

Ideas, philosophy and personality in the history of Kwazulu-Natal's Town and Regional Planning Commission

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1997 is likely to mark the end of an era for planning in KwaZulu-Natal.

The provincial government is hoping to put in place legislation by the end of this year which would replace the forty-five year old Town and Regional Planning Commission with a new Planning and Development Commission. For the existing Commission it is a time of introspection: what contribution did the existence of the Commission make to planning and development in KwaZulu-Natal between 1951 and 1996? What kind of difference did the Commission make? How can its contribution be explained? Such questions give rise not to meaningless reminiscence, but speak directly to the present. The first piece of post-apartheid planning legislation, the Development Facilitation Act of 1995, provides for planning commissions in both provincial and national spheres of government, and there is serious debate as to the potential roles which such commissions might play. Deconstruction of the historical practice of planning can play an important role in informing current debates.

The emphasis of this paper, however, is not on the contribution of the KwaZulu-Natal Commission to creative planning in its province - a contribution which we believe to be considerable. The history of the Commission can be explored from a number of angles and, indeed, many different histories could be written. This particular paper focuses on the individuals whose actions, ideas and philosophies shaped the development of the Commission, albeit within the constraints of the broader institutional, economic, political and social environment. Although a large number of personalities contributed to the history of the

Commission there were a few whose contributions were decisive and whose ideas and philosophies came to dominate the collective thinking of the Commission for long periods. The paper divides the history of the Commission into three broad periods, the forties and fifties; the sixties and seventies; and the eighties and nineties, and explores the development of planning ideas and activities in the hands of particular personalities in each of those periods.¹

The individuals referred to in this paper include Commissioners and senior staff serving the Commission (as well as a few significant outsiders). It will be noted that the individuals

¹ This paper draws on a study into a history of the Town and Regional Planning Commission (TRPC) commissioned by the TRPC and undertaken jointly by Alan Mabin and Philip Harrison. The full findings of this year-long study are to be found in a report entitled *Imaginative planning with practical considerations? The contribution of the KwaZulu-Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission to planning and development, 1951-1996* which was submitted to the TRPC in March 1996. We are grateful to the TRPC for their sponsorship of the study. It is indeed unusual for a planning authority to sponsor an externally conducted review of its own history. It should, however, be noted that any views expressed in this paper and the interpretations of history contained herein are those of the authors alone. We are also grateful to Melinda Mc Mann, Andrew Ferindinos and Anthony Werkman for the many days spent in the Natalia Archives working through the minutes of countless Commission meetings and subject files; and to the many individuals who contributed to the study through lengthy interviews.

most mentioned in this paper (i.e. Eric Thorrrington-Smith and Ron Pistorius) were officials and not Commissioners. It is true that the influence of these key members of staff extended way beyond the influence of individual Commissioners. However, the role of these officials cannot be understood apart from the existence of the Commission. It was the presence of the Commission as a quasi-autonomous body and the support of the Commissioners that provided planning officials with a level of autonomy within the bureaucracy that enabled them to undertake planning that was arguably more innovative and successful than in the other provinces.

The formative years: the 1940s and 1950s

Key personalities

Two leading political figures in the former province of Natal played a key role in the unfolding events leading up to the establishment of the Town and Regional Planning Commission in 1951.² The first was the Administrator of Natal, George Heaton-Nicholls: he appointed the Post War Works and Reconstruction Committee (PWWRC) in 1943, which (in its the ninth report) recommended the establishment of a planning commission. The second was Douglas Mitchell, the first appointed chairperson of the PWWRC and later Administrator of Natal and longstanding and controversial leader of the United Party in the province. Mitchell, in particular, was familiar with the reconstructionist thinking in the UK that took shape during World War Two and with the idea of a commission as an instrument of public reconstruction. As will be shown, a significant feature of the embryonic planning in Natal in the

period was a strong English influence.

Immediately after the second world war the provincial administration created a town and regional planning section, and with the help of ex-Administrator Heaton-Nicholls, by then High Commissioner in London, sought to recruit a 'Provincial Town and Regional Planner' in England. The successful candidate was Eric Thorrrington-Smith, who moved to Pietermaritzburg in 1946. He had apprenticed to the planning firm of WR Davidge in London in 1930, when town planning schemes were founded on the 1919 British legislation which also provided the basis for town planning sections of the South African provincial ordinances passed in 1927 (Cape), 1931 (Transvaal), and 1934 (Cape and Natal).³ Thorrrington-Smith increasingly worked on regional plans for the 'home' counties around London, such as Middlesex, which included at that time parts of the greater London complex as well as smaller towns and rural areas. He saw himself as following a career as a county planner, a position which under the 1932 and 1943 legislation meant amongst other things, district planning for the county and supervision of town planning in the towns. On his slightly early return from active service in 1944, he found himself immediately involved in the development of applications of Abercrombie's Greater London Plan.⁴ Ideas drawn from this experience formed strong influences on Thorrrington-Smith's contribution to Natal planning - a large contribution given that he began as the sole experienced planner employed not only by the province but by any public authority in Natal. Such concepts, along with his impressions of the power of regional planning drawn from his reading of works on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) came with him to Pietermaritzburg and infused his contribution to shaping new planning institutions.

A second planner who studied in London

² For an account of the creation of the Commission see S Brooks and P Harrison, Pietermaritzburg vs Pretoria: the creation of the Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission and the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board, in Planning History Study Group, *People, Places and Planning - Symposium Proceedings 1994* (University of Pretoria Department of Town and Regional Planning for Planning History Study Group), vol.2 pp. 208-239.

³ A Mabin and D Smit, Reconstructing South Africa's cities? The making of urban planning 1900-2000, *Planning Perspectives* 12 (2) 1997 pp. 193-223.

⁴ cf. Patrick Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan 1944* (London: HMSO 1945), esp. pp. 168-171.

immediately after the war, worked in London and later returned to exercise a powerful impact on planning activity in Natal was Ron Pistorius, who began work under Thorrington-Smith in 1949; after the departure of Thorrington-Smith in 1969, Pistorius directed the staff of the Commission. After demobilisation, Pistorius had persuaded the South African authorities interested in study opportunities for returning service people to fund his passage to England, together with his wife, rather than sending him to a South African university. However, arriving in London, he secured employment with the London County Council and studied part-time in the planning course offered at the Regent Street Polytechnic.⁵ Pistorius's work involved 'trying to turn the County of London Plan into a practical thing', and together with several other young planners he walked the streets of several boroughs south of the Thames in the attempt to sharpen the 'soft focus' of the published plan. Uncertain to begin with as to whether he would return to South Africa, he missed promotion and eventually opted for a job at Stevenage Development Corporation in 1947 where he remained for a year, physically drawing the master plan. He returned to South Africa in 1949 to take up a position as deputy to the Provincial Town and Regional Planner in Natal.⁶ The fundamental analysis of the problems of London contained in the County plan, as well as the Stevenage experience, influenced Pistorius's thinking for a long time to come and was also to exert an important influence on the Commission.

Thorrington-Smith was clearly the dominant personality in the 1950s, although the Commission chairpersons of the time, TM Wadley (1951-1954) and Dr GC Scully (acting between 1954 and 1965) were forceful characters. In the office, Thorrington-Smith was supported by two assistant directors: Pistorius for regional planning; and A.J Dakin (later professor of planning at Toronto University) for town planning (1950-1955), followed by M.J. Rosenberg (1955-69). The research assistant was G.A.T. Davies who had the

unlikely background of a colonel in the British Indian army.

Other individuals who played an important role in the Commission were the researchers sponsored by this body. A major focus of the Commission's has been the promotion of research and the Commission has, arguably, played an important role in the scholarly development of a number of personalities who were to become prominent academics in the province and in South Africa at large. In the early years, the Commission's research programme was largely shaped by Thorrington-Smith who was enthusiastically supported by Lt. Col. Davies. Dr. Scully - a Commissioner with strong links to the University of Natal - was an important facilitator, whilst Prof. Burrows - head of the university's Department of Economics - was a valuable advisor to and collaborator with the Commission, until his transfer to the University of Fort Hare in 1958.

Dominant Ideas

The first idea of importance was that of establishing a planning commission - a body of persons from outside government who advise and decide on a range of planning issues. While Natal's Town and Regional Planning Commission was to take unique form in the South African context, the planning commission was a common institutional form in the United States during the first half of this century. With reference to the USA, Burnham (1992) explained the rise of the planning commission in terms of a particular understanding of the role of planning and the nature of cities.⁷ This was the idea of the city as an organism with interdependent parts that needed to be understood as 'a whole' and of planning as a comprehensive and synthetic activity able to develop the interconnections between the diverse elements of a city or region in a way that local politicians or line function bureaucrats could not. As will be shown, this understanding was shared by the early Natal planners.

⁵ R. Pistorius, interviewed by A Mabin, 22.01.1992 and 19.03.1994.

⁶ R. Pistorius, interviewed by A Mabin, 22.01.1992 and 19.03.1994.

⁷ See Robert Burnham, 'Planning versus Administration: the Independent City Planning Commission in Cincinnati', in *Urban History* 19 (1992), pp. 229 - 250.

In Natal, the Commission may also be construed as an attempt on the part of the ruling Natal elite to maintain a measure of independence from Pretoria - something still evident in KwaZulu-Natal politics today. The existence of the Commission allowed a body of people appointed from outside government to consider planning issues and policies, giving weight to ideas and concepts perhaps readily dismissed elsewhere, and providing what can best be described as 'greater consideration' to the planning process.

Almost as soon as he had arrived from England, Thorrington-Smith was called in by the then Administrator Douglas Mitchell and instructed to carry out the recommendations of the Post-War Committee regarding the overhaul of the 1934 Natal Town Planning Ordinance - under which very little planning had actually been done. His instructions included the establishment of the Commission.⁸ The draft Ordinance made provision for a Commission consisting of between three and seven members appointed by the Administrator. Mitchell initially conceived of the Commission as consisting of provincial officials but Thorrington-Smith, with his experience of British planning, was concerned that the Commission would operate too far in advance of public opinion and successfully argued for commissioners appointed from outside government structures.

It may seem remarkable, even ridiculous, to the observer in the 1990s that so much effort should have gone into the creation of vehicles which self-consciously set out to reshape society - a large-scale attempt to develop a 'scientific' approach to 'modernising' the province. But during the second world war, these were views which held wide currency in all the Allied countries. The defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan was associated with a vision of a new world in which the planned use of resources would be turned to a better future, just as had occurred with the prosecution of the war. An era of comprehensive rationality seemed to dawn, and in the South Africa of the period, the creation of advisory and planning commissions seemed to fulfil the need to create institutions

which could carry forward this vision.⁹ This reconstructionist ethos was, however, to fade, and even before the end of the war, it was clear that the ambitious visions for post-war planning would never be realised in their entirety. The Commission, for example, was not to have the autonomy and powers that were originally hoped. Nevertheless the status of planning in Natal was much enhanced by post-war reconstructionism.

The Commission finally came into being in 1951, under the 1949 Natal Town Planning Ordinance. Its terms of reference made it primarily an advisory body to provincial government, but it also had limited roles in the approval of development and in the conduct of research. Once established, the work of the Town and Regional Planning Commission proceeded on the basis of a particular philosophy of planning, an understanding of the Commission's role and its appropriate approach, and a changing set of planning ideas and methods. The Commission's own view of itself - of its philosophy, its procedures and its contribution - suggests one of the key differences between the Natal planning environment and those of other provinces throughout the period from 1951 to the present. It is frequently agreed among observers that the Commission created a particular ethos. The considered approach on the part of the Commission which followed from an adherence to a particular philosophy had another important consequence: the formation of policy statements which allowed both the Commission and planning officials to exercise a large measure of consistency in decisions on applications and in commentary on local plans and other matters.

Fortunately for researchers, the development of planning philosophy, ideas and methods became an openly discussed and debated process, a record of which exists in the Commission's papers. Many of these philosophies and ideas were simply imported from abroad - through the agency of men

⁸ Interview with E Thorrington-Smith, by P Harrison and A Mabin, Pietermaritzburg, 29.05.1994.

⁹ Paraphrased from P Wilkinson, A discourse of modernity: the Social and Economic Planning Council's fifth report on *Regional and Town Planning*, 1944, in Planning History Study Group, *Proceedings of the Symposium on South African Planning History*, Pietermaritzburg, 1993, pp. 239-279, esp. p. 248.

such as Mitchell, Thorrrington-Smith and Pistorius - but others (e.g. urban segregation) were more indigenous in origin.

It is possible to discern two core influences from other parts of the world which greatly influenced the Commission's planning when it first began. These two sources of thinking lay in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) experience in the USA, and in regional planning in Britain in the pre- and post-war period.

Eric Thorrrington Smith, who had joined the British forces fighting against Nazism in Europe fresh from his apprenticeship as a planner in London, read Julian Huxley's book *TVA Adventure in Planning* while waiting to be demobilised in Ostend, Belgium, at the end of the war.¹⁰ This book described a great regional planning initiative that was part of Roosevelt's New Deal.¹¹ Thorrrington-Smith was inspired by the TVA experience, and continued to be so for the rest of his career. Thus, on his arrival in Natal in 1946, it is scarcely surprising that he should have sought to identify areas which might lend themselves to treatment at least resembling the 'New Deal' approach to the Tennessee Valley. His interest was encouraged by Douglas Mitchell, the Administrator, who had read similar literature on the TVA, and shared Thorrrington-Smith's enthusiasm for such regional approaches and public planning roles. The identification of the Thukela Basin and certain other areas in the province soon followed, and the influence of these international ideas persisted for decades after the Commission's establishment.

The TVA as a model for regional planning complemented a developing philosophy of planning which drew on the work of the social ecologists. Ideas of evolution and ecological

communities, developed in the natural sciences during the latter half of the nineteenth century, were metaphorically transferred to the social sciences during the early twentieth century, and were brought to the field of planning by the pioneering regionalists Patrick Geddes and his intellectual successor, Louis Mumford.

Mumford outlined this philosophy when he stated:

Every living creature is part of the general web of life: only as life exists in all its processes and realities, from the action of the bacteria upward, can any particular unit of it continue to exist... Organisms, their functions, their environments: people, their occupations, their workplaces and living places, form inter-related and definable wholes.

For Mumford, modernity had displaced the social equilibrium of the traditional society and planning was required to restore order:

For lack of the conscious plan, the empire of muddle arose: a maximum opportunity for social conflict and cross-purposes and duplication of effort and a minimum means of achieving collective order.

It was through regional planning that the collective integration of the disparate elements of society could be secured and it was in the work of the TVA that these early regionalists saw their thinking being applied:

In the Tennessee Valley a basis can be laid, not merely for a more efficient industrial order, but for a new social order, and a new type of urban environment, provided the requisite courage and social imagination are collectively brought to bear.... The river valley has the advantage of bringing into a common regional frame a diversified unit: this is

¹⁰ E Thorrrington-Smith, interview with A Mabin and P Harrison, Pietermaritzburg, 29.05.1994.

¹¹ Prior to the depression of the thirties the Tennessee valley had been regarded as the poorest region of the United States, despite its rich resources of water, timber, and agriculture. The TVA was set up under federal legislation in 1933 and its successes caught the attention of planners everywhere.

essential to an effective civic and social life.¹²

So it was that in social ecology, regionalism and the practical example of the TVA that Natal planners found inspiration and a coherent philosophy. It was, however, in the thinking of South Africa's philosopher-Prime Minister, Jan Christiaan Smuts, that Natal's pioneering planners found a South African version of the broad philosophical approach. Smuts' concept of holism can be crudely captured in the adage, 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. The application of this philosophical concept to regional planning comes through clearly in a 1961 statement by Thorington-Smith:

The justification of regional planning lies in the concept that regional development comprehensively planned can comprise more than the sum of its parts. Unco-ordinated activities in different parts of the region may not lead to such beneficial results as the same expenditure of money and effort could produce if directed as part of one plan or policy for the region as a whole.¹³

These theoretical underpinnings are also clear in the Commission's *Second Report on the Tugela Basin* (1960) which was the culmination of the regional planning undertaken in the 1950s and which stated that:

The justification for regional planning lies in the concept that regional development, comprehensively planned, can

comprise more than the sum of its parts.....' (p.26).

Social ecology and holism - two motifs which emphasised the interconnectedness of all matter - fed a focus on comprehensiveness, both in analysis and in planning. In his model of planning methodology (the survey-analysis-plan sequence), Geddes stressed the need for comprehensiveness, with the survey 'ranging from geology and climatology through communications and manufacturing to population characteristics and urban conditions.'¹⁴ Situated within this tradition, the 1960 Tugela Basin report referred to the need for a 'comprehensive picture of the region' (p. 24) and argued that 'the essence of the regional planning concept is to envisage development in its entirety' (p.26). There was, however, one curious blind spot in the work of Natal's regional planners; the lack of consideration given to the social and political dimensions of regional development. This, despite the commitment to comprehensiveness and a belief in the interconnectedness of all dimensions of life.¹⁵

Apart from reference to comprehensiveness, the Commission also presented its regional planning as 'scientific' in approach. First, there was the idea that planning applied the laws of nature (particularly as evident in the study of ecology) to the urban and regional context. Then, there was the belief that the planning procedure and the planning techniques used, for example, in the Tugela Basin study, could be scientifically validated. As Muller points out, Geddes drew his survey-before-plan method from the diagnosis-before-treatment medical analogy and could therefore be viewed as a crudely positivistic view of scientific method.¹⁶ The only significant analytical technique used by the Commission in its regional planning was sieve analysis (also derived from Geddes). The Tugela

¹² Louis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938) pp. 302, 314, 323, 374.

¹³ Thorington-Smith on 'The Planning of Undeveloped Regions', in File 33, (Commission) Meeting 121, 23/8/61 in the provincial government's archives, Natalia Building Pietermaritzburg. Note that, unless otherwise stated, original documents referred to in this paper are housed in these archives and are referenced here in terms of file number, meeting number and date.

¹⁴ J Muller, From survey to strategy: twentieth century developments in western planning method, *Planning Perspectives*, 7 (1992) p. 127.

¹⁵ D Scott Brown, Natal Plans, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* May 1964 Vol. XXX No. 2 pp. 161-166.

¹⁶ Muller, From survey to strategy, p. 127.

Basin report referred to this technique as 'a process of objective analysis unaffected by the enthusiasm or apathy of local sentiment' (p. 127). Clearly, in the 1950s, planning was regarded as an activity to be undertaken through scientific means by experts who understood the complex interrelationships within the organic whole that made up society and nature. However, it should be noted that the more sophisticated application of scientific method to planning - associated, for example, with regional science and the work of Isard - bypassed the Commission as Natal planners remained firmly rooted in the thinking of the early ecologists.

Another major international influence on planning in Natal at the time of the drafting of the Ordinance and the establishment of the Commission lay in British planning experience and ideas. As in most once-British colonised environments, there have long been direct connections between government and planning in Britain and the practice of planning in South Africa. At the turn of the century, the experience of working in the London County Council shaped Lionel Curtis's powerful role in creating local government and establishing early planning practice in the Transvaal, especially Johannesburg, for example; and other Britons played direct roles in early formal planning in the country, such as Albert Thompson in the planning of Pinelands (Cape Town) in the twenties, and Longstreth Thompson, partner of Thomas Adams and Maxwell Fry, in the first town planning schemes in Johannesburg and other parts of Gauteng in the thirties.¹⁷ Developments in planning ideas in Britain around the time of the second world war were well-known to several Natalians interested in planning, including Mitchell, who was familiar with the ideas and recommendations of the trilogy of Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt reports (on industrial distribution, rural land and compensation and betterment) which shaped planning thought in Britain during the period. The London experiences of Thorrington-Smith and Pistorius strengthened this influence.

However, it is important to note that town planning ideas and planning practice continued to alter in Britain, with significant changes occurring just as Thorrington-Smith set out on his career in Natal. Town planning schemes were replaced by a more flexible approach to local planning under the Labour government's Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 - while South African practice remained based on the earlier British model. And, while in London it became increasingly legitimate 'to regard both the Abercrombie plans ... as "castles in the air" to be treated as pointing to the ideal rather than as programmes for practical action'¹⁸, these ideas found application in the Durban context. Thorrington-Smith, faced with the rapid growth of population and the ruling political demand for segregation, produced Greater London-like proposals for a new decentralised development at the Umlazi mission reserve to the south of the city. In this case, however, the town was to be entirely for occupation by Africans, and obviously matched the desire for segregation on the part of white politicians both at city and national levels.¹⁹ One could argue that these 1948 proposals took their legitimacy in planning terms from the widespread approval of the approach of the Greater London Plan as well as its metropolitan status in a semi-colonial situation.

The focus on slums, 'muddled' use of land, lack of open space and the traffic problem that captured much of the urban planning attention in Natal during the decades after the war largely reflected the dominant concerns of British planning in the 1940s. The idea that neighbourhood units existed and could be fostered within already built up space, and were not simply to be seen as new things to develop in new layouts, proved powerful too, as did the notions of rings of density and relationships between overcrowding and open

¹⁷ A Mabin, The Witwatersrand Joint Town Planning Committee 1932-1940: of rigour and mortis, *Planning History* 15 (2) 1993.

¹⁸ Young and Garside, *A History of the London County Council* p. 248.

¹⁹ Report on the Possible Urbanisation of the Umlazi Mission Reserve, Durban by the Provincial Town and Regional Planner, Natal (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Provincial Administration, May 1949).

space.²⁰ The Umlazi Master Plan prepared by Thorrington-Smith - with its neighbourhood units, village centres, neighbourhood parks and green belt - is clearly reminiscent of British New Town planning immediately after the war.

The Commission's commitment to the neighbourhood planning approach is also clear in a 1957 policy statement:

in planning the extension of a metropolitan area such as Durban one of the most fundamental objects must be to ensure that the metropolis consists of a series of live and balanced communities in which strong local loyalties and associations are developed and not an amorphous mass of housing with a sporadic sprinkling of shops, schools and other facilities.²¹

The influence of Abercrombie is also evident in a 1959 statement by Commissioner Bennett urged 'limiting the lateral expansion of the city by the establishment of a permanent green belt'.²² As with regional planning a strong spatial/physical focus inherited from Britain limited consideration to social and other dimensions of planning. An exception was the Commission's efforts to protect the threatened Indian community at Clairwood. This neglect of the social was also a feature of the Commission's research programme during this decade which focused primarily on natural resources that were important for industrialisation.

The approach to industry of the County plan as well as the Greater London plan not only influenced thinking about metropolitan areas in Natal, but in some respects were carried almost

unaltered. Ideas of dispersed nucleation at Compensation and Cato Ridge drew on this theme in the 1960s and 70s, and are still present in aspects of planning. The concrete results are visible in the decentralised Hammarsdale industrial area thirty kilometers from central Durban and the associated Mpumalanga residential township - a further example of the important if perverted legitimacy which key ideas from British planning lent to apartheid planning during the fifties and sixties, since Hammarsdale is a 'border' industrial area and Mpumalanga, a former KwaZulu township.²³ Though other proposed decentralised industrial areas such as Compensation on the north coast of Natal have never materialised, this approach lasted for decades, and is still being developed in Cato Ridge today

Throughout the history of the Commission, it has facilitated the entry of international ideas into planning in KwaZulu-Natal. This flow has occurred with Commission support to individuals who have studied abroad, access to documents from abroad, study tours, and specific reports or inputs by individual visitors. However, during the 1950s, as the Commission established its approach and style, there was a contraction in adoption of newer ideas, though staff frequently drew the Commission's attention to discussion in the international literature about matters such as shopping centre planning and estate layout.²⁴ International contacts included attendance by Thorrington-Smith at conferences abroad, such as one in London on regional planning and development in 1955.²⁵ However, the emphasis in such contacts was on spreading the Tugela Basin work abroad, and rather less on gathering new approaches and techniques to contribute to the work of the Commission. Whilst the Commission developed its own style and approach to planning, however, the country of which Natal formed a part

²⁰ J.H. Forshaw and P. Abercrombie, *County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan, 1943); E.J. Carter and E. Goldfinger, *The County of London Plan Explained* (London: Penguin Books, 1945), pp. 8, 9, 26, 29.

²¹ F 20, Mt. 78 11/12/57.

²² F 23 Mt. 91, 11/2/59

²³ For a rare engagement on interconnections between South African decentralisation and planning ideas in other parts of the world, see TJD Fair, *The Metropolitan Imperative*, Inaugural Lecture, Witwatersrand University, 1972.

²⁴ F9, Mt 40, 11.08.1954 & F26, Mt 101, 09.12.1959.

²⁵ F13, Mt 52, 10.08.1952.

witnessed the gathering implementation of apartheid.

Apartheid and the work of the Commission

Given the close match between the life of the Commission and the existence of a government at national level committed to the internationally condemned ideology of apartheid, the question begs answering: to what extent were ideas of apartheid and urban segregation infused into the work and thinking of the Commission?

Working in the spatial planning field, the Commission could not escape a connection with apartheid planning, and there were times when the Commission played an initiating role in such planning (e.g., racial zoning for beaches). However, there were also occasions when the Commission worked to ameliorate the effects of apartheid planning; and it occasionally made protests against certain group area removals.

By the time the Commission held its first meeting in 1951, the Population Registration and Group Areas Acts were already in being. As early as the end of 1951 the Commission had been instructed by the Provincial Secretary to consider how it would contribute to the implementation of the Group Areas Act in Natal, acting as the Natal Provincial Administration's agent in relation to what became known as the Group Areas Board. In general, the Commission tried to limit its role in this sphere to one of commentary and attempted alteration of proposals put forward by others, mainly the Group Areas Board and its planning committees. Behind this engagement lay a general acceptance at least of the inevitability of group areas, and perhaps on occasion of their desirability. Broad acceptance, even support, for racial segregation was tempered by a degree of compassion for those threatened with forced removal and dispossession. Indian Traders particularly came in for some attempted protection from the Commission.

In one extraordinary case the Commission tried to prevent - possibly with some success - the destruction of a long-standing area of predominantly Indian residence in Clairwood, Durban. Here in the 1950s, the Commission found

itself reluctantly siding with the vociferously anti-apartheid Natal Indian Congress (NIC) against the Durban City Council. The City had zoned Clairwood - a mixed use area including a lower income Indian community - for industry. The NIC appealed to the Commission for protection. Despite reservations, the Commission found that the representations of the NIC were 'not without foundation' and the Commission became involved in a protracted dispute with Durban City Council in support of the NIC.

Just as with group areas, the Commission had to consider its role and relationships in regard to the racial planning functions of the Department of Native Affairs. One of the major roles of that national Department which had enormous impact on Natal, was the removal of Africans from rural areas which government deemed 'black spots' and their relocation to reserves. The Commission's attitude to these processes is not clearly discernible in its records, except for the occasional expression of regret that the separation of planning by the Commission from the Department of Native Affairs meant that planning was 'haphazard' and from time to time there was a dispatch of memoranda to the Department calling for 'coordinated planning'.

The other central government attempt at spatial ordering at regional scale was the industrial decentralisation (or border industrial location) programme. As indicated above, although this programme followed international trends in regional planning, it was linked to the state's attempts to establish economically viable ethnic homelands and control the influx of the African population into the cities. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Thorington-Smith or the early Commissioners shared the same motivations as central government planners, the first chief planner did see aspects of apartheid-based policy as providing opportunities for the development of Natal. In particular, he identified central government's policy of border area development as a means to promote the industrialisation of the Tugela Basin.

The Commission's general attitude towards apartheid could perhaps be summarised as one of some distaste, but lacking strong hostility, given the extent to which a racially-segregated model of

the use of space underlay almost all planning throughout the apartheid period.

A perceptive commentator on the Commission's work wrote more than thirty years ago:

The authors of these reports [i.e. on the Tugela Basin] must be aware of this fact [of apartheid] (who in South Africa is not!) yet are in a situation where little good and much personal suffering may come of speaking. Their dilemma is that in order to be able to plan at all they must say less than they know and plan less well than they can.²⁶

The 1960s and 1970s: Continuity and Change

Personalities

As South African's society and economy changed in unprecedented ways in the 1960s, the Commission too saw important alterations. The important change in terms of personalities was the departure of Thorrington-Smith from the Commission's staff in 1969 following a period of underlying tensions as to the direction that the Commission should take; while Thorrington-Smith remained resolutely committed to the Tugela Basin and other regional planning work, Pistorius and others were increasingly oriented to metropolitan planning. Although the idea of the Tugela Basin - so central to Thorrington-Smith's vision - remained associated with the Commission, it was certainly no longer a central concern. Thorrington-Smith lamented that the Commission 'had dropped the Tugela Basin like a hot potato'²⁷

With Pistorius' elevation, Tony Little, who first joined the Commission staff in 1961, became head of the regional planning section. Little's influence in regional planning and research became very evident in the following years. Unlike

Thorrington-Smith, who had a strong concern for the promotion of industrial development, Little was an environmentalist who saw industry as potentially damaging to the natural resource base of the province. Barry Anderson, who also joined the Commission staff in 1961, replaced Rosenberg - who departed to private practice with Thorrington-Smith - as head of the town planning section. In 1966, R Bennett replaced Scully as chairperson of the Commission. He is remembered today as a very able chairperson with a strong interest in planning.

After Thorrington-Smith left the Commission he worked on the planning of Richards Bay which he has described as 'a peach of a job'. He also established a strong relationship with the government of KwaZulu and focused on the development of the KwaZulu homeland where he could continue planning for decentralised development.²⁸

Although the 'old guard' - with its strong roots in the philosophy and ethos of the Commission described above - remained dominant, the rapid expansion of staff numbers during the 1970s brought a new generation of planners to the service of the Commission. This was a decade of dramatic political developments. The Soweto uprising in 1976 is commonly cited as watershed in South African history which forced white South Africa to confront uncomfortable realities. After 1976, there were young planners on the Commission's staff such as Bruce McCormack who voiced social concerns and gave increasing attention to matters such as community participation in planning.

In 1960s the dominant research themes were natural resource utilisation and economic development (primarily industrial location). Prominent academics associated with the Commission at the time included: Prof. J. Phillips, Mr. L.P. McCrystal and Prof. Owen Horwood while in the 1970s researchers who were to achieve some prominence in later years included Professors J Butler-Adam, M. Kahn and G. Maasdorp, as well as G. Begg, M. Sutcliffe, J. Pickles, and R. Schulze.

²⁶ D Scott Brown, *Natal plans*, p. 165.

²⁷ E. Thorrington-Smith interviewed by A Mabin and P Harrison 29.05.94.

²⁸ See, for example, Thorrington, Rosenberg and McCrystal's 1977 Plan for KwaZulu.

Philosophy and ideas

The themes and approaches of the 1950s were generally carried forward into the 1960s, although there were significant changes in emphasis and nuance. Most important was the shift away from the regional planning exemplified by the Tugela Basin study towards metropolitan planning. This was, however, merely a shift in emphasis as the development of the Tugela Basin was still quite vigorously promoted.

In terms of town planning, the Commission's thinking throughout the 1960s changed little from planning ideas imported two decades previously. Natal planning in the 1960s closely reflected British concepts of town planning drawn from before rather than after the second world war - concepts in part discarded even then in Britain, and of dubious applicability in Africa, even Natal.

Towards the end of the sixties, as pressures mounted for planning proposals for the region (and its components), the various metropolitan and regional planning committees that has been set up began to investigate alternative models. However, such different models were contentious. Was Durban to be guided in the direction of concentration or nucleated dispersal in its development?²⁹ Or was industrial development to be encouraged much further away? Different staff members held very different views on these questions. The influences of the British metropolitan planning tradition and of national policy were strong enough to ensure that there was uniform opposition to concentration and support for decentralised industrial development elsewhere in the province, but deep division existed between 'dispersal' and 'decentralisation' schools of thought. To some extent these differences were expressed as growing opposition between the views of Thorrington-Smith and Pistorius, with the former supporting decentralisation and the latter dispersal of development closer to Durban. Towards the end of his time at the Commission, Thorrington-Smith became interested in a new approach, the 'linear city' model of Doxiadis; but

after Thorrington-Smith left provincial service in 1969, and Pistorius's view prevailed.³⁰

In the 1960s, in Commission circles, the idea of 'planning as science' and 'objective truth' was even more strongly stated. For example, it was common to refer to planning as the 'application of scientific principles'.³¹ The Commission was scathing of the work of other agencies, particularly at national level, whilst arguing that its own planning was scientific and of the highest international calibre.³² However, while the Commission used the discourse of science, much of the positivist revolution passed it by, and with it newer quantitative techniques.

In the urban context, processes of retail decentralisation presented a challenge to the Commission's views of urban order. By the early 1960s, the Commission was facing the first applications for suburban shopping centres. The Commission decided early on to support this 'modern trend', preferring controlled shopping malls (referred to then as the 'supermarket concept') as a desirable alternative to scattered commercial development intruding into residential areas. The Commission continued to reject mixed use development and was, for example, unhappy at the diversity of landuse along Durban's Grey Street.³³ The Commission did not react favourably to a consultant's suggestion that the city is an indivisible economic unit and should not be divided into separate zones.³⁴ Clearly, whilst the Commission was prepared to accept new trends developing internationally (e.g. the decentralised

³⁰ R Pistorius interviewed by A Mabin, Pietermaritzburg, 22.01.1992 and telephonically 19.03.1994. See also E Thorrington-Smith, Pietermaritzburg-Durban Regional Guide Plan: an alternative approach - open-ended linear development, unpublished paper, April 1975 (available in the Library of Physical Planning Division, Natal, and Durban Public Library).

³¹ F 31, Mt. 114, 8-2-61.

³² F. 35, Mt. 130, 11-5-62.

³³ Mt. 242, Item 10.2.

³⁴ F 45, Mt. 153, 8-5-64.

²⁹ F56-7 Mt x 1966.

shopping centre), it did so within a framework which emphasised the importance of spatial order and control.

In the 1960s, there was the first tentative explicit recognition of social concerns. The social problems faced by the Indian community were raised in Pistorius's *North Coast Survey* and the needs of Indians were addressed in a number of subsequent research projects. There was, however, no direct consideration to the needs of the African community. There was also no recognition given to the need for public participation in planning.

Nationally, the 1970s was the decade in which the dream of Verwoerdian apartheid was abruptly shattered and the government made the first tentative moves towards reform. Internationally, the 1970s also marked a turning point in planning. Social conflict challenged the comfortable consensus within planning. It was increasingly difficult to argue that planners were the guardians of a common public interest. In the 1970s, fiscal crisis brought many ambitious planning programmes to an end while disillusionment with the effects of planning (e.g. inner city redevelopment) brought a cynicism which contrasted sharply with the high ideals of the previous decade. While these changes would inevitably affect the work and role of the Commission, its response was slow: it saw its role in the 1970s essentially as a continuation of its activities in the previous decade. It failed, for example, to recognise and to address the significance of the growing informal urban population in areas such as Inanda.

Thus there is a sense in which the 1970s was a lost decade for the Commission. There is little evidence that it was willing or able to meet the increasing challenges or even that it was aware of the extent of the deepening problems. Also, emerging new approaches to planning had little effect on the work of the Commission. After 1976, there was perhaps a slow filtering of awareness through to the Commission and, as indicated, younger planners did begin to voice social concerns, but little was done to address the issues. By the mid-1970s there was also an explicit recognition of the need to introduce some level of public participation into planning; but again little was done in practical terms.

1979 seems to have been the year when the Commission finally gave at least limited recognition to the social and economic concerns that had begun to trouble some white South Africans after the Soweto uprising of 1976 and the nationwide township unrest which had continued thereafter. This is evident in the theme of two of the research projects proposed during that year: 'the economics of creating job opportunities in the peripheral townships of Durban' and 'urban planning in relation to social concerns'. The latter project, undertaken by Di Scott, was to play a significant role in broadening the perspective of the Commission.

Metropolitan planning provided an important theme in the Commission's work from about 1960 to 1975. In the later seventies and early eighties the dominant themes were environmental conservation and planning for recreation. The environmental theme was strongly pursued by the increasingly influential Tony Little who was strongly influenced by the 'founding ethos' of the Commission, as is indicated by his 1973 statement: 'we are sensitive to strong interrelationship between the land and the streams and the need for the co-ordination of all development within a river catchment ... so that our catchments are developed as a unit from their sources to the sea'.³⁵

It was in planning for recreation - through racial beach zoning - that the Commission most directly collaborated with the implementation of apartheid. However, by the late 1970s a new approach to recreation planning was beginning to take shape. The Upper Tugela Recreational Axis study, for example, was to give recognition to the link between recreational development and social upliftment. However, the ensuing years did not provide a return to the tranquil environment under which the Commission had originally entered the field of recreational planning.

There is no evidence to suggest that planning in Natal came under significant criticism from the public in this decade as occurred internationally but there were subtle criticisms which began to shift the style and focus of planning. In the 1960s planners such as Thorington-Smith had made

³⁵ Address by AM Little, 7/5/1973 Mt 278, 10/2/73.

much of planning being a science. But, in the 1970s there was less confidence in the scientific base of planning; planning had not brought everything that it had promised and there were some instances in which planning had patently failed. A member of the Natal Executive, Mr. Watterson, went some way in demystifying planning when he stated in the Provincial Council that, with planning 'there are certain scientific principles involved, but it is as much an art as a science together with certain basic principles that you involve yourself in ... there are very few planners that have the same idea as what the right thing is to do'.³⁶

1980s and 1990s: Decline, uncertainty (and renewal?)

The Context

The 1980s was a period of economic and political stagnation, despite all the attempts by PW Botha's government to reform apartheid. It was a period in which complex institutional restructuring took place which greatly complicated the environment within which the Commission operated; and it was also a time of centralisation of state powers which further undermined the role of the Commission. In KwaZulu-Natal, a civil war between supporters of Inkatha and the UDF/ANC made the implementation of planning and development exceptionally difficult.

The unbanning of political parties and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 brought in Natal and KwaZulu into a new era. The period from 1990 to 1994 was crisis-ridden and uncertain and an inauspicious context for planning. The effectiveness of governmental structures declined precipitously and bitter and often violent conflict at local level derailed many planning initiatives. Also, there was a policy vacuum. During the transition period, 1990 to 1994, the declining authority of state structures, forced government at all levels to enter various partnerships (or forums) for the purpose of planning and development.

However, the conflicts of the time and the complexities and uncertainties around the political process frustrated most planning initiatives.

Personalities

A major change for the Commission during the 1980s was the departure of Ron Pistorius (who was appointed Natal's Director of Local Government) and the appointment of Tony Little as Chief Town and Regional Planner. Pistorius subsequently retired but has remained active in the planning field and has served as consultant to the Commission on occasions. With Little's strong links to the earlier history and traditions of the Commission, this change did not represent a major shift in approach but did mean that the continuity from the establishment of the Commission was finally broken. However, from the late 1980s leadership stability ended. Little was promoted to a higher position and subsequently left the service of the provincial administration. He was replaced in turn by Barry Anderson, Ivor John and Jan Van De Vegte. Since then, the position of chief planner itself has diverged.

When Ivor John took over as Chief Planner, he restructured the office to reflect a focus on urbanisation and policy formulation and a process of devolution of planning powers, especially to the larger towns and cities, proceeded. However, his tenure was cut short by ill-health. Jan Van de Vegte used his short tenure as Chief Planner to promote devolution of functions to local level. But he was soon promoted to Chief Director and subsequently left the service of the provincial administration for the private sector.

There was also a change in the political leadership to which the Commission reported. Until the abolition of the Provincial Council, in 1986, the Members of the Executive Committee (MECs) with responsibility for planning generally worked closely with the Commission. Some MEC's, such as Ray Haslam - who was himself later to be appointed to the Commission - were particularly supportive. After the restructuring of the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA), the relationship was more distant and at times even strained.

Prior to the restructuring, the senior officials

³⁶ Watterson in Executive Council Minutes cited in F 156, Mt. 306, 15/09/75.

within the administration had a strong sense of the 'Natal ethos' and were supportive of institutions such as the Commission which were believed to be unique to the Province. The arrival of the energetic and ambitious Louis Koch as Deputy Director-General, Community Services was to further destabilise the Commission. Koch was an outsider who had little appreciation of 'Natal traditions' and was unimpressed by bodies such as the Commission which fell, at least partly, outside the bureaucratic command structures. It is clear that the new executive and senior officials did not 'know of the Commission and its value and use it', unlike the previous regime in provincial government.³⁷

Some individuals closely associated with the Commission at that time certainly believed that the intention of central government in the dying days of tricameral apartheid was to shut down the Commission, which was found to be a thorn in the flesh of those in power.³⁸ A further factor was that 'the number of people with lengthy experience in the service of the Commission was reduced by restructuring within the administration and by the tensions brought about by suspicions cast on planners within the administration by the state's security services.'³⁹ Key staff members such as McCormack were sidelined and effectively hounded out of the NPA by securocrats.

During the first three decades of the Commission's history the strong personalities of Eric Thorrington-Smith and Ron Pistorius and of Commission chairpersons such as Scully, Basson and Bennett provided continuity in leadership. These individuals were able to defend the interests of the Commission within an admittedly generally favourable institutional environment. At a time when the Commission needed to reaffirm its position and defend its interests, its staff were undergoing a transition in leadership and

leadership continuity was lost.

While the Commission survived the tenure of often unsupportive MECs and senior bureaucrats, it was undoubtedly further marginalised within provincial government during their time. Tony Little described the attenuation of the Commission 'by circumstance and context' and ascribed his own departure from the NPA from a situation when it became impossible to continue working in terms of the 'Commission's ethic'. The confident, trailblazing spirit associated with the early work of the Commission was now much more difficult to detect.⁴⁰

Little, Anderson, John and Van der Vegte served as chief planners at a time when the relationship between the Commission and the staff was significantly altered by the restructuring of the provincial administration. No longer did planning staff report directly to the Commission. Their primary responsibility and direct line of reporting was to the newly constituted Community Services Branch of the NPA, which itself was essentially an agent of central government (after the abolition of elected provincial councils). The staff now had divided loyalties; while the historical connection to the Commission was considered to be important, the staff found themselves under increasing pressure to spend more and more time on central government-initiated programmes, related mainly to the goal of 'orderly urbanisation'. The Commission found itself sidelined from the mainstream of planning and development within the province, was not consulted with regard to the major development initiatives of the time and was not even fully aware what its 'own staff' were involved in.

Ideas and philosophies

In understanding the ideas and philosophies of the 1980s and 1990s we need to understand continuity as well as change. Senior planners such as Pistorius, Little and Anderson provided continuity with the days when catchment planning enjoyed high priority within the Commission and there was a strong emphasis on the natural resource base.

³⁷ J van der Vegte, interview with P Harrison and A Mabin, Pietermaritzburg, 01.06.1995.

³⁸ A point made in a number of interviews with the authors.

³⁹ J Greig interview with A Mabin and P Harrison, Durban, 2 June 1995.

⁴⁰ Interview with AM Little, Durban, 01.06.1995.

While the Commission was implicated to some degree in apartheid planning, there was one consequence of apartheid to which it was always opposed (though usually in technocratic rather than political language). That was the separation of the province into two areas of jurisdiction: administrative Natal and KwaZulu. From KwaZulu's creation as a territorial authority in 1972, the Commission recognised the need for coordinated planning with the self-governing territory. Records from the 1970s indicate that Pistorius, in particular, was vocal in his concern at the fragmentation of the province. In the early 1980s, the Commission - through the agency of individuals such as McCormack and Little - played a high profile role in bringing the two regional administrations together with a view to eventual amalgamation. The process which was to lead to the creation of the KwaZulu - Natal Joint Executive Authority arguably began with a commission-sponsored project involving Prof. Philip Spies of the Institute for Futures Research at Stellenbosch University. This concern with the effects of administrative fragmentation can be related to the notions of holism and organic unity that informed the thinking of key individuals such as Pistorius and Little. The motivation of the younger generation of planners was more socially (and even politically) oriented.

It was during the 1980s that the Commission's resistance to the adoption of new ideas came to an end. Arguably, this resistance through the 1960s and 1970s was related to the Commission's conscious possession of a coherent philosophy and set of ideas - largely inherited from abroad in the forties and fifties. As this philosophy attenuated in the 1980s, new ideas were accepted. So, for example, Ivor John - influenced both by his experience as chief planner in Newcastle (Natal) and by his exposure through reading and travel to newer thinking about local planning abroad, vigorously pursued the alteration of the basis of local planning in the province. The ultimate result was a new approach to local planning, termed the 'package of plans', a three-part approach requiring structure, development and scheme plans for each local authority area. A particularly striking example of John's acceptance of the need for change and the power of newer thinking in planning abroad may be found in his consideration and advocacy of a 'performance' or 'impact'

approach to zoning, which - amongst other places - he expounded in a paper in 1985 which drew particularly on the work of J Stockham of Oregon.⁴¹ As a follow-up to the introduction of the 'package of plans', an international study tour was proposed in 1986. While the proposals for this tour clearly indicate the openness to ideas from abroad which had returned to the Commission, they also demonstrate how narrow the range of places from which the Commission had always felt it was appropriate to draw such concepts. The countries to be visited were the USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany - just as had been the case on previous occasions, all wealthy western countries.⁴² Unfortunately for the Commission's formation of planning approaches, by that time it had become almost impossible for representatives of a South African public agency to visit and investigate planning agencies in any part of the 'third world' - a situation which was to change dramatically after 1990, but which, together with other consequences of apartheid, had isolated not only the Commission but South African planning generally from many developments internationally.

A further means by which planning ideas from abroad did begin to alter Commission thinking at the end of the 80s and into the nineties lay in the more frequent recourse which the Commission had to academic input. An example, important to the history of planning thought in South Africa at large, may be found in the presentation made by Professors D Dewar and R Uytenbogaardt to the Commission in October 1989 concerning their 'ideas on the planning of the Greater Marianhill Area.' Key concepts, which had become familiar abroad characterised this presentation: accessibility to economic opportunity, higher residential densities, and movement away from neighbourhood concepts; corridors of activity; creation of public space and a range of service levels. However, the comments of Commission members following the presentation show that there was considerable hostility to these ideas, and

⁴¹ I John, A preliminary review of private property ..., Attached to Mt 461 18.11.1985 Ag 4.2.

⁴² Mt 467, 05.05.1986.

the presentation was merely noted⁴³, despite growing staff interest in new planning concepts at the time.

Within the context of a difficult economic environment, the Commission gave greater attention to facilitating economic growth, promoting efficiency and encouraging deregulation and devolution of powers. A new discourse was apparent which partly reflected international trends in this area. It is hard to imagine the Commission in the 1990s easily repeating the call of 1960 for 'planners as regulators of capitalist excesses'.⁴⁴ The Commission was less restrictive in control of development; it was more inclined to recommend approvals of applications and support more flexible provisions within town planning schemes. It developed policies to address new pressures in the formal development environment, such as the growth of retirement villages. The introduction of the 'package of plans' in 1985 was an important move towards a more proactive and flexible planning style and a devolution of power for local planning. The 'structure plan' introduced a policy context for local planning and allowed for flexible proactive planning that was not possible in terms of detailed and rigid town planning schemes. The 'development plan' - which unfortunately was to be neglected by most local authorities - tied planning to the constraints of implementation by requiring budget and phasing programmes.

From about 1985 to 1988, there was also a strong focus on deregulation, both in terms of economic activities and bureaucratic procedures. Staff of the Commission played a leading role in the provincial Deregulation Forum and, together with the KwaZulu Finance Corporation introduced the idea of Zero Based Regulation Areas (ZEBRAs), to promote the development of the informal sector at selected sites. To some degree planning procedures were simplified during this decade although there were still complaints at bureaucratic delays in the 1990s. In terms of the devolution of powers, there was some progress but the rhetoric was far stronger than action. The focus on economic

efficiency led, for example, to a greater acceptance of higher densities which would allow for the economic use of serviced land.

The style of planning in the 1980s also shifted towards being more pragmatic and strategic. Increasingly, planning was seen as the mediation of different interests and not the imposition of an ideal desired by planners. The 1990 Port Shepstone/Marburg Plan, for example, had the aim 'to produce a plan, fair to all communities, which would provide a reasonable compromise solution'.⁴⁵ This is not to say that the Commission was immune to submissions such as 'the very essence of planning is to control such matters [new peripheral development] in such a way as to effect co-ordinated development of the planning area'.⁴⁶

The basic philosophy and ethos of Natal's original planners was brought into the 1980s through individuals such as Tony Little but this was also the decade in which young planners - including such persons as Bruce McCormack, Dave A' Bear, Mark Povall, Liz Hicks, Neil Fox, and Larry Sanders - added a new dimension to the work of the Commission. A new generation of planners had arrived with greater social and political awareness than their predecessors but with far less contact with the philosophies that had inspired planning in its early years in Natal. The classic divide between the 'Old Guard' and the 'Young Turks' became apparent; a divide which was unfortunately exacerbated by the political context of the time. A more participatory approach was evident in certain of the planning initiatives towards the late 1980s. The Upper Tugela Catchment Initiative, for example, involved a wide range of community and other interest groups for a sustained period. However, the increasingly problematic political context of the late 1980s constrained the shift towards a more participative and socially-relevant planning. Community conflict bedeviled participatory initiatives while many groups were wary of engagement with official structures and the Commission and the NPA were also cautious of channels of communication outside officially-sanctioned structures. Also, with the increasingly

⁴³ Mt 512, 23.10.1989.

⁴⁴ F23, Mt 108, 13.07.1960 p. 170.

⁴⁵ Mt 520, 18/6/90.

⁴⁶ F165, Mt 515, 01.1990.

influence of the security establishment and their suspicion of many of the planning staff, the position of planners within the NPA was undermined and their ability to engage with communities reduced.

Shifts in philosophy and ideas that became apparent in the 1980s were even more evident in the early 1990s, although the influence of the past was still evident. A 1991 mission statement - prepared after a strategic planning session conducted by a Commission anxious to reaffirm its role - reflects something of a synthesis between the 'traditional Natal approach to planning' and the emergent planning of the 1980s with its greater sensitivity to social and economic considerations.

The mission statement declared the overall purpose of the Commission to be 'the harmonious, co-ordinated development of the Province of KwaZulu/ Natal.' This statement could well have been written in the 1950s. It reflects a continuing influence of the founding philosophy of the Commission. However, the mission statement went on to state that:

The Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission recognises the need to have;

- Co-ordinated harmonious planning
- Efficient planning
- Achievable plans
- Equity in planning
- Community participation
- Devolved planning

And further the Commission recognises in the context of the region, planning needs to :

- Facilitate urbanisation
- Stimulate development
- Create employment
- Accommodate environmental objectives.

The 1990 report of the Ordinance Review Project (of which Ron Pistorius was a joint author) also illustrates the changed discourse of planning. The report made frequent use of such words as 'pro-active', 'diversity', 'process', 'realistic', 'implementable'. The report also called for a strong focus on participation rather than mere consultation and stressed the importance of the economic elements of planning and the need for

credibility (particularly during the transition).⁴⁷

The new concepts introduced in the 1989 Greater Mariannhill Plan were further explored in the 1990s. In particular, the idea of corridors of high density development which integrated landuse became popular.⁴⁸ This idea represented an almost complete reversal of earlier planning orthodoxies. In 1959, for example, the Commission turned down an application for shops along the main road from Pietermaritzburg to Edendale, arguing that flanking such a road with commercial uses 'would interfere with its primary traffic functions'. The appropriate site of such facilities, argued the Commission, was in the centre of a defined neighbourhood.⁴⁹ The activity corridor of the 1990s would, by contrast, involve the active promotion of economic activity along a road.

The one theme that has remained important throughout the history of the Commission is that of environmental protection. In some respects the Commission was a pioneer in the environmental field, with an active involvement long before the creation of a national Department of the Environment.

There was a strong environmental theme in the work of senior planners such as Pistorius, Little, Anderson and Van De Vegte. There have, however, been shifts in emphasis. Thorrington-Smith's environmental concern, for example, related primarily to natural resources as a basis for industrialisation and his approach was therefore somewhat different from that of planners such as Tony Little whose environmental concern was more direct and who was far less enthusiastic about industrialisation. The thinking of more recent environmentally aware planners - such as

⁴⁷ Mt 529, 26-11-90, RA. Pistorius and DH Samson, 'The Town Planning Ordinance Review Project report to the Ordinance Review Steering Committee'.

⁴⁸ In 1994, the Commission responded to a request from MEC Ismail Omar by appointing a consultant to investigate the idea of corridor development along the N3 axis between Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

⁴⁹ F 29, Mt 100, 11/11/59.

Van De Vegte who prepared a submission to the President's Council on environmental policy for the Commission - shows a more pragmatic understanding of the trade-offs involved in balancing a concern for the environment with a concern for development. Recent international concern for sustainability and sustainable livelihood development is now evident in the work of the Commission.

The other theme which, internationally, rivals environmental concern within thinking about development is that of local economic development (LED). This is a theme that is less well developed in the history of the Commission than the environmental one. The economic theme was important in the early years of the Commission, but mainly in relation to the promotion of industrialisation within less developed regions. Much of the research sponsored by the Commission at the time dealt with this concern. With the departure of Thorrington-Smith in 1969, the economic theme in planning and research was much reduced, until the 1980s when a few projects dealing with matters such as job creation and the structure of the regional economy were financed by the Commission. However, at a very recent strategic planning session (1996), Commissioners acknowledged that the link between spatial planning and economic development was poorly developed.

Conclusion

The Commission missed both the opportunity to participate in shaping a broader vision of the urban future of KwaZulu-Natal between 1986 and 1994, and to connect such a vision to local planning. However, under the energetic chairing of James Greig, it did begin to provide an environment in which some of the more difficult questions relating to such issues as urbanisation and housing policy could be debated, and, to a limited extent, therefore, laid a basis for policy development and planning in the post-apartheid years. Also the existence of the Commission opened up space for staff to explore and to develop areas of work which otherwise might have been lost in the narrower paths of public service reportage.

South Africa's first truly democratic national and provincial elections in April 1994 - which brought the merger of the two regional administrations of KwaZulu and Natal - once more transformed the landscape within which planning happens. The change was not, however, as immediate or dramatic as some might have anticipated. Processes of change had been underway for number of years and the consolidation of democracy in South Africa would also take a number of years. The elections put in place an ANC-led Government of National Unity at national level. In KwaZulu-Natal, the more conservative Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) narrowly won the provincial election but had to include other parties in its government. The planning portfolio now fell under the IFP's MEC for Local Government and Housing, Peter Miller but, the ANC's Jacob Zuma was given the Economic Affairs and Tourism portfolio and responsibility for co-ordinating the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in KwaZulu-Natal.

With the coming of democratic governance and the widely accepted ideals of reconstruction and development, planning was infused with a new purpose and new possibilities for meaningful intervention. However, the process of change was to prove immensely complex and, to date, achievements have been very limited. Transformation in the planning field required new legislation, new institutions, new policy frameworks and mechanisms for the rapid delivery of services and infrastructure to previously disadvantaged communities. The amalgamation of the KwaZulu and Natal bureaucracies has proceeded, but not without considerable problems.

After a period of uncertainty, the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government decided to prepare provincial planning legislation that would be applied together with the Development Facilitation Act. The draft provincial bill makes provision for the reconstitution of the Town and Regional Planning Commission as a Development and Planning Commission. The draft gives recognition to the current *de facto* situation in which the Commission no longer monopolises planning. A wide range of authorities at all tiers of government will have planning responsibilities but the new Commission would monitor, co-ordinate and

provide a policy framework.

This paper has shown how key personalities have played an important role in shaping the nature of planning at crucial moments in the history of the Commission. Once again, planning in KwaZulu-

Natal is to undergo fundamental transformation and once more the actual directions of change in planning ideas and activities will depend on the ideas, philosophies and personalities involved in the process.¶