

---

# Planning and[/in] the future: The place of utopian thinking and the utopian thinking about place

E. Meyer & M. Oranje

---

Submitted to *Town and Regional Planning*, 17 February 2005, revised 13 September 2005.

## Abstract

In this article the argument is made that the once visionary profession of planning lost its focus on the future. This is done through an analysis of the nature of planning, its identity and the place of utopia in its make up, and the deployment of the metaphors of 'loss' and 'need'. In accordance with this reading it is argued that it is imperative for planning to restore this relationship, not just for its own soul and sanity, but especially so for those who benefit from its endeavours. Following on from this, a set of suggestions is made as to how this can be achieved, both in the theoretical approach to planning and in actual practice. The article is concluded with a cautionary note on the potentially inappropriate application of these future seeking and shaping ideas.

## BEPLANNING EN[/IN] DIE TOEKOMS: DIE PLEK VIR UTOPIESE DENKE EN UTOPIESE DENKE OOR PLEK

In hierdie artikel word geargumenteer dat die eens visionêre professie van beplanning sy fokus op die toekoms verloor het. Dit word gedoen deur 'n ontleding van die aard en identiteit van beplanning en die plek van utopiese denke in beplanning, asook 'n ondersoek na wat 'verloor is' en waaraan daar tans behoefte is. Na aanleiding van die ontleding word daar verder geargumenteer dat beplanning se verhouding met die toekoms weer herstel moet word, nie net ten einde sy siel en 'rede vir bestaan' te vind nie, maar veral ter wille van diegene wat baat by beplanningsintervensies. Teoretiese en praktiese voorstelle word gemaak oor hoe 'die toekoms' weer 'n belangrike rol kan speel in beplanning. Die artikel word afgesluit met 'n waarskuwing teen die onvanpaste toepassing van hierdie toekoms soekende en toekoms vormende idees.

*"In the center of Fedora, that grey stone metropolis, stands a metal building with a crystal globe in every room. Looking into each globe, you see a blue city, the model of a different Fedora. These are the forms the city could have taken if, for one reason or another, it had not become what we see today. In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined a way of making it the ideal city, but while he constructed his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became a toy in a glass globe. The building with the globes is now Fedora's museum: every inhabitant visits it, chooses the city that corresponds to his desires, contemplates it, imagines it ...*

*On the map of your empire, O Great Khan, there must be room both for the big, stone Fedora and the little Fedoras in glass globes. Not because they are all equally real, but because all are only assumptions. The one contains what is accepted as necessary when it is not yet so; the others, what is imagined as possible and, a moment later, is possible no longer"* (Calvino, 1974: 32).

## 1. PLANNING, IDENTITY AND UTOPIA: THE LOSS ...

*"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at, for it leaves out the country where humanity is always landing"*

(Oscar Wilde as quoted in Mumford, 1962: title page).

Planning originated as a calling and later a profession with a vision of a better tomorrow and it still is, in its broadest sense, about visions and imagining what the environment could and perhaps should be like (Blowers & Evans, 1997: xi). This vision, or social purpose of planning, has existed much longer than planning as a professional occupation, field of research or governmental activity. Blum (as quoted in Forester, 1989: 20) describes planning as 'the organisation of hope', while Bryson and Crosby (1996: 463) ascribe to planning, amongst others, the virtue of making 'hope reasonable.'

This paper explores planning, its identity and the place of utopia by firstly looking at loss and need within planning. The potential of re-placing utopia in planning is further explored by identifying potentials and pitfalls associated with this idea.

Long ago planning held the promise of a profession that can tell of a better future, but there have been difficulties in delivering on this promise. During the past two decades a number of scholars proclaimed that planning finds itself in a 'crisis' or a 'cul de sac' or at a 'crossroads' (Castells, 1992; Levy, 1992; Cherry, 1994). A frequent claim that is made to substantiate these statements is that planning is caught in the ambiguous position of utilising methods and concepts of modernism while facing the challenges of postmodernism

---

E. Meyer, Postgraduate student, Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa, 0002. Tel: +27 (0)11 603 3960, Fax: +27 (0)11 234 6290, Email: <engela@brookepatrick.co.za>

Prof. M. Oranje, Professor and Head of Department, Town and Regional Planning, University of Pretoria, South Africa, 0002. Tel: +27 (0)12 420 3531, Fax: +27 (0) 12 420 3537, Email: <mark.oranje@up.ac.za>

(Beauregard, 1991: 190; Sandercock, 1998: 2). Innes (1998: vii) refers to these modernist methods and concepts as being practices of 'rational' planning and describes them as an "... orderly (albeit hypothetical) process which assumes that meaningful collective goals can be defined, that expert neutrality is possible and that the best way of achieving a goal can be determined through formal analysis." 'Progress' is the guiding doctrine of the modernist society and implies that, through scientific development, there would be a gradual increase in society's ability to eliminate or reduce problems relating to the physical and social environment (Nisbet, 1980). The future is viewed as a single, linear timeframe within which it is possible to continuously improve quality of life. According to Cecchini (1999: 152) "(t)own and regional planning has designed cities on a Ford style model of productive and social organisation" based on "the model of scientific rationality elaborated by Galileo and Newton that led us to believe (and hope) that we might be able to predict and govern (control) the world; the secret certainty in the **magnificent destinies and progress of humanity**" (emphasis as in original).

Planning has come a long way from being a profession that was visionary and influential to being a fragmented profession intimidated by the complexity of the postmodern (Gill & Kelly, 2000: 270). In order to rekindle the inspirational and visionary role of planning, it is necessary to enhance [or establish?] a conscious relationship with the future. By acknowledging the possible, the probable and the preferable in planning, planners can [once again] bring hope by telling stories of a better future.

According to Marshall (1997: 50) attempts to steer future events unavoidably has a value dimension as it results from certain directions or paths chosen at the expense of others. The turn of the century value laden, quasi religious search for a concrete utopia resulted in a fair amount of [often public] failure accompanied by some disillusionment (Sandercock, 1998: 1). In reaction, planning's engagement with the future was refined during the course of the 20th century to involve more than dreams and visions. The modernist scientific perspective, which was dominant for most of the 20th century, held that 'the world' is something that can be explored and explained. Through me-

ticulous observation patterns could be detected, explanations provided and clarity gained. Scientists applied this approach to the concept of time as well as the manner in which change takes place over time. If change is to be observed and analysed, it might be possible to detect patterns and eventually to predict behaviour as well as possible and probable outcomes.

Planning theorists and practitioners shared this modernist deterministic approach and, as planning is a field concerned with the future, there was wide spread interest in the development of mathematical models to be used in the planning of settlements and regions during the 1960s and early 1970s. Batty & Cole (1997: 283) refer to a 'quantitative revolution' that took place in geography and related fields between the mid 1950s and early 1970s. Scientific and technological development provided the field with new techniques and measurement tools in terms of spatial modelling and socio economic forecasts to give substance and certainty to the utopian dreams that inspired earlier planners (Marshall, 1997: 32; Baum, 1999: 4; Oranje, 1997: 117). The scientific hope was embodied in large scale modelling and these tools and techniques were applied extensively in all kinds of plans and policies, but yet again disillusionment set in. Observations were made in the 1970s (Lee in Levy, 1992: 83) that planners lost some faith in their ability to predict accurately over the long term due to the failure of many plans to deliver on promises and realise predictions that were made. According to Baum (1999: 4) "... the Achilles heel was irreducible ignorance about how to understand the perverse complexity of the world." The result often was an oversimplification of past and existing conditions and projecting these into the future (Baum, 1999: 4). Planners' disillusionment coincided with a general loss of faith in the predictive capacity of large scale models, which has been part of the broader disillusionment in the validity of rational scientific method and universally applicable theory.

Part of the response to these realisations consisted of emerging paradigms in the late 1970s and through the 1980s that were based on phenomena such as complexity and chaos. These proclaimed that accurate prediction in complex socio economic or socio environmental systems is not possible

(Engelen, *et al* 1997: 125). The intrinsic detail of such systems matters and their success and survival reside precisely in their level of complexity. These theories on chaos and complexity hold that presumably small impacts or changes might have spectacular effects in the future (Gleick, 1987; Niiniluoto, 2001: 373) with the resulting "exponential instability and ... uncontrollable effects" (Baudrillard, 1994: 111). These impacts being unpredictable, an interpretation of this system of 'order without predictability' is that it eventually becomes an unplannable reality (Levy, 1992: 83). Thus planners questioned the longterm validity of and therefore motivation for exercising forecasting in a variety of forms (Berry, 1994; Cartwright, 1991). Disillusionment with the usefulness of mathematical models in particular set in. In this vein Baum (1999: 4) for instance describes it as a 'fantasy' that "scientific method could comprehend complexity and control uncertainty."

In a somewhat idealistic interpretation, Helling & Sawicki (1997: 228) concur that the latter part of the 20th century saw the future orientation of planning manifested through the affirmation of community goals and aspirations specifically by sharing relevant knowledge in the interest of improving decisions about the future. In addition, emphasis was placed on the role of historical momentum in shaping the present and the future (see also Strategic Marketing Committee of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, 1997: 223). However, Isserman (1985), in a seminal article about planning's relation with the future, is of the opinion that this broad concern with the sharing of and access to knowledge that was regarded as planning's late 20th century approach to the future, still lacked the ability to inspire and enchant planners, politicians and others.

## 2. PLANNING, IDENTITY AND UTOPIA: THE NEED ...

"It is a poor memory indeed that only works backward!" the White Queen to Alice in Wonderland

(Carroll, 1993: 138).

The loss of our ability to bring inspiration to the places and practices of planning is ascribed to our lack of focus on the future, but subsequently also to our skewed relationship with change. Walton (2000: 35) is of the opinion that

planning tends to deny the unexpected by dealing in trends based upon extrapolating from the status quo. Gilg & Kelly (2000: 269) argue that it is imperative for planners to become experts in the study of change. Such expertise would enable them to preempt change, to recognise it and accommodate it in daily planning actions. Isserman (1985: 485) even argues that in the same manner as geographers claim the study of space and have developed methods to analyse it, planners should claim 'change' as a dimension and accept the obligation to study it. Although the world will still change without planning, "... planning's central claim is that change will be better for its intervention" (Gilg & Kelly, 2000: 269). Post modernism queried the wisdom of modernism and demonstrated over the past few decades that even "... a system predicated by change can itself be undermined by change" (Gilg & Kelly, 2000: 270). Planning has become little more than a procedure driven, plan as you go activity with an absence of debate and leadership (Morphet, 1999: 18). Huxley & Yiftachel (2000: 338) share this concern about the prominence of proceduralism in planners' activities. Tewdwr Jones (1999: 26) observes that planning conjures up an image of "the abandonment of the past", and not necessarily that of a proactive future seeking and future shaping profession. Planners tend to accommodate change instead of choosing to effect it. Expectations of plans to be both visionary and pragmatic resulted in planning becoming "... a multifaceted dilemma within a political crucible" (Tewdwr Jones, 2003: 3). This political dilemma had the consequence of the profession being marginalised [and sometimes barely tolerated] as a harmless and low key activity (Cherry, 1994: 22).

Gilg & Kelly (2000: 271) further argue that recent prominent planning theory [ising] also contributed to neutering the profession. Planning through debate and/or communicative planning inherently focuses on the communicative practices of planners in an attempt to make planning a more democratic activity (refer to Healy, 1993; Healy, 1997; Innes, 1995; Innes, 1998a). Although the idea is to present a form of planning that is not technocratically orientated or prescription dominated, but 'planning by learning' (Oosthuizen, 1998: 1), it often results in work that is

relatively low key, short term, project based and incrementalist in style, reducing planning to being merely an exercise in accommodating change (Gilg & Kelly, 2000: 271). Innes' argument that the important part of planning is not deciding on a course of action for the next twenty years, but about "being adaptive and creative as the future unfolds" (1998: viii) is symptomatic of what Huxley (2000: 372) argues could result in 'practical paralysis' where consensus, however provisional, is a desirable end state in itself.

While the realistic perspective of Baum (1999: 3) that "planning concerns imaginary events that, however much one might desire them, have never taken place, have uncertain precedent, and might never occur", is important, Hyde (2000: 19) argues that planning can learn from utopian planners and their ideas for/of utopia that planning should be confident that it can make things better and planners have to once again share that confidence with the broader society. Idealism should be at the heart of planning, but in day to day activity one might observe that planners are often merely there to "provide the useful service of 'reducing the inconvenience' for developers and other powerful companies and people" (Hyde, 2000: 19). Parkyn (1999: 30), in a severe criticism of planning, accuses the profession of having "... singularly failed as a profession to supply anything much that people can hang their hopes on". Sandercock (1999: 19) shares her opinion on the responsibility of planning to inspire. She refers to a 'city of desire' depicting the present and the future and the rediscovery of the 'city of the spirit', keeping in mind that planners are the people responsible for inventing new forms of enchantment within the built environment (Sandercock, 1999: 19). The metaphoric importance of utopian thinking in planning has been very important. "When viewed through the lens of a grand master plan, the future as utopia was a powerful metaphor that gave their plans direction and purpose" (Wachs, 2001: 367).

The identity of planning and/or planners has been subject to continuous definition and scrutiny. The postmodern fluidity and transgression of borders contributed to ongoing mediation and redefinition. Planning as a professional activity is also subject to these pressures. Status and membership are widely debated with Tewdwr Jones (2003: 5)

describing a 'behind the scenes' activity with debatable 'sexiness' and appeal. Questions are asked: who are the clients and/or beneficiaries of planning? What are the aims of planning activities? What should be the content of plans? Subsequently the curricula of planning schools are scrutinised: what is the emphasis on technique? What should the emphasis on technique be? What is the influence of current day government policies?

The responses of planning/planners in South Africa to these pressures have been diverse. A first response was 'back to the laager' where planners returned to former mainstream professional activities such as the management of the use of land thereby reducing the aim/scope of planning to something that is safe and predictable. In a further attempt to deal with post modern pressures a drive for work reservation is evident. Planning even went utopian: icons and ideals were identified and highlighted to reinforce their purpose. In some instances there was a measured recognition of fluidity, hybridity and flux with planners accepting the challenges posed to them. Incremental approaches were employed to reconsider issues such as role players and their contributions and power structures.

The argument that there is a need for a utopian approach to/in planning is therefore based on two aspects. Firstly the development of sustainable human settlement[s] cannot take place without a future focus. "Apart from the difficulties of definition and therefore also measurement, sustainability as policy deals in time horizons hitherto unimaginable – certainly decades and probably centuries" (Evans, 1997: 8). At the heart of sustainability lies a time [and future] dimension of generational justice. There is a need for direction and purpose that cannot be satisfied through plan as you go, reactive methods/approaches in/to planning. As a second supporting aspect it could be argued that in terms of the identity of planning, the future and utopian thinking is crucial. The origin of planning is visionary, offering promises of a better life and attempting to make 'hope reasonable'. Planning inevitably has a value dimension and we need to revisit these promises and ask ourselves whether we want and could deliver on them. The planning profession is concerned with two universal dimensions, space and time, and

according to Myers (2001: 365) "(a)t present, our methods for addressing the time dimension of planning are far less developed than those for space".

### 3. THE PURSUIT FOR PERFECTION

*"Subversive historiography connects oppositional practices from the past and forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently imagined in such a way that we can witness ourselves dreaming, moving forward and beyond the limits of confines of fixed locations"*

(Bell Hooks as quoted in Sandercock, 1998: 33).

Throughout history the focus on the future repeatedly manifested in utopian thinking, writing and planning. This utopianism not only focused on imaging of places, but entailed broader ideological movements dealing with ideal societies and systems. Scholars and authors from different backgrounds embarked on the journey to provide a peek into a future ideal society. The utopian approach to life is often viewed as being part of ordinary human behaviour. Although arguments prevail that refer to utopian thinking as a fad, or accusing it as being unattainable, sometimes naïve ideals that are of no use to society, it covers such a broad range of ideas and approaches that it is evident that it has not gone out of fashion, it is more a case of the way in which it is approached and presented that might have changed.

Mumford (1962: 1) observes that the term 'utopia' could mean either the ultimate in human hope or the ultimate in human folly. Sir Thomas More (refer to More, 1997), whose work in 1516 introduced the term to modern political discourse, intended the double coding contained in the term as he pointed out the Greek origins: 'eutopia' which means the good place; and 'outopia' which means no place (Achterhuis, 1998: 14).<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity

of utopias – once described as striving to reach 'the good place' and the futility of searching for 'no place' – reflects the ambiguity inherent in utopian modes of thought and their ambiguous relationship to history. According to Meisner (1982: 2) utopia, the perfect world that people wish for, and history, the imperfect future that people are in the process of creating, do not correspond. He is of the opinion that this lack of correspondence contributes to giving utopian thought a sense of moral pathos as well as his torical ambiguity: morally utopia might be 'the good place', but historically it is 'no place'. Meisner (1982: 4) views this ambiguity of utopian thinking as an asset: "For it is precisely because utopia has not been realized in history – and indeed is something historically unlikely and perhaps impossible – that provides utopian thought with its continuing intellectual and historical vitality." Frye (1965: 25) gives further clarification when he refers to utopia as a 'speculative myth' which is not designed to be a theory that connects social facts, but rather that utopian thinking creates a tension between the actual existence and the ideal, thereby generating a sense of hope for the future.

According to Hardy (2000: 12) the utopian thinking of the 20th century can to a certain extent be seen as a response to the impact of the two World Wars, the social effects of economic dislocation, the spectre of totalitarianism and the harsh new world of modernity the ordinary citizen was confronted with. Rapid change gave rise to high hopes and great anxieties, all at once (Hill, 1997: 2). In traditional societies this utopian ideal was/is provided by either religion or some other governing force, be it a monarchy or a strong politically elected government. With the Enlightenment came the idea that human beings are not necessarily dependent on an external force to provide hope for a better future. Through science and the control that humans can acquire over nature, they could determine their destiny and therefore provide their own hope or create their own utopia/dystopia. During the 20th century hope for the future increasingly became embodied in the idea of scientific progress. Scientists were determined to discover what Le Corbusier called the 'rules of the game' (Fishman, 1982: x). Through this modernist idea political systems such as communism came into being

which are in essence utopian ideals. With religious fervour the idealists of the 20th century set about realising utopian ideals through an ideology of technological and scientific progress (Eco, 2001).

Some utopian visions have a very articulate physical aim in the sense that it is prescriptive on the actual appearance and arrangement of the utopian settlement. In this instance Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* [1898] is probably the most well known planning example of a reaction to the smoke and smog filled cities of his age that also has a very clear description of the nature and form of the proposed settlements (Howard, 1965). Frank Lloyd Wright's *Broadacre City* [1935], Le Corbusier's *Radiant City* [1935] and Tony Garnier's *Cité Industrielle* [1904] are some of the other well known 20th century urban utopias (Fishman, 1982). "Utopianism ... varies from one period to another. A utopian scheme will invariably seek to address problems experienced at a particular time and in a particular cultural setting, its aspirations will be coloured by popular dreams of perfection and the ways in which ideas are expressed are also a product of their time" (Hardy, 2000: 11).

A recent example of such utopian writing in planning circles would be Sandercock's *Towards Cosmopolis* [1998] in which she pleads for a new planning paradigm that makes provision for a 21st century society based on plurality and diversity (Sandercock, 1998). Even the South African example of *A Manifesto for Change* by Dewar and Uytendogaard [1991] contains strong utopian elements focusing on an integrated and inclusive South African society.

Utopian thinking and writing inevitably reflect a distinction between darkness and light. Thinking about utopia tends always to favour opposites and extremes. Polak (1965: 281) argues that there is usually no continuum, only polarisation. A certain moralistic approach cannot be escaped and although the description might centre on the utopia, the presence of the opposite, the so called dystopia is always there. The Janus face of utopian thinking: Having both a utopian and a dystopian presence.

Another characteristic of utopian thinking is that of theory versus reality. The realisation of a utopia is often

1. Of interest is that More's *Utopia* was published in the same year as Machiavelli's *The Prince*. According to Achterhuis (1998: 48) these publications are of importance in that they were published at a time when imaginations were stirred by sudden changes of conceptions of the world. These texts attempted to provide some answers to the questions of the age, signifying a break with the Middle Ages and laying some of the foundations for modernity.

something totally different from the one rising about it. The sought after heaven often becomes a hell. According to Baudrillard (1989: 75) the United States of America is the realised utopia of our age and his opinion of the Country of the Stars and Stripes is not flattering. Another example of disillusionment with realised utopia might be the former Soviet Union, which actually served as the guinea pig of the 20th century (Achterhuis, 1998: 119). Orwell's 1984 [1949] is seen by many as a kind of warning about socialism gone wrong and some even argues that it refers directly to the Soviet regime with a number of parallels such as the relationship between Big Brother and his arch enemy Goldstein playing on the Stalin Trotsky power struggle and the tendency to attribute to the dictator all of the feats of history that had led the regime to victory and even the rewriting of history (Eco, 1995: 82-83). On a smaller scale Hardy (2000) describes a number of utopian settlements of pacifist groups, religious sects and artistic clusters – providing many examples of the reality not always being as enchanting as the utopian ideal. Many reasons are cited for failure – more often than not the blueprint nature of these utopias is blamed. D.H. Lawrence was amongst the [megalomaniac?] utopian thinkers disillusioned with reality when discovering that his vision of a new beginning for society proved to be well beyond the reach of even his most enthusiastic followers. Instead of acknowledging the limits of utopia, he blamed human shortcomings: "... my idea was the true one. Only the people were wrong" (Hardy, 2000: 17). This characteristic disillusionment of utopia is often raised in critique on the utopian approach (Aldiss, 1995: 157).

Utopias also necessarily give a so called panoptic perspective of the idea[], reflecting both the bigger picture and the detail. The former is usually necessary to validate and justify the proposed view of the world and to capture imagination and support.

Utopian elements are found everywhere; even Maslow's [1962] self actualisation of personality and the realisation of all potentialities (refer to Hjelte & Ziegler 1981: 361) can be regarded as utopian in nature (Manuel, 1965: 94). Shipley (2000: 235) argues that Maslow's theories introduced new approaches to the study of 'cognitive and motivational dimensions' which

had a major influence on, amongst others, management theory and organisational practice and had an indirect influence on planning. Self actualisation implied that ordinary folks' dreams and/or visions could be realised. But even more significantly for planning, the argument that "the study of motivation must be in part the study of ultimate human goals or desires or needs" (Maslow as quoted in Shipley, 2000: 235) supported the claim that it is the vision of the future that motivated present actions.

#### 4. RE-PLACING UTOPIA IN PLANNING: WHAT AND WHERE?

In terms of the 'what' and the 'where' of re-placing utopian thinking, planning could look at:

- the content of the stories that are told about the future thereby creating a vision of the future that motivates present actions;
- the way planners/planning/plans tell their stories about the future, therefore the rhetoric, and
- developing our methods and techniques to address the time dimension of planning and not only spatial aspects (Myers, 2001: 365).

Even if a number of arguments against utopian thinking could be raised and even though the [partial] realisation of many utopian ideals might have had disastrous outcomes, the use of the approach is still relevant for this millennium. It represents a particular way of looking at the future and Rorty (in Achterhuis, 1998: 397) argues that a return to utopianism is one way in which intellectuals can fulfil their neglected task of keeping the future alive. "It is the **striving** for utopia, not its accomplishment, that is the dynamic force in history – and indeed a historically necessary one" (Meisner, 1982: 4). The premise is further supported by what Levy (1992: 84) refers to as the relationship between 'ought', 'should' and 'how.' A concern with the future provides the planning profession(s) with the 'ought' and 'should' supporting the day to day activities of planners, which are often lacking in planning theory focusing on the 'how' of planning. Mannheim (1960: 236) even argues that the relinquishment of utopian thinking would result in the loss of the will to shape history and with

that the ability to understand both the present and the future.

Re-introducing utopia in planning will help us deliver on the said promises of planning by giving a vision and shared purpose. Sandercock's (1999: 19) call for cities of desire and enchantment and Throgmorton's (1993: 122) case for inspirational planning stories about the future support the re-introduction of utopian concepts. Throgmorton (1993: 122) calls for planners to tell stories about the future that are potentially both persuasive and constitutive and as such should lead us to ask questions such as: What kinds of communities, characters and cultures do we want to help create? He argues that planners should strive not to speak only/purely scientifically or only/purely politically but to find a rhetoric that helps to create and sustain a public, democratic discourse. Maybe we have succeeded in taking the first steps towards creating an arena that would facilitate and encourage public and democratic persuasive discourse permitting "planners (and others) to talk coherently about contestable views of what is good, right, and feasible" (Throgmorton, 1993: 122). The latter could not only improve the vividness and inspirational value of planning, but also the vividness and value of the future. Baum (1999: 11) even argues that "(t)he pragmatic test of a plan is whether it can convert readers into collaborators."

Of obvious importance is mapping the future in terms of what is probable, what is possible and also what is preferable. The suggestion is made that planning should look towards futures studies for concepts, theories and tools useful for strengthening the future focus in the field (Cole, 2001: 373). As fields of scientific research planning and futures studies have a number of interfaces and shared traits and they can [potentially] have a complementary relationship.

Cecchini (1999: 168) however, advises planners to treat techniques and methods from other disciplines with caution as they are not always the 'powerful picklocks' that will at once resolve the limitations of traditional models. Bayne (1995: 315) argues that this emphasis on technique and method might "further complicate the creative task" as planners are required to "construct plausible images of future possibilities that are firmly grounded in reality." She argues that this ability to

'future image' is based on a capacity to "perceive the world through models that are neither verbal, nor numerical nor literary" (Bayne, 1995: 315).

## 5. RE-PLACING UTOPIA IN PLANNING: HOW?

*"Holistic, bold images of desirable futures were once an important part of planning. Our predecessors dared to dream and to create. Today we must again learn how"*

(Isserman, 1985: 491).

The first way to re introduce utopian and futures thinking is through planning education. Planning has a history of visionaries and according to Wachs (2001: 367) "many planners tell (them) selves and (their) students that in the early days of planning the field was dominated by visionaries such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Daniel Burnham, Ebenezer Howard, Clarence Stein, and Rexford Guy Tugwell who saw the future in bold outline." The first planners to grab the imagination way back then did it through selling an idea of the possibility of a better world and a better life. And of course a better future. Theorists such as Isserman (1985) called for the introduction of modules on 'the future'.

Amos's (1999: 22) postmodern argument for opening up the borders and breaking down the fences that isolate the planning profession from other disciplines could enrich the stories that planners/planning/plans tell about 'the future'. Specifically the cross boundary export of techniques/methods and data for shaping and knowing 'the future' is essential. Wilson (1994: 13) argues that the planning process came to rely in many cases on a single technique or methodology. "Given the range of issues and factors that strategic planning has to deal with, such reliance was manifestly misplaced: no single methodology could fulfil all needs, and this approach was doomed to failure" (Wilson, 1994: 13). Field and MacGregor (1987: 17) make some suggestions as to the selection of appropriate futures techniques for planning: quality control is to be emphasised by determining the 'accuracy', 'validity' and 'constancy' of a forecasting tool. In addition to that, the selection of a method [or an appropriate mix of methodologies] is highly dependent on the investigated subject, the available resources (material and human) and the characteristics

and planning culture of the organisation (Wilson, 1994: 23). If we could introduce futures modules as part of the planning curricula, we could enrich planners' thinking about the future, while at the same time address the need for specific planning techniques that theorists such as Mazza (1995; 2002) call for.

Another aspect that could be addressed through planning curricula is sensitising students to the rhetoric of planning/planners/plans. Other sources of knowledge and inspiration should be emphasised. 'The future' provides a domain for discussion which Couclellis (1997: 165) describes as "... right there between prediction and game playing, between science and science fiction, lies the realm of sharpened intuition, informed speculation and educated guess." Imagination is therefore used as a methodology to predict/understand/question 'the future' thereby challenging the widely held assumption that the only legitimate way to study planning is in a manner considered scientific after an image of the natural sciences – with intellectual, emotional and moral detachment (Baum, 1999: 4). Mumford (1965: 307) appeals to planners that their most important task is to build castles in the air. Planning is supposedly governed by practical reason, in that it always has to confront effective problems of choice and action that demand the abilities of judgement, orientation as well as the formation of consensus and implementation. And to be able to do this "... (s)ound principles are not enough, and neither is purely methodological competence" (Palermo in Cecchini, 1999: 165).

A second way in which utopian and futures thinking could be re introduced to planning is through informing and publicising so called stories of success. The practice of best practice profiling is important if we are to make planners and ordinary people aware of the impact of planning. Popularising images and perceptions of the future could begin to address the need for debate and leadership on the planning profession. In our very individually focused societies, buy in (not only participation), is crucial in any planning endeavour. Furthermore, these methods of utopian thinking should become part and parcel of planning practice and process. To ensure this we obviously need to illustrate the impact and resulting benefits of a utopian approach.

## 6. POSSIBILITIES, PROBABILITIES AND PROSPECTS FOR PLANNING

*"... we should be suspicious of the Greek distinction between appearance and reality ... we should try to replace it with some thing like the distinction between 'less useful description of the world' and 'more useful description of the world'"*

(Rorty, 1999: 48).

While we strongly support a concern with the future and the practice of 'thinking about utopia', we contend that a utopian focus can unfortunately result in a fixation with a bounded territory – utopian thinking about place. This is aptly demonstrated by Vigar and Healey (1999: 153) who indicate that in aspiring to giving a sense of purpose and a shared focus to planning, the [often highly constrained] context in which an area/region finds itself, might be glossed over or even disregarded. In South Africa, with planning and visioning done for all of the 284 municipalities, we could end up with '284 utopian areas' with little regard for the realities of history, place, context and location. Applying utopian ideals and apparent success stories and so called best practices without contextual considerations could, likewise, fail.

A re introduction of utopia in planning would require a need for different scales of planning and a way of coordination and integration between these. Recent movements and discourses in planning in South Africa have had a strong emphasis on these so called 'intergovernmental relations' and the concept of 'governance' (Oranje, 2002). Under 'governance' is understood the complex interactions between state institutions and a diversity of role players in the management/governing of public affairs (Flinders, 2002), which implies that existing/current forms would be subject to constant review and change, and that new and different forms of governance would continually be developed. This view is supported by Ache (2000: 447) who argues that responsible representatives, stakeholders and other actors in the planning arena face an "increasingly heterogeneous, fractionated and volatile environment for decision making and policy delivery." Under these conditions it follows that new modes of, and approaches to governance would have to be developed that are more flexible, less static and

traditional, more communicative and creative, less standardised, open to learning processes and open to participation by many different stakeholders with respective material and immaterial assets. It is this procedural dimension of planning, the measure of co-operation and networking, which will be decisive in the pursuit of the competitive edge by cities and regions.

It is furthermore important to develop a common language on utopia in planning, e.g. what is our shared understanding of the concept? What is the importance of this approach to us all? How is it relating to current planning discourses? Best practices and past successes need to be demystified and contextualised and the balance between various aspects such as certainty and discretion has to get specific attention in a utopian approach to planning.

Lastly, it is important to recognise the state of fluidity in the world, the necessary and resultant hybridity of planning (Harrison, 2004), and of course, an approach and culture of learning and adaptation. Baum (1999: 3) for instance argues that for planning/planners/plans the learning experience will depend on forgetting – "giving up memories of some things in order to remember others." The paradigm of the 'learning region' and its interface with 'planning' is also promoted by Ache (2000: 445) in his references to terms such as 'creative milieus' or 'local innovation systems', which are associated with a situation where "actors are strongly and flexibly networked, ideas and thoughts cross disciplinary boundaries rather than remaining isolated inside, where the network is not restricted to economic actors but incorporates social, political and institutional actors, where communication and information exchange is a frequent rather than an occasional event" (Mitchell, 2000: 56).

## REFERENCES

ACHE, P. 2000. Vision and creativity – challenge for city regions. *Futures*, 32, pp. 435-449.

ACHTERHUIS, H. 1998. *De erfenis van de Utopie*. Amsterdam: Ambo.

ALDISS, B.W. 1995. *The Detached Retina: Aspects of SF and Fantasy*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press.

AMOS, F. 1999. What planning is – or should be. Planning what? *Planning*,

1340, pp. 22-23, 15 October.

BATTY, M. & COLE, S. 1997. Time and Space. *Futures*, 29(4/5), p. 277-89.

BAUDRILLARD, J. 1989. *America*. New York: Verso Books.

BAUDRILLARD, J. 1994. *The Illusion of the End*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

BAUM, H.S. 1999. Forgetting to Plan. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 19(1), pp. 2-14, Fall.

BAYNE, P. 1995. Generating alternatives. *Town Planning Review*, 66(3), pp. 303-320.

BEAUREGARD, R.A. 1991. Without a net: Modernist Planning and the Postmodern Abyss. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 10(3), pp. 189-193.

BERRY, B.J. 1994. Comprehending complexity. *Urban Geography*, 15(8), pp. 695-697.

BLOWERS, A. & EVANS, B. (eds.). 1997. *Town Planning into the 21st Century*. London and New York: Routledge.

BRYSON, J.M. & CROSBY, B.C. 1996. Planning and the Design and Use of Forums, Arenas, and Courts, In: Mandelbaum, S.J. et al (eds.). *Explorations in Planning Theory*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Centre for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

CALVINO, I. 1974. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

CARROLL, L. 1993. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

CARTWRIGHT, T.J. 1991. Planning and chaos theory. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 57(1), pp. 44-56, Winter.

CASTELLS, M. 1992. The world has changed: can planning change? *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 22(1), pp. 73-78, Sep.

CECCHINI, A. 1999. New information and communication technologies and the professions of town and regional planners. *Computers, Environment and Urban Systems*, 23(3), pp. 151-172, May.

CHERRY, G. 1994. At a crossroads or stuck in a cul de sac: which way now? *Planning Week*, p. 22, 3 March.

COLE, S. 2001. Dare to Dream. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 67(4), pp. 372-383.

COUCLELIS, H. 1997. From cellular automata to urban models: new principles for model development and implementation. *Environment and Planning B: Planning & Design*, 24(2), pp. 165-174, Mar.

ECO, U. 1995. *Apocalypse postponed*. Edited by Robert Lumley. London: Flamingo.

ECO, U. 2001. The roots of conflict. *The Guardian*. October 13. [online], available from: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/saturdayreview/story>>

ENGELEN, G., WHITE, R. & ULJEE, I. 1997. In Timmermans, H. (ed.). *Decision Support Systems in Urban Planning*. London: E & FN Spon.

EVANS, B. 1997. From town planning to environmental planning. In: Blowers, A. & Evans, B. (eds.). *Town Planning into the 21st Century*. London and New York: Routledge.

FIELD, B. & MACGREGOR, B. 1987. *Forecasting Techniques for Urban and Regional Planning*. London: Hutchinson.

FISHMAN, R. 1982. *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

FLINDERS, M. 2002. Governance in Whitehall. *Public Administration*, 80(1), pp. 51-75, Spring.

FORESTER, J. 1989. *Planning in the Face of Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

FRYE, N. 1965. Varieties of Literary Utopias. In Manuel, F.E. (ed.). *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge.

GILG, A.W. & KELLY, M.P. 2000. Managing change in the new millennium. *Town Planning Review*, 71(3), pp. 269-288.

GLEICK, J. 1987. *Chaos: Making a new science*. New York: Viking Penguin.

HARDY, D. 2000. *Utopian England Community Experiments 1900-1945*. London: E&FN Spon.

HARRISON, P. 2004. *Postcolonialism and Planning Agendas in the Global South and North*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

HEALY, P. 1993. The communicative work of development plans. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 20(1), pp. 83-104.

- HEALY, P. 1997. *Collaborative Planning: Shaping places in fragmented societies*. MacMillan Press Ltd: London.
- HELLING, A. & SAWICKI, D. 1997. The Central Sixth Theme: Linking Knowledge and Collective Action. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 16(3), p. 228, Spring.
- HILL, D. 1997. *Predictions: The Future of Men*. London: Phoenix.
- HJELLE, L.A. & ZIEGLER, D.J. 1981. (2nd ed.). *Personality Theories*. Singapore: McGraw Hill Book Company.
- HOWARD, E. 1965. *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.
- HUXLEY, M. 2000. The Limits to Communicative Planning. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 19(4), pp. 369-377, Summer.
- HUXLEY, M. & YIFTACHEL, O. 2000. New Paradigm or Old Myopia? Unsettling the Communicative Turn in Planning Theory. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 19(4), pp. 333-342, Summer.
- HYDE, D. 2000. 'What planning is – or should be: Idealism should be at the heart of planning'. *Planning*, 1366, p. 19, 28 April.
- INNES, J. 1995. Planning theory's emerging paradigm: communicative action and interactive practice. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 14(3), pp. 183-189, Spring.
- INNES, J. 1998. Viewpoint: challenge and creativity in postmodern planning. *Town Planning Review*, 69(2), pp. v-ix.
- INNES, J. 1998a. Information in communicative planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 64(1), pp. 52-63, Winter.
- ISSERMAN, A. 1985. Dare to Plan. *Town Planning Review*, 56(4), pp. 483-491.
- LEVY, J.M. 1992. What Has Happened to Planning? *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 58(1), pp. 81-84, Winter.
- MANUEL, F.E. (ed.). 1965. *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge.
- MANNHEIM, K. 1960. *Ideology and Utopia*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- MARSHALL, T. 1997. Futures, foresight and forward looks. *Town Planning Review*, 68(1), pp. 31-52.
- MAZZA, L. 1995. Technical knowledge, practical reason and the planner's responsibility. *Town Planning Review*, 66(4), pp. 389-409.
- MAZZA, L. 2002. Technical Knowledge and Planning Actions. *Planning Theory*, 1(1), pp. 11-26.
- MEISNER, M. 1982. *Marxism, Maoism and Utopianism. Eight Essays*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- MITCHELL, W.H. 2000. *e topia*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- MORE, T. 1997. *Utopia*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
- MORPHET, JANICE, 1999, 'What planning is – or should be: Modernising Planning?' *Planning*, 1333, p. 18, 27 August.
- MUMFORD, L. 1962. *The story of utopias*. New York: The Viking Press.
- MUMFORD, L. 1965. Utopia, the City and the Machine in Manuel, F.E. (ed.). *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge.
- MYERS, D. 2001. Symposium: Putting the Future in Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 67(4), p. 365, Autumn.
- NIINILUOTO, I. 2001. Futures studies: science or art? *Futures*, 33, pp. 371-377.
- NISBET, R. 1980. *History of the Idea of Progress*. London: Heinemann.
- OOSTHUIZEN, E.M. 1998. Unpublished notes on *Communicative action in planning*.
- ORANJE, M.C. 1997. *The language game of South African urban and regional planning: A cognitive mapping from the past into the future*. PhD thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- ORANJE, M.C. 2002. Should provinces/regions have their own planning acts? An exploration of the debate using the post 1994 South African experience, in Rydin, Y. and Thornley, A. (eds.). *Planning in a Globalised world*. UK: Avebury.
- PARKYN, N. 1999. 'What planning is – or should be: Make no little plans'. *Planning*, 1348, p. 30, 10 December.
- POLAK, F. 1965. Utopia and Cultural Renewal. in Manuel, F.E. (ed.). *Utopias and Utopian Thought*. Boston: The Riverside Press Cambridge.
- RORTY, R. 1999. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin Books.
- SANDERCOCK, L. 1998. *Towards Cosmopolis Planning for Multicultural Cities*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- SANDERCOCK, L. 1999. 'What planning is – or should be: Recovering the city of spirit'. *Planning*, 1344, p. 19, 12 November.
- SHIPLEY, R. 2000. The origin and development of vision and visioning in planning. *International Planning Studies*, 5(2), p. 225-39, June.
- STRATEGIC MARKETING COMMITTEE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE SCHOOLS OF PLANNING, ACSPP. 1997. Anchor Points for Planning's Identification. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 16(3), pp. 223-224, Spring.
- TEWDWR JONES, M. 1999. Beyond a joke: facing up to some home truths about planning. *Planning*, 1329, pp. 26-27, 30 July.
- TEWDWR JONES, M. 2003. Creating and Shaping Places with Purpose, Vision and Pride. *International Planning Studies*, 8(1), pp. 3-8, February.
- THROGMORTON, J.A. 1993. Survey Research as Rhetorical Trope: Electric Power Planning Arguments in Chicago in Fischer, F. and Forester, J. (eds.). *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 117-144.
- VIGAR, G. & HEALY, P. 1999. Territorial Integration and 'Plan led' Planning. *Planning Practice & Research*, 14(2), pp. 153-169, May.
- WACHS, M. 2001. Forecasting versus Envisioning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 67(2), pp. 367-372, Spring.
- WALTON, D. 2000. 'What planning is – or should be: A massive and enduring market for planning'. *Planning*, 1398, p. 35, 8 December.
- WILSON, I. 1994. Strategic Planning Isn't Dead – It Changed. *Long Range Planning*, 27(4), pp. 12-24, August.