

Secure the future — innovate and make a difference

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The past

Twelve months ago, 25 June 1996, saw a watershed event in the history of the planning profession in South Africa taking place. Following two years of negotiation and consultation, the South African Planning Institution was established through the amalgamation of the former South African Institute of Town and Regional Planners (SAITRP) and the Development Planning Association of South Africa (DPASA).

On that occasion, I stated that the planning profession in South Africa was in transition. Transition does not focus on the outcome, but rather on a conscious ending, leaving the old situation behind. Transition, therefore, involves the abandonment of certain long-held attributes that attached to the old system. However, meaningful change also takes what was good in the old order and builds on that for a sustainable future.

The SAITRP was established in September 1954, after having functioned as the South African Branch of the Royal Town Planning Institute since January 1944.

The DPASA was established in January 1994.

Whilst the SAITRP and the DPASA had some fundamental differences in priorities and programmes in pursuance of their respective objectives, there was clearly also wide-ranging common ground between the two organisations' objectives. This common ground became

progressively greater during the second half of 1994, post the nation's first democratic elections in April 1994, and early in 1995. The imperatives of reconstruction, sustainability and development were increasingly being acknowledged by the majority of planners in South Africa.

The amalgamation of the two bodies was sought because the majority of planners in South Africa believed that the planning profession does have a future in this country. At the commemorative dinner a year ago, the gathering was reminded that two fundamental features characterise the existence of an organised profession :

- In the first instance, the profession and its members are publicly recognised as having knowledge and competency.
- In the second instance, the members of the profession must accept professional accountability for their work.

The challenge is for the members of the new Institution to provide the public with the assurance that we have the skills to execute our functions with the necessary judgement, impartiality and care expected from a professional. We have to lead, not follow. Our new Code of Conduct was the logbook to guide us on this journey into the great unknown.

At the commemorative dinner, I also spelt out a seven-point action plan to direct the Board of the

new Institution during my two-year term of office :

- We must devote ourselves to promoting the improvement in the quality of life of all our people, especially the poor, in a sustainable way.
- We must be an independent non-governmental organisation — we must not repeat past mistakes and we must give praise where it is due, but we must also have the courage and conviction to constructively criticize where necessary.
- We must undo as practically and equitably as possible the inequalities caused by past apartheid policies.
- We must ensure that planning is based on the principles of sustainability and partnerships between the communities and the public and private sectors.
- Our planning policies must recognise that blueprint-type, restrictive planning is ill-suited to our conditions of rapid urban growth and to the creation of socio-economic development — our planning processes must become more flexible and focused on delivery.
- We have to accept that planning will not be perfect, but that it is a better option than simply relying on unrestrained market forces.
- We must convince Government at all levels that the reconstruction and development of South Africa cannot progress without a substantial planning input and that all the South African planners together are willing and able to offer that input.

The future

The future, to quote the Anglo American Corporation's scenario guru Clem Sunter, is not what it used to be. We look backward to

understand where we have come from and what we have done (or not done), to set the context for present conditions. In looking forward, we attempt to see how we can offset and correct negative consequences and, in particular, how we can forge a viable and vital future. For most of us, the present is all we have. For many of us, the future seems uncertain. The best way of securing the future is to invent it.

Planners in South Africa will in future increasingly have to innovate in order to make a difference. Staid, traditional approaches to urban development will no longer be appropriate in the emerging globalisation of the South African economy.

Cities are no longer only places where people live and authorities provide services. Moreover, cities have become dynamic foci for economic, social and cultural development.

The case of Atlanta in the USA holds great hope for South African cities. Projected into international focus as the host city of the 1996 Olympic Games, Atlanta in the mid-seventies had a corrupt police force, deep-rooted racism, a racially divided city authority, segregated schools and colleges and a mainly white business elite. Twenty years later, Atlanta has re-positioned itself as a successful global city, mainly due to a remarkable partnership between the private sector and the city authority.

Atlanta proves the point that cities need a vision for their future which is endorsed and actively pursued by all key roleplayers and interest groups. Planners have a major role to play in contributing to and co-ordinating the processes of formulating city visions and development plans. The current process of establishing Land Development Objectives (LDOs) in terms of the Development Facilitation Act is one such process. There are also other legitimate processes currently underway in South Africa in this regard.

In order to formulate sustainable city visions for the future, Ann Bernstein states that city authorities and planners must :

- understand the new global and regional realities in which the city functions;
- analyse the opportunities for growth or decline in the light of these new realities;
- ensure that all the important roleplayers in the city (including national and local players) are kept informed of the new trends;
- engage in a social compact process which includes all the roleplayers, in order to formulate and implement a shared vision for the future of the city;
- ensure that city bylaws, regulations and rules encourage and promote entrepreneurial activities;
- ensure that city authorities themselves do no attempt to be entrepreneurs;
- ensure that authorities act entrepreneurially in marketing their cities for commercial growth and local specialisation in areas of competitive advantage;
- learn to create new sources of revenue to overcome budget limitations, legal impediments and other stumbling blocks;
- not seek solutions, but rather processes that will empower people to work together on sustainable solutions to urban problems; and
- think big and have an inspired vision for the future.

It is also essential that the focus should not only be on urban development in the major metropolitan areas. Authorities must ensure that it is complemented by a sound urbanisation and migration strategy, a growth strategy for secondary towns and cities and an effective rural development strategy.

The future is ours to create. Innovate and make a difference. ¶