

Newbuilt low-cost housing area with minimal space for gardens near the houses. Missionvale, PE, South Africa



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The western concept for urban planning used today is developed to fit a society of labour-based employment. In many growing cities in the Third World, however, the vast majority of the inhabitants is unemployed and has to survive in other ways. There is a need for a more flexible planning concept that enables other means for livelihood security such as from urban agriculture. Both politicians and planners keep up the idea of a western consumer lifestyle as the blueprint for development, even though it is unrealistic for the majority of urban inhabitants in the developing world.

This article is a synthesis of insights from a short period of participation in a comprehensive urban planning project (Sida funded) in Kimberley and Port Elizabeth (South Africa) in 1998 and 1999. All statistics used in this article originate from the First Comprehensive Urban Plan (draft), City of Port Elizabeth (May 1999).

Why We Need Insights from South Africa New Urban Planning Concepts

According to basic knowledge, the aim of physical planning should be to organise the system of maintenance of a human society in space. The agricultural society has its own characteristics, which are different from those of the industrial society. The meaning and function of work, recreation, housing, working place, consumer and producer differ between the two. However, the cities of South Africa represent neither of these two types of society. They are not agricultural societies as the majority of the inhabitants do not own or have access to any means of agricultural production like land or animals; neither are they industrial, as the majority is not employed, has little or no income, and limited consumption. They represent an exception and therefore need to be handled in a different way by the planners.

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PLANS WITHOUT POWER
Planners, however, seem to be unaware of this fact. Their main goal continues to be to try to develop these cities as industrial cities with a functional separation between housing areas, working areas and shopping areas and a focus on the transport system. This planning concept leads to extremely dense housing areas, with very little space left over for agriculture and other productive activities near the dwellings, space that could be used by unemployed people without means of transport, and women with children to look after.

Unfortunately, the planners have no power to attract the necessary industries to the planned areas! They simply devise schemes and hope and pray, and in some ways facilitate for the investors to come. Many big investors need to

be attracted to employ all the unemployed as well as all the newly arriving poor people migrating in from the countryside every day.



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Inhabitants of a peri-urban squatter camp are planning to develop a settlement with agriculture. Joe Slovo Settlement, Port Elizabeth

DECREASING EMPLOYMENT IN SPITE OF A HIGH ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE

In 1998, the growth rate of the population of Port Elizabeth was estimated to be increasing from approximately one million to 2.3 - 2.9 million by the year 2020. At the same time, the formal sector employment was estimated to rise to between 95,000 and 285,000 persons (depending on the economic growth rate: 3 % or 6 %). The draft Comprehensive Plan (1999) states:

“Both scenarios assume a higher growth in the total economy than over the last 25 years. The gap between employed in the formal sector and the rest of the population will tend to increase in both scenarios. However, in the High Growth scenario the public sector will have the economic capacity to increase transfers and maintain services for the entire population. The assumption is that it will be difficult in the Low Growth scenario.”

The above thinking reflects a very fragile foundation for the physical planning of the future society. A society where the

majority of people will depend on production by a minority is not sustainable, especially not if the precondition is a permanent extreme growth rate of 6 %. The discussion about jobs in the informal sector and the areas for small industries and handicrafts, is still within the concept of the industrial society. Urban agriculture is mentioned, but in practice it is not given requisite attention in the plan. Urban gardening can be applied in allotment areas in some places where the space is not needed for anything else. The private plots for housing are planned to be extremely small in order to obtain high density.

NEW PLANNING CONCEPTS

Maintenance systems that are more suitable to the cities of South Africa as well as other parts of the developing world, must be systems that enable not only entrepreneurs and employed people, but also unemployed people without the resources to earn a decent living. Instead of the industrial city concept, it ought to be a mixture of agricultural, industrial and handicrafts systems, where the limits between producers and consumers, work and recreation, housing areas and working places are weakened or nullified. Allocation of land for food production must be an important part of the infrastructure and as important for the design of the city as the transport system.

CONSUMPTION-BASED MODEL AND GLOBALISED CULTURES

To change the prevalent planning concept will certainly not be easy. It will also not be enough because the development of societies is not conducted by theories.

The driving forces are complicated mixtures of cultural and economic factors. Many strong forces drive the industrial planning concept. The attitudes among ordinary people today are highly affected by global influences through the television. The western lifestyle stands as an ideal for many people in the developing world. It is the ideal of consumption, supported by strong commercial forces. But clearly, this lifestyle will never be achieved by the majority. This is most obvious in developing countries, where conditions will continue to be very rudimentary or deteriorate if the physical planning of their cities remains based on principles that have been developed for a

Strong forces drive the industrial planning concept

completely different maintenance system. Politicians often take on the role of optimists, encouraging their people. The main criticism of the comprehensive plans for Port Elizabeth and Kimberley is this unfounded optimism, or rather the illusions it supplies, including the illusion that the people will become well-adapted members of a consumption society.

Another part of this topic is the influx to the cities. In the townships of Kimberley and Port Elizabeth, one would doubt the prevailing view of the positive connection between urban growth and living standard. As long as this connection is taken for granted and is spread by authorities who do not provide strategies for developing the countryside, rural people without assets will go on setting their hope on a new and better life in the city. If access to land for small-scale farming and basic services in the countryside and small towns were to be increased, a great part of the rural population would stay there rather than moving into a dense township in a big city.

Furthermore, in order to ensure a global sustainable future, people in the richer world must also adapt their consumer lifestyle for one that takes greater care of nature, the resources and our fellow people in the less well-off parts of the world. All of these variables impact (directly and indirectly) upon the prevailing planning model and the options for alternative ones.

Unemployed men, preparing for vegetable gardens on a temporarily vacant site. Walmer township, PW.



REFERENCES

Municipality of Port Elizabeth. 1999. The First Comprehensive Urban Plan (draft). Port Elizabeth: City of Port Elizabeth.

Women in a township have invited a councillor to ask for gardening land. New Brighton, PE.



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