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*This article seeks to survey changes in South African urbanisation since the mid-sixties, to explore how they have come about and to consider implications of present trends for planning. It is argued that the complex nature of urbanisation processes, including, for*

*example, the persistence of circular migration patterns, demands more adequate explanation. A better understanding of urbanisation in South Africa will obviously contribute to the formulation of more appropriate and more confidently based proposals for*

*positive urbanisation policies. Appropriate planning depends on the incorporation of a sophisticated understanding of urbanisation into planning education and practice.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Those involved in urban affairs in South Africa, including town planners, are obviously aware of urbanisation as a force which has exercised a major impact on our cities. In recent decades, rapid population and spatial growth have combined to alter the character of urban South Africa, particularly of the major metropolitan areas. Yet to grasp the extent of our urban revolution, it serves a useful purpose to pause and to compare today's cities with their structure and ethos at various points in the past. Reflection on the course of developments since the first academic planning department in the country began in 1965 provides considerable material for thought on the role and future of planning for urbanisation.

The central theme of this article is that the phenomena of urbanisation are more complex and less tractable in analytical terms than much of the existing literature would suggest. As a result, planning is as yet far from being able to grapple confidently with what is arguably the central social phenomenon of our era.

## 2 OPTIMISM AMID REPRESSION

The mood which prevailed in planning in the mid-sixties was apparently one of optimism. In a press release issued at the close of the planning education conference held in 1962, the South African Institute of Town Planners (as it then was) stressed the growing demand for planners under conditions of an expanding economy and increas-

ing public sector interest in planning (Marsh and Malloes 1962:131). The cities grew along with the economy, and planning along with the growth of the cities. In various ways a successful national and urban growth model seemed to have emerged.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the period was suburban expansion coupled with vigorous building in central city areas where height, density and bulk all increased rapidly. These changes provided large volumes of work for planners and indeed, brought about changes in planning practice, in legislation (e.g., the new Transvaal ordinance of 1965) and in planning education. Both public and private sector planning expanded, and the new planning schools found a ready market for their graduates. Those graduates were equipped with skills appropriate to the era: knowledge of urban form and growth, ability to handle rezoning and removal of restrictions, design ability appropriate to new township development.

Suburbs, townships<sup>1</sup> and hostels provided the elements which structured the urban residential environment of the mid-sixties. A few anomalies still remained in this system from the fifties. Some smaller, older, mainly black<sup>2</sup> areas persisted in very central localities of some towns (Kroonstad) and even cities (Cape Town). But the Group Areas pattern had largely been set, together with the huge wedges of land allocated to the new large black

townships, like Daveyton or Zwide, with their large numbers of NE 51/6 and /9 houses publicly-built houses.

Indeed, the pace of housebuilding had slowed in the black townships, and no longer *predominated* as an urban concern as it had done in the early fifties. Planners concerned themselves to a greater extent with upmarket urban expansion and intensification than with the housing of the mainly poor black masses. The thrust typified by the work of Connell, Calderwood and other on low cost housing had ebbed.

The whole complex structure of legislation and practice in a variety of fields, which might be described as the 'urban regime' of the sixties, provided for expansion of planned schemes affecting black people in the bantustans<sup>3</sup> rather than in the established urban areas (Hendler, 1986). Of course in some places, that simply meant house building continued at a much the same distance from town or city centres as the new townships of the fifties. Bantustan townships like Ga-Rankuwa, Mdantsane or Seshego illustrate (cf. Mokobane, 1990). So planning continued, replicating township forms in new localities rather than contributing innovative urban ideas.

The prevailing urban regime of course rested on a variety of other state policies and practices aimed at restricting black entry to the cities and at providing for black settlement in the reserves (Hindson, 1987). It is as well to pause at this point and to recall that these

policies deprived blacks of freedom of movement and of choice of location to a very high degree. Clearly these were oppressive policies, ones which could only be implemented in a climate of considerable repression. And indeed, in oppositional political circles the sixties are regarded as the supreme decade of repression, beginning with the state of emergency and the banning of the ANC and the PAC in 1960. Bannings, detention without trial and other measures reduced to a minimum the possibilities of political organisation against policies affecting mobility and place of residence: even organisations which were never banned were forced from the scene, like SACTU (Lodge, 1983).

Thus the urban regime of the sixties acquired what appeared to be stability, and if it did not in itself foster the form and pace of economic growth in the sixties, it certainly co-existed with it<sup>4</sup>. For many residents and aspirant residents of the cities, the optimistic mood of expansion which affected the milieu within which planning was conducted, could not have been the dominant experience. Township populations and those who tried to join them bore the brunt of a negative and restrictive urban experience. The two quite different meanings which the word "township" acquired – referring to the world of property development and much of professional planning on the one hand, and to the racially segregated, generally poorest areas on the other – capture some of the isolation of planners from people in the late sixties.

### 3 THE RURAL SCENE

A vital feature of South Africa in the sixties was the extent of loss of access to rural land on the part of many rural people. This dispossession took four main forms outside the reserves: expropriation of "black spots" "consolidation" of bantustans; private eviction of "squatters", tenants, sharecroppers and, most importantly, labour tenants, from privately and publicly owned land; and rural planning measures applied in the reserves which deprived some people of access to farm land.

Together with a variety of measures adopted in the reserves, including the replanning of agricultural communities known as 'betterment', evictions had

already created a large landless population by the time the National Party Government of D F Malan came to power in 1948. In many reserve areas, 'miserable', 'bleak and bare' settlements of the landless began to develop (Walker 1948), from which, inevitably, most households had to send members to participate in the urban economy. During the fifties the pace of rural eviction began to increase, and it accelerated greatly in the sixties and seventies, until literally millions of people had directly experienced eviction (Platzky and Walker 1985).

It should not be assumed that these evictions affected blacks alone. Still less well documented, many thousands of coloured households experienced eviction, while others lost their small land holdings under adverse economic conditions. In areas like the southern Cape, even white farm labourers met similar fates, while many smaller white farmers lost their land to creditors. In Natal, Indians suffered likewise. Unlike blacks, in most cases coloured, Indian and white rural households could not repair to the reserves; but they were not legally discouraged from moving to the towns, where jobs, housing and welfare could in many cases be secured, even if at bare survival levels. These processes continued throughout the twentieth century: they probably peaked for whites in the thirties; in the sixties the full weight of land dispossession was felt by coloured and black households.

In the sixties and for much of the seventies, the state managed migration through allocating massive numbers of blacks forced off the farms to 'closer settlements' of various kinds in the reserves (cf. Mabin, 1987). These peculiar features of the landscape prompted the view prevalent in the literature that specific and conscious state actions underpinned by an ideology called apartheid 'contained' black urbanisation – or, in later views, 'displaced' that urbanisation (Fair & Schmidt 1974, Letsoalo 1983, Murray 1987).

### 4 CRACKS IN THE EDIFICE

Towards the end of the sixties symptoms of difficulty began to appear in the planning system in the face of its inability to provide for all those seek-

ing a livelihood or even, simply, a place to live. The first indications that the urban regime was less stable than it might have appeared probably came, paradoxically, with the passage of the Physical Planning Act in 1967, particularly in its draconian provisions regarding the "erection or extension of factories" and the use of land for industrial purposes. These provisions, it could be argued, provide evidence that the existing urban regime was not functioning as smoothly in allocating labour and growth as the government wished.

A further measure, designed to increase urban control while allowing a little more flexibility in allocating labour within urban areas, emerged with the creation, from 1969 onwards, of Bantu Affairs Administration Boards (Bekker and Humphries, 1985). It might be inferred that these Boards, which took over from (white-elected) local authorities the administration of affairs affecting blacks, especially labour allocation and housing, were intended to shore up the urban regime. In fact, since they continued all the more vigorously to implement existing urban policy, without alleviating (except to a minor extent) the pressures on the lives of those excluded, they only exacerbated the underlying contradictions of that policy, with the result that animosity towards authority increased rapidly. Yet both the creation and the workings of the Boards and the Physical Planning system revealed shortcomings in the system.

Perhaps the key problem in the urban regime lay in the lack of provision for significant expansion of black residential development outside the reserves. In the official mind, that lack could be (and was) justified by the notion that a combination of bantustan/border development and influx control would cope with the growth and distribution of the black population. But in reality the non-reserve black population showed a considerable propensity to grow, and the underlying problems began to express themselves in disturbing ways.

The first major symptom of the problems of the system came in the explosion of *informal residence* which began in the late sixties. In the reserves, this

took the form of extending the pattern of unapproved, unsurveyed allocation of sites and erection of buildings. Such allocation and building took both "tribal" and market forms. The result was the beginning of rapid unregulated settlement growth especially in areas close to towns and cities. The phenomenon manifested itself at many sites, such as Winterveld near Pretoria, parts of the old Pietersburg reserves in the vicinity of what was then the University College of the North (Turfloop), and in the Inanda area outside Durban.

In the formal urban areas this growth of informal residence took the form of letting rooms (and in fewer instances to begin with, other spaces) to lodgers. These tenants, mostly subletting from township house tenants, were not of any particular social class nor geographical origin. What they had in common was lack of direct access to formal housing. Internal population growth alone, coupled with the lack of new house construction, would have brought about overcrowding. The increasing density of population was also caused by in-migration to the cities of both "legals" (e.g., contracted migrant workers) and "illegals" (e.g., "pass-less" rural people).

The state, through not increasing the quantity of housing available in most non-reserve urban environments; actively pursuing a programme of demolition; and through *shrinking* the funds made available to local authorities (including BAABs), especially after 1973, to build housing, compounded the problems of township residents in the urban areas. By 1973, many township and hostel residents faced deteriorating living conditions and rising rents in the informal housing market. These conditions, together with accelerating general price inflation, contributed waves of strikes by black workers, such as those which rolled across the Durban and East Rand industrial areas in 1973.

The townships were becoming pressure cookers: yet little was done to turn down the heat. In the late seventies, officials would look back on the period prior to 1970 as one in which housing finance was relatively easily available. Even in 1973, planners working on developments such as Mitchells Plain

assumed the support of large-scale state funding. Housing project delays arose as the realisation dawned that private sector sources of finance would be required, while systems were created to enable official bodies to undertake new housing developments with private sector finance.<sup>5</sup> For such schemes to succeed, those who moved into them had to be able to afford the repayment of private sector loans – something which was certainly possible for some, but by no means for all.

More extreme conditions resulted from the slowing down of the economy and the slackening of employment growth. At the same time a great increase in the number of school leavers occurred, particularly as black education began to produce exponentially increasing numbers. Of course many township school attenders saw little prospect of employment let alone wealth. The deterioration of housing conditions coupled with rising unemployment brought about an explosive mix in many townships.

Some saw the warning signs and pleaded for change. Within the government different views on urban policy existed; for example, Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration Punt Jansen called for less hard-line measures against migrants; and some Bantu Affairs Administration Boards even tried to secure funds to enable them to return to building substantial numbers of houses in their own townships instead of investing in far-off reserve areas – as the Orange-Vaal Board did in the early seventies (Chaskalson, 1988). But the trajectory of state involvement during this period continued away from the expansion of township housing. In black areas particularly, the vacuum created by the lack of state developmental activity was hardly filled by the minimal private sector involvement. In a few instances some private sector firms began to involve themselves in house construction for employers within townships like the Soweto complex, e.g. Southern Life at Pimville. But it was only after the explosion of violence from June 1976 that first private and then public sector thinking began to change.

By the end of 1976 a wide range of business interests, led by Anglo-Ameri-

can and Rembrandt had begun a process which culminated in the establishment of the Urban Foundation with the aims of initiating pilot projects to alleviate deteriorating urban conditions and influencing urban policy. Both the widening cracks in existing policy and the disarray resulting from 1976 onwards provided opportunities to do so. The state also recognised the decay of the once-stable urban regime, and appointed numerous commissions of enquiry to examine problems; but the pace of urban change eclipsed minimal reform recommendations such as those of the Rieker Commission (Hindson, 1987).

Meanwhile a veritable mushrooming of informal residence had occurred throughout the seventies. No longer was this phenomenon a relatively minor adjunct of formal urbanisation. In the reserves, where such development had been a minor phenomenon in the mid-sixties – it accounted, according to Simkin's (1983) probably low estimate, for 3,7 million people by 1980. The formally planned and properly serviced residential areas within the reserves were completely overshadowed by informal, non-rural, population concentrations.

Increasing reserve populations delivered large numbers to the job queues at the rural labour bureaux. But, as labour demand stagnated in the later seventies, rural labour bureaux ceased to have any substantial recruiting function at all, to the point where, as Greenberg and Giliomee (1985) put it, 'for many blacks in the rural area there is no labour market'. For sheer survival, large numbers of supposedly 'rural' households which had no prospect of supporting themselves solely through rural activities, had to find access to urban economies. Chaskalson (1988) puts the consequence starkly: 'the African population . . . ignored influx control for over a decade . . .'

The state's refusal to build houses in sufficient numbers to meet needs and its exclusion of 'illegals' from official tenantry in formal townships forced people to build for themselves; the poverty of the great majority meant that the results were often massively inadequate. The overcrowding of township houses and the growth of shack populations in back yards and on open spaces in and around formal townships

(35 000 people in Katlehong, for example, in 1980) demonstrated some of the results. In short, booms in domestic mine migrant recruitment and often remote bantustan housing construction could not shore up a crumbling regime of population management. The inadequacies of these policies produced numerous bureaucratic problems and material difficulties for urban as well as rural people: and coexisted with the development of massive 'informal' population concentrations – important urban areas in which planners played little if any role.

## 5 URBANISATION IN THE EIGHTIES

Struggling to survive and gain greater access to the accumulations of wealth represented by the cities, black – and sometimes other – people all over South Africa began to remake the nature of urbanism in the country through informal settlement. That struggle assumed obvious and intense forms first in the Western Cape, where the urban regime developed in the sixties had its most rigorous application. Over a few years the state response to informal settlement began to change: Modderdam and Unibel disappeared under state bulldozers in 1977-78 (with grave consequences for the international standing of the planning profession in South Africa), but Crossroads survived and grew into the eighties. Similarly, 'squatter' areas not only mushroomed at Soweto-by-the-Sea adjacent to Port Elizabeth's townships and the previously-cleared Kabah area of Uitenhage's Langa: they survived, at least until the state of emergency in the mid-eighties.

Townships within bantustan boundaries already fringed towns and cities closer to bantustans. For example, some 25 to 30 kilometres northwest of Pretoria, GaRankuwa and Mabopane lay just inside Bophuthatswana. Unlike Cape Town, where church-owned land provided the nucleus of eviction-free 'squattling' which began the Crossroads communities, privately-owned small land holdings on the Bophuthatswana side of the townships offered sites on which to live at low rentals. In this area, the Winterveld, population rapidly grew to some hundreds of thousands, and besides, became the object of much official interest.

Around Durban, similar 'metropolitan fringe' development (Watson 1987) took place. Some fell within the KwaZulu or trust land boundaries, but, as in the Western Cape, privately-held and church-owned non-reserve land became more densely settled by blacks, for example at St Wendolin's. Even around the Witwatersrand, 'squattling' developed rapidly in the late seventies and early eighties: much of it occurred (and continues) on farms, smallholdings and vacant land at places like Lenasia Forest, Wilgespruit, Honeydew, Weiler's Farm and Varkfontein, with numbers ranging from merely a few households to over a thousand. Many of those attempting to create an urban life in these strictly illegal and unapproved circumstances faced defeat at the hands of the state as well as private land owners; from Kabah (Uitenhage) to Noordhoek (Cape peninsula) and Midrand (north of Johannesburg), eviction and relocation has been common.

Still further afield, just within daily reach of Pretoria and even the Witwatersrand, parts of Bophuthatswana and the whole of KwaNdebele (Murray 1987) grew from almost no population to enormous size during the later seventies and early eighties. In some parts of the country, a large proportion of the 'rural slum' population lives at even greater distances from the metropolitan centres. Hundreds of kilometres from the PWV (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal Triangle) heartland of the highveld lie almost countless settlements which in their broad social character appear very similar to the better known, more centrally situated rural slums. Examples include the tentacles of settlement extending along new roads from Mafikeng, the multiplication of 'villages' in the reserves of the Pietersburg area, and the extraordinary growth of informal urbanism in districts like Nsikasi (Kangwane) or the area around Bushbuckridge. Such settlements exist in every reserve area of the Transvaal and in such places as QwaQwa and the Ciskei. Perhaps half the country's population now lives in unplanned, informal, nonrural settlements. Half of those people probably live in areas fairly remote from any city.

Yet the absence of influx control since 1986 has hardly altered the pace at

which households move to town from 'rural' areas (cf. Dewar, Rosmarin and Watson 1991). The Urban Foundation estimates that the rates of immigration were higher in the first half of the eighties. Indeed, the peak era of black migration from rural areas to the cities, which probably began in the late seventies, seems to have subsided by the time influx control was abolished in 1986 (cf. Urban Foundation 1990; cf. also Cilliers and Groenewald, 1982).

The kinds of households which find informal residence the best option at present in South Africa would seem in very many cases to be those involved in patterns of circular migration, maintaining a variety of urban and rural bases.

## 6 UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY URBANISATION

Indeed, it is becoming increasingly widely accepted that in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, circular migration is proving to be a persistent phenomenon. Evidence gained from interviewing households in rural, informal urban and 'semi-urban' contexts suggests that the migratory patterns of members of those households are indeed 'circular, involving sometimes multiple rural or near-rural bases and in some cases several widely separated 'urban' worksites (Mabin, 1988, 1989). In such patterns migration occurs at frequencies ranging from very short-term to generational intervals.

The essential point is that entire households have frequently not migrated as whole units, and while a base has been maintained by some members in rural (more recently simply non-formally-urban) areas, other household members have moved to town or indeed other rural areas for longer or shorter periods. Many 'urban' households combined resources from both urban and rural activities (Martin and Beittel, 1987).

Urban workers with rural bases to maintain and extend tend to engage in a great variety of struggles to defend these patterns of circular migration. In the author's experience, urban factory workers sometimes oppose the closing of compounds and hostels insofar as such closures threaten the maintenance of circular patterns. Recently the

Johannesburg-based community service agency Planact has found that one of the reasons why many workers oppose employer home ownership schemes is that while the companies involved insist on their assistance being invested in houses close to the places of employment, many workers would greatly prefer to invest in houses at distant 'rural' bases (Planact, 1989: 42-43). Recent research suggests that many households have every intention of persisting in their present circular patterns of migration (Gaffane, 1990; Mabin, 1990; Maluleka, 1990; Seekings, Graaff & Joubert, 1990; Dewar, Rosmarin and Watson, 1991), but little policy or planning thought is yet being directed to the accommodation needs of this enormously significant section of South African society.

The violence which has come to be associated not only with the informal areas of various South African urban complexes, but also with the hostels, underlines the seriousness of a lack of understanding of the social character of urbanisation. Tensions over access to limited material resources create a volatile environment. Half a decade of conflict in other informal settlements, whether in the Western Cape or Natal (cf. Cole, 1987; Hughes, 1987; Kentridge, 1990) speaks of an urgent need to gain a clearer understanding of the urbanisation processes which produce those places than is presently the case, especially if planning is actually to contribute to securing improvement in the residents' material conditions. Planning for investment in housing, transport and many other urban components needs to be thoroughly informed by these social realities, with greater attention being paid to the persistence and the directions of change in circular migration patterns.

## **7 COMMUNITY AND STATE RESPONSES: 1990 AND BEYOND**

In some townships, community organisations have responded to the pressing demand for relief from oppressive material conditions by promoting invasions of open land, following similar patterns in Latin America. The degree of political opening which characterises South Africa in recent times has encouraged such events. Civic associations in places as diverse as Mangaung (Bloemfontein) and Wattville (Benoni, east Witwatersrand)

have planned and executed invasions of land adjacent to the townships, and erected settlements. Through a variety of tactics they have applied pressure on authorities such as local white town councils, development agencies such as the Urban Foundation and provincial administrations to enter into negotiations on their security and on the provision of basic services to these new urban communities (Mabin & Klein 1991).

The acquisition of land through collective struggle renews the patterns of four or five decades ago, when movements like Sofasonke established new communities by invasion of land adjacent to the nascent Soweto and in the industrial areas of the Witwatersrand (Bonner 1990). But these processes are not without their problems. Amongst other things, they tend to reinforce the broad apartheid geography of the cities rather than fundamentally challenging it. By establishing themselves next to the large townships built in the fifties, the land invaders reinforce the pattern created in that era space - space the pattern of peripheral, segregated black residential areas.

State planners have also engaged vigorously in the allocation of large tracts of land for legalised informal residence since the mid-eighties. Under the amended provisions of section 6A of the amended Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, minimally serviced areas have been opened to settlement in the hinterlands of the established townships. Orange Farm in the area between Soweto and Sebokeng, Motherwell across the Zwartkops river from the sprawling Port Elizabeth townships and parts of Khayelitsha on the Cape Flats provide well-known illustrations, while many smaller towns and cities reveal similar patterns. Apartheid in the sense of the broad allocation of segregated, remote areas for the housing of black urban residents is very much alive, although it is continuously challenged by 'squatters' who occupy land outside approved areas.

In various respects community responses to the inadequacy of South Africa's planning for urbanisation have by-passed the planning system. Land invaders like those at Manguang, Bloemfontein, who have 'planned' their own new settlement territory,

down to explicit decisions about mixed uses and site density, have substituted community action for professional town planning. Those in places such as Wattville, Benoni, who have negotiated their desired land use with local authority planners have begun what could prove a transformation of planning roles. Planning consultants retained by provincial administrations and local authorities seem by comparison to be engaged in perpetuating outmoded patterns in their layouts for township extensions to accommodate, at last, some of the backlog. None of the models presently operating in the tense and resource-poor terrain at the cutting edge of the urbanisation process seem particularly adequate, and they remind the observer how much planning has yet to learn concerning the dynamics of urbanisation.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

The directions of change in South African urbanisation are as yet little understood. For planners a more adequate explanation and therefore understanding of urbanisation in South Africa will obviously contribute to the formulation of more appropriate and more confidently based proposals for positive urbanisation policies. Means will have to be found to incorporate community knowledge as well as preferences in planning for urbanisation. For example, a misunderstanding of circular migration could mean inappropriate projections and proposals for policy in every theatre of urbanisation - housing, transport, education and so on. Ill-founded population, political and environmental scenarios would all follow from misapprehension of internal migration processes.

Our planning schools need to consider the extent to which they are adequately addressing the urbanisation question in their teaching and research. For the foreseeable future, effective planning will depend on much more sophisticated knowledge and skills regarding urbanisation-related issues than planners have generally acquired in the past. If planning schools fail in this task, either the overall management of our urban environments will continue to deteriorate, or other professionals will increasingly usurp what most planners would regard as essentially

their role. If the arguments presented here are accepted, there is an urgent need for reorientation of planning efforts in South Africa.

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