

Humanitarian development in Africa

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Abstract

A great debate on public history is what does one do with buildings and spaces inherited from the past? The aim of this paper is to see in what ways the city of Johannesburg can be developed to create unity and increase economic productivity in a divided urban South Africa. This paper engages with the theoretical framework on humanitarian development paradigm, looking at State, Market, and People, as well as Development From Below.

Keywords: urbanism, nationalism, economy, humanitarian, state power, law, property rights, regeneration.

1 Introduction

Johannesburg stands in a peculiar and promising position in the global imagining of sustainable cities. As a major city in the African southern hemisphere, Johannesburg has major developmental challenges but with great and beneficial outcomes. Given its founding principles as a European city and with Black South Africans as its burden bearers, Johannesburg started off on a wrong footing. Its lust for gold that was previously mined by Black South Africans in Johannesburg created a rush among the European prospectors and speculators to haphazardly form a city so as to start trading gold. Before the Anglo-Boer War, Johannesburg was a town for the Dutch (Afrikaners) and after the ‘war of conquest’, Johannesburg took a form of a city with English (British) characteristics. Given its shameful history, Johannesburg stands on the verge of proving itself and to the world that it is amenable to democratic change, development and progress.

For the sake of national identity and nationalism, Johannesburg needs to revise and amend its legal and corporate structure(s) in order to include the indigenous and settler groups harmoniously. In this twenty-first century and going forward, democratic cities need to be created. Democratic cities must be concerned with indigenous environment first and then secondly, human development. Western



models of city building and planning have or are proving to be an unsustainable development because they lack order, and the human essence that is African. Nations in the developing countries are looking and exploring new ways and forms of city planning and building that is in harmony with not only the environment but also with the essence of being a human.

David in *The Humanitarian Development Paradigm: Search for Global Justice* offers a pivotal and critical theoretical framework for any policymaker who is concerned with developmental paradigm shifts in the adopted European city in Africa:

The focus is on enhancing human development potentials through a dialogue that is anchored in core human values, basic human rights, global justice, and cosmopolitan standards. Such a perspective of liberation calls for nothing short of a “humanistic renaissance”, or revisionism based on explicit or overt norms emanating from within rather than implicit or overt ones imposed from outside or above (David [1]).

Developing the city from above is counterproductive because it seeks to maintain status quo that got Johannesburg in this mess from the beginning. I agree with David that developmental paradigm dialogue needs to be initiated by the grassroots and from below because the grassroots are the masses, and they are the class that contribute and keep the city up and running through their “informal” economic initiatives. For as long as the masses are kept in the margins, the Johannesburg will never and can never speak any of the South African language(s).

“The most notable feature of urban apartheid is the ‘apartheid city’. One form of this is residential segregation, caused by racial zoning and low incomes among Africans” (Tomlinson [2]). For example, let us look at The Maponya Mall that was opened in Soweto in 2007. Such initiative appeared to have interests of the masses in Soweto and other surrounding townships of Johannesburg, to bring economic benefit directly and indirectly to the people who needed it the most in the post-apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, one will be hard-pressed to find that none of the shops in this 65,000 square-metre initiative are owned and controlled and benefiting the people who patronize them.

With this example in our disposal, we must say then that a “humanistic renaissance” is needed in order to create and ensure that balance is kept between those who are in the center and those who are in the periphery. Otherwise, we would have no choice but to say, again Johannesburg is morphing itself into its own image of when it was first started – to exclude the periphery and to use the periphery (African masses) as burden bearers for the European city and its dwellers. But then again, this discussion is not about shopping malls but about building cities that are not only democratic but are in harmony with the environment and its inhabitants. All major and minor stakeholders need to participate in the dialogue of planning, developing and building cities with humanistic essence.



2 Political commitment

When local governments and authorities are transformed from being more administrative appendages of central state power to more autonomous and effective developmental institutions, they become facilitators of the devolution process (David [1]). For as long as dormitory locations such as Soweto, Umlazi, Gugulethu, Alexandria, Kagiso, and more are still in existence- the government will struggle to initiate and effect serious programs and reforms to benefit the average South African. We must remember that the locations (so-called townships) were created to be watersheds and tributaries to supply European cities and suburbs with cheap labor. Like a forced marriage, these cities are unsustainable and that is why they are in decay.

Even the laws that were in place (and are still in place through the legacy of apartheid), ensured that the African either was in the city to render his or her services for the benefit of the European immigrants, and if not, the Pass Laws, Burgers' Law and other mechanisms, rendered him out-of-status and was forced to go back to the homesteads. This is the same reason why the squatter camps are encouraged or overlooked because the government and capitalists know they can extract free labor and offer low wages to those who are desperately seeking employment. This is the reason why huge numbers of the youth in the inner cities of South Africa such as Johannesburg are unemployed.

Besides the problem posed by a lack of political commitment and will, the real trouble with reformist governments often lies in the fact that they are often undecided about the means by which reforms should be executed (David [1]). The State needs to be honest with what to do exactly with its National Development program in order to include the grassroots. It needs to look at drastic and bold programs of reconstruction, rezoning, and planning for an all-inclusive and all-benefiting city that will serve as role model for all other cities in the post colonies.

David continues to advance the theoretical framework for any policymaker worth his or her salt by offering valuable advice:

At the pragmatic level of policymaking and institutional development, the communal will-to-power reflects the positive roles played by diverse organizations occupying the space between the state and private sector. They not only constitute a circle championing programs of community development, but are also enablers of a process whereby people in provinces, districts, and villages have become involved in improving their personal lives by establishing their own priorities in the context of existing realities (David [1]).

There are so many grassroots and community initiatives in and around Johannesburg that are not being given any time of day to thrive simply because those in the center see them as a threat to their "colonial" ways of profit making, and might even displace the status quo. But since the State is the mother-body, it needs to offer alternatives that will ensure that the economy does not only grow or



develop sideways but in both horizontal and vertical- while putting emphasis on giving seed money to the so-called informal economic initiatives (structures). Urban development needs to finally speak at least one or two (South) African language(s).

3 Accessing the city space

The city allows this phenomenon of marginalization, which is created and sustained by the discriminatory laws set up in the city to exclude and frustrate Africans in the city, thus maintaining the status quo that loudly says that the city is for the European and not for a redundant African. In Johannesburg, White privilege reign supreme today as it did back in the late 1800s. Africans still do not know whether they are coming or going, and whether the city space will ever include them or not. Tomlinson offers his two cents on the development paradigm dialogue in South African cities, especially Johannesburg:

South Africa's cities are both extraordinarily inefficient and inequitable. Fortunately, negotiations are presently underway to address the delimitation of functional urban areas that share tax base and institutional and technical capacity. Similarly, racial zoning and restrictions on African enterprise are now a thing of the past. Yet the consequences of this history will not easily be reversed. South Africa will long be burdened by the form of its cities, inequalities in the supply of land, housing and services, and by disadvantages arising from impediments to economic advancement (Tomlinson [2]).

In understanding the city and its needs, moving forward, one has to go back and carefully study its history. History is important to know and understand in order to forge healthy ways of forward progression. Johannesburg is a case study to understanding why it seems to be stuck in its old discriminatory ways. South African government, policy makers and urban planners, need to come up with ground-breaking initiatives that will not compromise the integrity and humanism (Ubuntu) of the African people. Yes, Johannesburg is in the continent of Africa but it is a European concept and creation that is firmly rooted on master-servant doctrine.

4 Humanitarian development

So therefore, and as David puts it, Johannesburg seriously needs an “authentic or sustainable human development” that will be a product of “a political process rather than from mere technical efficiency or technological change” (David [1]). The government and its private as well as public sector, all need to ultimately define the environment in which development agendas are set and executed (David [1]). The government is the one running the State, so they need to show that they are serious about the plight of the down trodden who are constantly side-lined and



excluded by the city space. If not, we can agree with Beavon that the city of Johannesburg systematically created a permanent underclass out of Africans as early as 1890, when he says that the laborers that came to the city they were required to sign contracts with the mines for periods of between six and twelve 'shift' months, the breaking of which would render them criminals (Beavon [3]).

Regeneration of the inner city is a priority for provincial and metropolitan government (Harrison *et al.* [4]). Urban planning and architecture of the Johannesburg is greatly divisive as if to ask the (South) Africans a question they seem to be not wanting to hear being asked, which is, what does one do with public spaces and monuments inherited from colonial (and apartheid) era? This is a question that only a humanitarian development can answer, honestly. The goals of humanitarian development are unreachable except through an open political process that guarantees democratic forms of participation in civil society by all citizens who share a strong commitment to solving common problems (David [1]).

Humanitarian development from below should be concerned with the capacity to empower people at the middle and bottom rungs of society and not so much the size of their organizations, but more importantly, the extent to which their survival skills and mechanisms can be enhanced and protected (David [1]). Lessons could be drawn from radical initiatives made by the Boers when they came into power in 1948, where they ensured that the city was speaking their Afrikaans language. The reform programs they set in place created an environment where their grassroots people took part in the wealth sharing of the country. Even the British under the presidency of Paul Kruger, made sure that the city was constantly given a face-lift to ensure that the Randlords and other capitalists extracted high margin profits. Through forced removals, rezoning, and other reforms, such initiatives benefited a healthy economic growth. Therefore, the ruling government needs radical transformation programs to benefit its citizens from bottom up.

5 Conclusion

Johannesburg has a vibrant and positive future, but the current corporate and legal structures that systematically exclude Black South Africans, retards the growth of this city. Dialogues about the humanitarian development and cities that are democratic need to be centered in the periphery and with voices coming from below in order to develop a healthy city that is productive. Again, for the sake of national identity and nationalism, Johannesburg needs to revise and amend its legal and corporate structure in order to harmoniously include indigenous South Africans as well as the settler (immigrant) groups. Democratic cities that are concerned with the environment as well as human essence need to be planned and built – today. The government needs to be seen taking serious action and initiative as far as setting the mood for planning, building, and financing of these democratic cities. If such discrepancies and injustices are not addressed immediately, Johannesburg will remain a city in which the public and private sectors are renegotiating their relationship and that seeing a drift towards privatization, not just of infrastructure and services, but also affecting land development regulations, building codes and social services (Beall *et al.* [5]). Cities, just like architecture,



they age too and thus, radical transformation is inevitable to make cities benefit its citizens and create harmony and not disparities. It is not about profits but about human, cultural, tradition, and as well spiritual wellbeing of the city dwellers. If we fail to do these things, we will continue building only to destroy.

References

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