redistribution.

Part of the problem with political transition theory is that it is able to offer limited insight as to the nature and causes of the dialectic of change and continuity in times of transition. With its focus on events at the national level and on elite pact-forming processes, there is little concern for how change is, or is not, taking place at the level of lower order institutions and bureaucracies or within civil society more generally. While significant decisions may be taken by pacting national elites, which indeed impact on the course of history and on people's everyday lives, it is not possible simply to 'read off', or predict from these events, what the dynamics will be beyond the negotiating chambers. The impacts and implications of these decisions depend heavily on how they are received, used, interpreted, or ignored within the multiple and complex networks which make up society. In turn, the path taken by a transition process is fundamentally shaped by broader local and international political and economic milieu, and by collective actors outside the process, all of which provide a constraining set of possibilities for the individual actors within it (see Howarth and Norval 1998).

The Cape Town metropolitan planning process, which forms the subject of this book, was taking place concurrently with political transition in South Africa, and it is clearly evident that these events impacted on the planning process. However, understanding such a planning process requires an unpacking of how these events articulated with the dynamics of existing and long-standing local institutions (which in turn had shaped and been shaped by a wide range of regional – Western Cape – specificities) and with the particular philosophies, personalities and ambitions of the planners involved in the process. In this sense, the book aims to provide a view of transition from below, rather than above. This in turn requires the drawing on of alternative theoretical frameworks to help explain processes of change and continuity.

No account can be simple description. The values and perspectives of the writer are critical determinants of what questions are asked, what material is chosen for presentation, and what interpretations are made of events. The relationship works in the other direction as well: the empirical material throws new light on theory and concepts and renders them more or less useful. I now turn to the conceptual informants which helped my telling of this story.