

A critical analysis of regional planning in South Africa in the 21st century

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Abstract

The democratic South Africa brought with it a swathe of changes regarding the entire governance system of the country including the notorious apartheid planning system. One of these changes that landed with the new dispensation was the establishment of provinces as a distinctive interrelated and interdependent (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996) sphere of government between the national and local governments. This sphere of government consists of nine provinces that are earmarked, amongst others, by varied population and geographic sizes, political orientation, socio-economic endowments, institutional capacities and competencies, development potential and development planning systems and implementation capabilities. One of the major challenges currently facing the national government is the muddled state of regional/provincial development planning processes and plans. Most of the regional development plans are characterised by a lack of a clear strategic development agenda and an ongoing planning process that seldom sees the dawn of completion and implementation, varying time frames, inward focussed plans, plans that are hardly monitored, plans that do not have teeth and plans that seldom add value to the intergovernmental landscape of South Africa. The aim of this paper is twofold: firstly, to unpack the current provincial/regional development planning challenges and to critically discuss and engage some of the pertinent phenomena that have shaped and are currently shaping the nature in which provincial development planning has evolved thus far in South Africa since the early 21st century; secondly, the paper will also touch on the dynamics that underpin the provincial planning processes since 2000 in South Africa. The paper will adopt a critical and interpretive stance. In doing so, the paper will relate briefly to the concept and dynamics of municipal integrated development planning of South Africa within the intergovernmental planning landscape that is currently emerging.

Keywords: provincial development planning and implementation, municipal planning, governance system, intergovernmental planning landscape, municipal integrated development planning.



1 Introduction

Provinces in South Africa, like municipalities and other apartheid related forces, had to undergo a form or change since the dawn of the new government after 1994 (Rogerson [1]). This change in provinces was witnessed by an increase in the number of provinces from four to nine. This re-demarcation process was marked by a range of difficult political nuances. Since the introduction of nine provinces by the new government, the advancement of provincial planning in South Africa became almost non-existent and unheard of within the planning and governance platforms. A sign of life on the existence and perhaps acknowledgement of provincial development planning (provincial strategic planning) was witnessed around 2004. In fact, neither the Presidency nor the Department of Provincial and Local Government had staff that attended to provincial planning matters prior to 2004. Municipal planning was the latest fashion and fascination for both planners and other government practitioners.

The move adopted by certain proponents of the integrated development planning concept shortly after the failure of the introduction of this concept at national level, to by-pass the provinces as an alternative sphere within which to locate this concept, could be interpreted as a statement by national government pertaining to the importance given to provincial planning. It could be argued that this step is one of the decisions taken by the new government to indicate their uncertainties, or perhaps lack of commitment to provincial planning as opposed to local level planning, which enjoyed undivided attention since 1996.

The entrenchment of the local integrated development planning pointed out the importance of proper planning requirements in other government spheres in order to optimally enjoy the benefits of the local plans, thereby teaching us about the importance of a systems approach to planning within government (Harrison [2]).

When the evolution of provincial started saw the dawn of light in the early 21st century when the evolution of provincial planning started to take off mainly due to the importance and the strong emergences of the concept of alignment given the establishment of the IDP system.

Whilst provincial planning in South Africa is finding its feet, the evolution of national planning in South Africa is not better off. The fruitless attempts undertaken by the Forum for Effective Development Planning (FEPD) to kick-start a national development plan, in the form of an integrated development plan shortly after the new democratic government of South Africa are yet to see the light of day [3].

Notwithstanding these variances within the intergovernmental planning landscape of South Africa together with their relationships with one another (irrespective of how these relationships may be perceived, interpreted, approached used and abused within the system) and the supposedly underlying implications thereof, this paper focuses on relating the story of regional/provincial planning.

In relating this story, it is imperative to firstly provide a broad and brief overview of the intergovernmental planning landscape of South Africa, with a



specific focus on the provinces/regions. Secondly, the paper touches on certain key development planning trends, events and practices in some of the regions/provinces.

More importantly, it is essential to discuss the implications of some of these ad hoc, varying and uncoordinated development planning practices within the regions. It is also empirical to obtain a broad understanding of possible causal factors for such trends without necessarily placing any positive or negative judgement on such practices that could potentially undermine and jeopardise the enjoyment of the current Constitutional, legislative and policy frameworks and more.

Lastly the paper will provide implications of such practices to governance issues, planning issues and other pertinent social issues affecting South Africa immensely such as health and the youth. The paper does not aim to provide answers but seeks to raise questions pertaining to the implications of the issues mentioned above.

This paper is based on studies conducted on the provincial planning since 2004 and the current ongoing work on producing the provincial planning guidelines in South Africa. The paper also borrows from some of the studies undertaken on intergovernmental planning, the National Spatial Development Planning (NSDP) and Integrated Development Planning (IDP).

2 Overview of the intergovernmental planning landscape of South Africa

As a government admired internationally for its young and progressive Constitution, South Africa consists of three spheres of government that are interrelated and interdependent. Felmann and Ambert [4] contend that powers and functions of each of these spheres are clearly laid out by the Constitution and should be adhered to by each of the spheres. One of these powers and functions are to be executed by these spheres of government is that of planning.

In South Africa, the nature of holistic development planning undertaken within the intermediate sphere of government (this kind of planning does not include the planning that is executed by sector departments located within the same sphere of government; sector planning in provinces is undertaken separately from the overall provincial development planning process), the provinces, is mainly known as the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) (other provinces often refer to these plans as Provincial Growth and development Plans e.g. the Eastern Cape Province). Whilst the PGDS is accepted as the provincial planning tool, the IDP at local level is the legally prescribed planning tool whereas the major planning tool at national sphere is accepted to be the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF). According to Mohammed et al. [5] the interrelationships of the PGDS, the IDP and the MTSF should be guided by the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP). These plans and the policy/guiding frameworks, supported by the respective financial and sector plans across each sphere, are aimed at making interventions in district and metropolitan spaces. Figure 1 below argues that interventions, or the so-called



government actions co-ordinated through the various spherical planning instrument/tools as a means to an end, should be guided by the philosophy of joint collaboration on planning and implementation by all three spheres in order to optimise government delivery in the impact zones of government (Mohammed et al. [5]). The impact zones are defined as the 47 district municipalities and the 6 metropolitan municipalities are local level. Figure 1 below illustrates the intergovernmental landscape of South Africa and its key planning tools within each sphere.

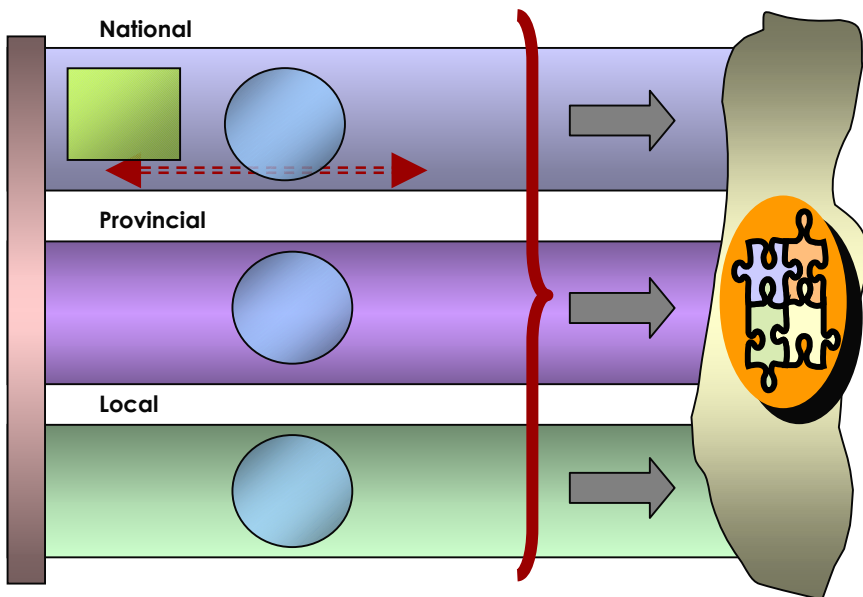


Figure 1: The intergovernmental planning landscape of South Africa (Mohammed et al. [5]).

Given the importance and the role of development planning and the planning tools that are located within the various spheres of government, the importance of these planning tools in each sphere is inevitable, and should be pursued, managed, supported, implemented and co-ordinated with equal importance in order to realise in a sustainable manner, the implementation of government policies and legislation. As it has been hinted earlier, and will be elaborated upon further, this has not been the case with the provincial plans and the national plan. The following sections explore different ways by which these plans have evolved over time.

2.1 The municipal planning system: integrated development planning

The intergovernmental planning landscape of South Africa can be located within each of the three spheres of government as defined by, amongst other key policy

imperatives, the 1996 Constitution and the White Paper on Local Government on Local Government (WPLG). To date, the current nature of planning executed in each sphere of government in South Africa is vividly known to the public. Whilst this is still the case, this evolving intergovernmental landscape has recently become vital to the democratic government of South Africa. Notwithstanding certain political impasses, and the failure of development planning to find a place in the recently promulgated Intergovernmental Relations Bill soon to become an Act, the nature and the formation of the intergovernmental planning landscape is currently emerging strongly in South Africa. To date, the fore-runner to the above scenario is local level/municipal planning. This municipal planning system was established shortly after the new democratic South Africa and is currently legally prescribed to all 284 municipalities that surfaced from the original 850 during the daunting process of demarcation and introducing a new system of developmental local governance (Feldmann and Ambert [4]). Municipal planning in South Africa has taken the form of a holistic plan that is executed within the municipal level and embraces the ethos of integrated development planning. This type of planning is defined in Oranje et al. [3, p 15], Harrison [2, p 185], Meiklejohn and Coetzee [6, pp 4-11] and others as:

“A participatory approach to integrate economic, sectoral, spatial, social, institutional, environmental, and fiscal strategies in order to support the optimal allocation of scarce resources between sectors and geographical areas and across the population in a manner that provides sustainable growth, equity and the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised”

In this definition, of integrated development planning, five key pillars reign. These pillars are; (a) *integration*, (b) *participatory*, (c) *strategic*, (d) *service delivery orientation*, (e) *pro-poor focus*, and (f) *anti-apartheid geared*.

Furthermore, Chapter 5 of the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000, which lies at the core of municipal planning, defines integrated development planning as:

“(a) the principal strategic planning instrument which guides and informs all planning and development, and all decisions with regard to planning, management and development, in the municipality; (b) binds the municipality in the exercise of its executive authority, except to the extent of any inconsistency between a municipality’s integrated development plan and national or provincial legislation, in which case such legislation prevails; and (c) binds all other persons to the extent that those parts of the integrated development plan that impose duties or affect the rights of those persons have been passed as a by-law”

The current legal framework and a range of support measures that have been put in place by government as pointed out in Rauch [7], ensured a sense of direction and progression in development planning within this sphere of government. Even



though certain support measures in the various forms have been put in place, this local planning system still suffers major criticism, stands under constant scrutiny and still suffers many inadequacies indicated by various researchers such as; Aitkinson, Feldmann and Ambert [3], Harrison [8], and others.

In some cases, expectations and the hope placed on these local plans to deliver services, foster development and change lives of the poor in South Africa, led to major disappointments, at least thus far, to the beneficiaries and other IDP believers in government, private sector, and the broader development arena. There are those who were hoping that the IDP will deal with the so called "*big issues*" such as poverty and HIV. As Ambert [9, pp 36-40] illustrates, this has not been the case in most municipalities. Clearly, this is a major concern in South Africa given the rapid spread of the disease and the future implications to issues of governance and planning that needs to be taken into account within municipalities and their abilities to plan in a sustainable fashion.

Despite the challenges that this local plan is facing, it still stands its ground pertaining to its execution, the support it enjoys, and legislation that has been put in place. In fact, it can be argued that the battle to make the IDP work has led government to the be aware of the many gaps that exist with regard to planning in other spheres and how this local plan needs to be supported by other planning processes in the other two spheres of government.



Figure 1: South African provinces.

2.2 The provincial planning system: the provincial growth and development strategy (plan)

In contrast to the evolution of the local planning phenomenon, provincial planning in South Africa has been robbed of attention. It is interesting to note that other than the strategic and developmental role mentioned in the WPLG [10, p 41] probably the first attention-worthy research on provincial planning was conducted about two years ago. This study will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

Other than this study, very little work has been undertaken regarding provincial planning in South Africa as compared to place like the England, (Marshall [12]) that have made major strides and progress since 1997. Figure 2 above provides an overview of the nine provinces of South Africa. Other than Gauteng and Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal, most of these provinces are characterised by high levels of poverty, HIV and unemployment.

The reason for this neglect remains a speculation for many. There are those who attribute this negligence by government to provide some form of guidance as a symptom of the underlying uncertainties and dissatisfaction around the role of provinces within the system. On the other hand, there are scholars that call for the concept of creative experimentalism (Harrison [11]) on planning in the new democratic South Africa. This argument is centred around openness and creating a platform within which planning can evolve without legislative impediments and hindrances that often tend to stifle creativity and experimentation. Even though this argument was targeted at local level planning, there is no doubt that it bears some relevance to provincial level planning. Perhaps the validity of this argument has more merit at the provincial level compared to the local level. However valid, this view, can be countered by the need expressed by most provinces in South Africa for some form of guidance on how to undertake the provincial plans (Gwagwa [13]).

There are also recent emerging observations and concerns regarding the limited role that provinces are playing as a sphere of government that possesses executive and legislative powers. These concerns take the view that some provinces are operating merely as the administrative arm of government despite the powers bestowed upon them by the Constitution. This is an issue of great concern given the fiscal allocation that the provinces secure from national government compared to the local government (Feldmann and Ambert [3]).

Whilst these views are being expressed, there are provinces that have been implementing their constitutional right to undertake provincial planning at their own discretion and putting in place some policies and legislations in this regard, which demonstrates the desire and will to be a government sphere that enjoys its Constitutional rights, and becoming presumably creative and innovative. Harrison would argue that this is perhaps the right approach. Whilst this is the case amongst some provinces, the opposite scenario has played and continues to play itself out in other provinces, thereby, making the provincial planning platform a complex and diversified one with somewhat chaotic and uncoordinated planning processes, actions and efforts that others would argue, yield undesired outcomes and perpetuates a stagnant and unsustainable environment for development within the intergovernmental planning landscape.

Over and above the call for provincial guidelines expressed by certain provinces, as opposed to a provincial planning legislation due to the limitations this will impose to the provinces (Gwagwa [13]), a report on Study Tour for Municipalities [14], makes a recommendation made by the Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government saying:



“provinces should give serious consideration to devising new provincial general development plans that shape and are shaped by the municipal IDPs”

This study was undertaken in 2003, during a period within which some provincial planning were underway. The timing of this recommendation, raises critical questions regarding the existence of provincial plans and or planning. More important to note is that this recommendation provides a clue into the lack of government knowledge or perhaps acknowledgement of some of the provincial development plans, given the fact that the WPLG clearly stipulates that provinces need to develop provincial growth and development strategies as part of their strategic role in government [10, p 41]. The same policy paper clear stipulates the importance of alignment between the IDPs and the PGDS as provinces developmental role.

The study undertaken by Gwagwa [13], paved way and raised some awareness to government regarding the poor planning or lack of planning or even others would argue creative and innovative planning that existed in some of the provinces. This study discovered amongst others, the following issues pertaining to provincial planning in South Africa:

In most provinces the PGDS is in draft form and its finalisation has been delayed by the April 2004 elections. Where there has been substantial change of political leadership, the draft PGDS is being reviewed by EXCO, for example, KwaZulu Natal and Mpumalanga. This is introducing new processes and will obviously impact on the final PGDS that is approved, which might have substantive changes from the draft that was reviews for this report. A case in point here is perhaps KwaZulu Natal. This reinforces the importance of political ownership of the content and process of the PGDS.

Generally there are no province wide planning instruments in most provinces except KwaZulu Natal, North West and Gauteng

The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that, firstly, there is limited province wide planning in this country. Rather what exists is sector and programme specific planning.

Secondly, it can be extrapolated that planning legislation in KwaZulu Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng has been a response to a need to manage and control spatial development and land use management, rather than to guide development *per se*.

What came out clearly though is the need for guidance in the preparation of PGDSs. Provinces are not at the same level in terms of experience in and capacity for planning. Furthermore, the importance of planning, in some instances, seems to be affected by the inclination of the incumbent political leadership

Gwagwa [13, pp 7-12]



This muddled state of provincial planning exposed by Gwagwa, did not go unnoticed. Soon after the presentation of this report to Cabinet, a resolution was taken to prepare some guidelines of guidelines for provincial planning. This call was headed and soon after the first draft guidelines for provincial planning were developed (Lodi [15]). Complementing the development of these guidelines was the call by the President for government to embark on a strategy of harmonising the NSDP, the PGDS (which were broad and undefined at that point). The subsequent outcomes of this study added more light to the possible development of the philosophy that should accompany the development of the PGDS guidelines (Mohammed et al. [5, pp 21-26]), and the subsequent practices thereof.

One of the positive impacts of the awareness that is emerging 2004 on PGDS has been the strong marketing of the various PGDS process in the various process on the radio, billboards and newspapers.

These were followed by an intensive process that culminated into more comprehensive guidelines that are soon to be finalised (DPLG 2005).

3 Concluding remarks

A decade has passed since the new government of South Africa was reinstated. Since then, provincial planning came to the fore about a year ago. The opposite side of the coin demonstrates clearly that local planning is well embedded. Only now is South Africa waking up to adopt, implement and take seriously the importance of an intergovernmental planning system. This new awakening, however good, has certainly had a negative effect on the long standing development issues such as health, government expenditure, the overall delivery of services, unemployment and poverty in the country. The sudden new awakening also points to the reactionary and crisis management tendency of the South African government of many development and governance issues. However concerning this attitude maybe, there is some comfort in the powerful progress made by The Department of Provincial and Local Government and The Office of The Presidency since the call made by parliament to develop the PGDS guidelines.

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