

Planning and Planners — issues to be addressed in the Natal/KwaZulu region

As the turn of the century looms little more than a decade ahead it is pertinent to take stock of the development issues that will need to be addressed in the Natal/KwaZulu region. This article, from the perspective of an urban and regional planner, describes the scope of interest of planners and the approach currently adopted in examining complex situations such as this region. Attention is then focused on firstly, the overriding, strategic issues and secondly, their urban and regional planning dimensions. Finally, some suggestions are made regarding the role of planners in the coming years.

Scope of urban and regional planning

In a universal sense, the term planning refers to the 'making of an orderly sequence of action that will lead to the achievement of a stated goal'.¹ This is the kind of planning undertaken by most people and organizations on a daily basis. The more particular concerns of planning for socio-economic development involve the following interwoven elements:

- people, where they live and how they satisfy their day-to-day needs;
- their activities, (economic, social, cultural, recreational, political and administrative);
- the land, including physical resources, the natural environment, man-made improvements and infrastructure;
- the manner in which land and resources are managed and used.²

The field of urban and regional planning focuses attention more sharply still on 'planning with a spatial or geographical component in which the general objective is to provide for a spatial structure of activities (or of land uses) which in some way is better than the pattern existing without planning'.³

Urban and regional planning is a broad discipline which interfaces with the full spectrum of social sciences (including geography, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology and public administration) as well as the disciplines involved in the natural and built environment, such as ecology, architecture, engineering and surveying. Urban and regional planners are therefore trained as generalists, in order to operate at the nexus of varied and often conflicting situations. The scale at which planners work also ranges widely from national/regional, through sub-regional to urban and local contexts.

Planning methodology

Since the 1920s, planning students were taught the classic sequence: survey–analysis–plan, based on the work of the British pioneer in planning, Patrick Geddes.⁴ During the 1960s a new planning method based on cybernetics was introduced and widely adopted. Known as the systems approach, the new sequence was: goals–continuous information–projection and simulation of alternative futures–evaluation–choice–continuous monitoring.⁵

In practice the activity of planning has usually been regarded as separate from implementation and almost invariably carried out by different organizations or teams. The result has been that planners generally hand over their reports to decision-makers and play little further part in the proceedings. Obviously this arrangement has inherent problems with planners excluded from the implementation process and therefore unable either to adjust plans to meet changing circumstances or to learn from experience.

Partly as a response to the need for planning and implementation to be treated as one continuous process, and partly in order to cope with increasingly complex situations that are characterized by uncertainty and the need for short-term decisions, planners have turned to an approach developed by business management. This is the strategic planning methodology. In contrast to the conventional systems method, strategic planning is issue-based, action-orientated and participative in seeking to create an environment within which decisions can be taken progressively from an early stage. In other words, it integrates planning with implementation as part of a continuous process. Strategic planning thus provides a means of ‘managing limited resources and addressing issues critical to a community’s long-term health and economic vitality’.⁶

A consulting firm currently engaged in a strategic planning exercise in Natal⁷ draws attention to the role that the strategic planning process plays in:

- providing an integrated perspective of a region’s current position and future prospects;
- identifying trends that shape the directions in which a region and its community can develop;
- positioning the region to seize opportunities, rather than merely react to changing circumstances;
- identifying trends that shape the directions in which a region and its people can develop;
- allocating limited resources to the most pressing issues;
- identifying those actions, policies and investments that will have the greatest impact on a region’s future;
- ensuring that activities have a long-term direction and focus regardless of changing leadership and intervening crises; and
- providing a mechanism for co-operation between public and private sectors.⁸

It is normal planning practice to adopt an approach that matches the nature of the problem being investigated. In the case of Natal/KwaZulu’s development over the next decade, choice of an approach is influenced by the high level of uncertainty about a number of fundamental issues, the complexity of issues involved and their inter-relatedness, the wide range of major participants involved and the considerable variation in their present access to resources and negotiating power.

The strategic methodology copes particularly well in this type of context and is, therefore, seen as the most suitable both for understanding and for tackling the planning and development issues facing the region. While it is way beyond the scope of this article to undertake a strategic analysis of the region and its people, there is value in setting out some thoughts on one component, namely identification of some of the main issues relating to the region's space economy. The sections following describe the structure of the region's space economy and the broad development issues that need to be addressed as a background to looking at their urban and regional planning dimensions.

Structure of the space economy

The South African space economy reflects the continuous interaction of two major processes — economic and political.⁹ Conceptually the space economy can be described in terms of three main elements (Fig. 1). Firstly, at the centre is the **urban core**, comprising the major metropolitan areas of the PWV, Durban–Pinetown and Cape Town together with the minor metropolitan areas of Port Elizabeth, East London, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein and Kimberley. These represent the non-contiguous urban core of the country's gross geographic product (g.g.p.). Secondly, surrounding these cores is an **outer periphery** zone of primary production which comprises the rest of South Africa in white, coloured and Asian ownership. This large region of farms, mines and plantations generates about 30 % of the g.g.p. Thirdly, there is an **outer periphery** comprising the African homelands or national states which generates only about 3 % of South Africa's gross geographic product.¹⁰

As this centre-periphery pattern has evolved during the last half century, imbalances have become increasingly pronounced, as more and more wealth and economic activity are attracted to the core at the expense of the periphery.¹¹ Applying this model to the Natal/KwaZulu region it becomes clear that the same pattern of concentration and increasing polarization permeates every aspect of society.¹² The Buthulezi Commission reported that in 1970 KwaZulu had 51 % of the region's population but, in terms of the 1975 consolidation proposals, only 36,5 % of the land. The Durban–Pietermaritzburg core generated 72 % of the region's g.g.p. in 1972, the rest of white Natal 23 % and KwaZulu only 5 %.¹³ Fair and A'Bear, submitting evidence to the Buthulezi Commission, comment:

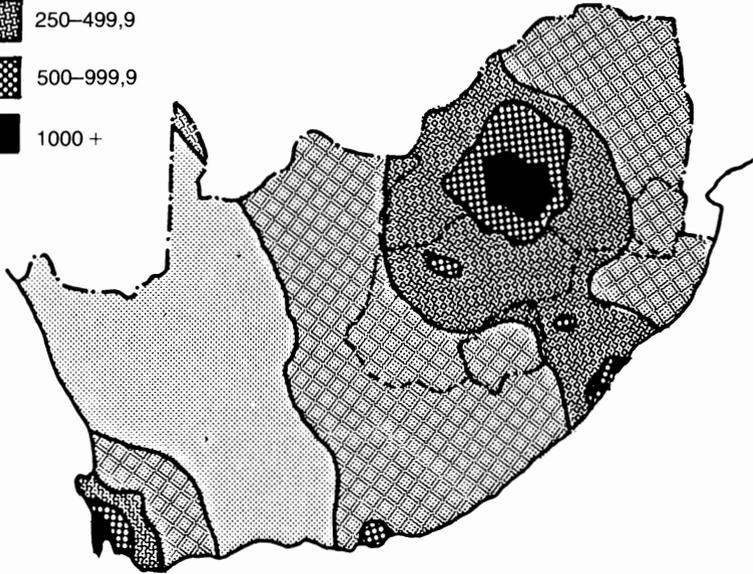
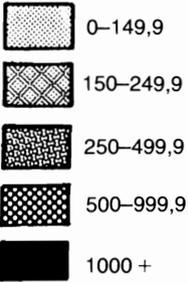
The polarization between Natal and KwaZulu is increased by the fact that Durban and Pietermaritzburg, as port and capital cities of the province respectively, are located in Natal. In other words, the economic power associated with these large cities together with their potential influence in South Africa as a whole, gives Natal a bargaining advantage over KwaZulu in competing for a slice of the economic cake. Finally the adoption of the controversial Homeland policy by the South African Administration serves to polarise society racially and geographically rather than to integrate the already polarized economic core and periphery.¹⁴

The Natal/KwaZulu space economy can thus be described in terms of the Durban and Pietermaritzburg metropolitan **core** region; an **inner periphery** comprising the Newcastle–Durban corridor, the productive agricultural areas, the northern Natal coalfields and the coastal belt; while its **outer periphery**

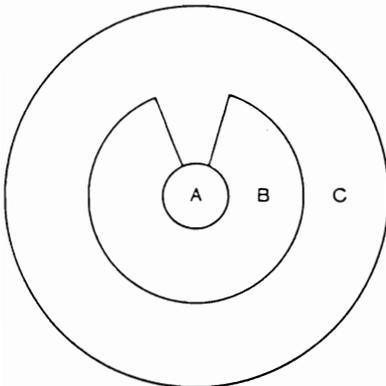
Figure 1 Core-periphery model as applied in South Africa
 (Source: Fair (1982) Figures 5.2, 5.9, 5.10)

(a) Core-periphery structure. Gross geographic product potential 1960

equi-potential surfaces in hundred thousand rands per mile



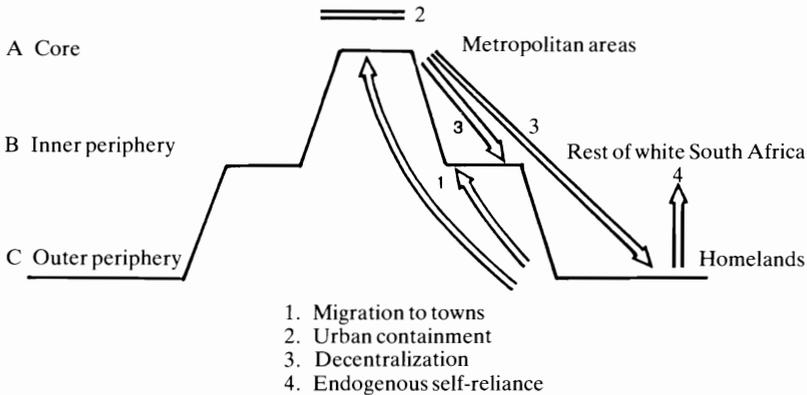
(b) Space economy structure



Gross geography product

	1955	1975
A = Core	62	66
B = Inner periphery	35	31
C = Outer periphery	3	3
South Africa	100 %	100 %

(c) Space economy — trends and strategy



encompasses the less productive parts of white Natal and the whole of KwaZulu.¹⁵

Strategic issues

Having outlined how the region's spatial economy is structured and the overall processes in motion, attention turns to the most important or strategic issues to be addressed in the Natal/KwaZulu region in the next decade. These issues are pivotal in the sense that public and private sector decisions about these issues will, cumulatively, set the parameters (limitations and potentials) for the region's development.

Participation in the political process and in decision-making structures

All people in the region want the same opportunity to play a role in the political process through decision-making structures they regard as legitimate and representative. However, the existing political dispensation and structures are acceptable to only a small minority of the region's people.

Economic growth

The region's economic well-being depends on growth which, in turn, depends on the region's maintaining or increasing its share of the national g.g.p. and on remaining competitive in international markets. The regional economy will need to grow more rapidly than it has over the last decade if the minimum aspirations of its residents are to be met.

Employment creation in both the formal and informal sectors

Closely linked with economic growth is the need to create jobs for the increasing labour force. The formal sectors of the economy are unlikely to be able to achieve this alone and a considerable proportion will need to be taken up in the informal sector.

Urbanization

Urbanization has two components. Firstly, the physical concentration of people and economic activities in towns and cities, and secondly, the social aspect, or way of life, whereby people become urbanized in a

psychological sense.¹⁶ In purely numerical terms, the Natal/KwaZulu region is urbanizing rapidly with Durban now established as the second largest city in South Africa and one of the fastest growing in the world. The land, housing, infrastructure and service implications of the rate and scale of urbanization being experienced impose severe demands on the region's resources and delivery systems. The social component of this urbanization presently lags far behind the physical migration as is revealed in the oscillating patterns of migratory behaviour.¹⁷

Infrastructure, services and housing

The resources are not available for the public sector to provide these services at the standards previously used. The issue is partly one of meeting minimum requirements in all three spatial zones in the short-term and making provision for upgrading of services in the medium and longer terms; and partly one of involving the private sector (ranging from large corporations to individuals and households) to an increasing degree in the provision of these services and facilities.

Financing development

Central government sources of funding are limited and are subject to competing priorities from other regions and for purposes other than development. Here again, the private sector is being called upon to play a larger role than before, but the ways and conditions upon which private sector funds can be deployed, require considerable clarification and room for manoeuvre if the potential is to be fully realized.

Regional integration

In order to counter the growing imbalances in the region outlined above, and to address the political/social issues, Natal and KwaZulu need to be viewed, planned and developed as a single, indivisible region. This has been recognized by numerous bodies and has resulted in such initiatives as the Buthulezi Commission, the KwaZulu-Natal Planning Council, the Indaba and the Joint Executive Authority and the proposed Regional Services Councils. To date, none of these is more than a small step in the direction of regional integration.

Environmental management

The region's long-term economic development and the welfare of its people depend to a large extent on management of natural resources (such as water, soils, vegetation, coast etc.) in a sustainable way. The issue is one of achieving integrated resource management based on recognition of the needs of all users.

Urban and regional planning dimensions

These issues manifest themselves in different forms in the three areas of the region's space economy; namely, the core, the inner periphery and the outer periphery. The following sections attempt to highlight some of the most pressing issues within each of these zones.

Urban core

The population of the Durban Metropolitan Region (DMR) is currently estimated at 3 584 000 of whom 10,4 % are white, 17,1 % Asian, 1,9 % coloured and 70,6 % black (of whom two-thirds or 1,65 million live in

informal settlements).¹⁸ Looked at from another perspective, almost half Durban's population lives in informal settlements which are mostly located far from employment, and provide inadequate physical infrastructure (sites, water, roads, drainage, sewerage, electricity, telephones, refuse collection, etc.) and little security of tenure. At present Durban is widely recognized as one of the fastest growing cities in the world, a trend which is likely to continue beyond the turn of the century. The metropolitan population is expected to nearly double to 6 459 000 by the turn of the century which is an alarmingly short 12 years ahead. Longer term projections envisage DMR's population rising to around 10 million by the year 2010.¹⁹ The most urgent implications of this rate and scale of urbanization from a planning perspective are those of finding land in advance of settlement and of upgrading infrastructure and services in informal areas already settled. Associated with these concerns is the need to use land within the formally settled areas of Durban and Pietermaritzburg more effectively and intensively. From an economic perspective the crucial issue is that of employment creation at accessible places within the metropolitan areas.

The other component of the urban core, Pietermaritzburg, has a present metropolitan area population of almost half a million people with land and service demands similar to those of Durban.²⁰

Inner periphery

The inner periphery comprises the development corridors extending inland to northern Natal and along the coast. This zone is the region's area of primary production — mining and agriculture. The main development corridors are along the north and south coast; from Durban–Pietermaritzburg to Ladysmith and Newcastle; from Richards Bay–Empangeni to Vryheid; with other smaller potential development corridors emerging as off-shoots of this network (e.g., Estcourt–Winterton–Bergville–Ladysmith, Tongaat–Wartburg, Empangeni–Nkwaleni–Eshowe). Three basic types of town are found here: service centre towns providing for the needs of farming enterprises and agriculture-based industry (e.g. Kokstad, Estcourt, Bergville, Greytown, Stanger), resort towns of the coastal belt (e.g., Margate, Port Shepstone, Scottburgh); and industrial growth points where incentives and the development of infrastructure have stimulated industrial development (e.g. Richards Bay, Empangeni, Newcastle, Ladysmith).²¹

The most critical issue in this zone is economic development in the sense of continued production; and this hinges on optimizing the development of natural resources with a view to their long-term sustainability. The towns in this zone are characterized by small commercial cores and slow-growing residential areas. The most critical spatial planning issue relates to the efficient use of land and provision of services in the towns. At present settlement in and around these towns is strongly influenced by historical patterns of racial zoning with the result that infrastructure and services cannot be provided on a cost-effective basis.

Outer periphery

The outer periphery is mainly populated by the poorest people in the region, those who have the least skills or access to resources and who



'Little boxes on the hillside ...' The provision of housing is a major challenge to planning.

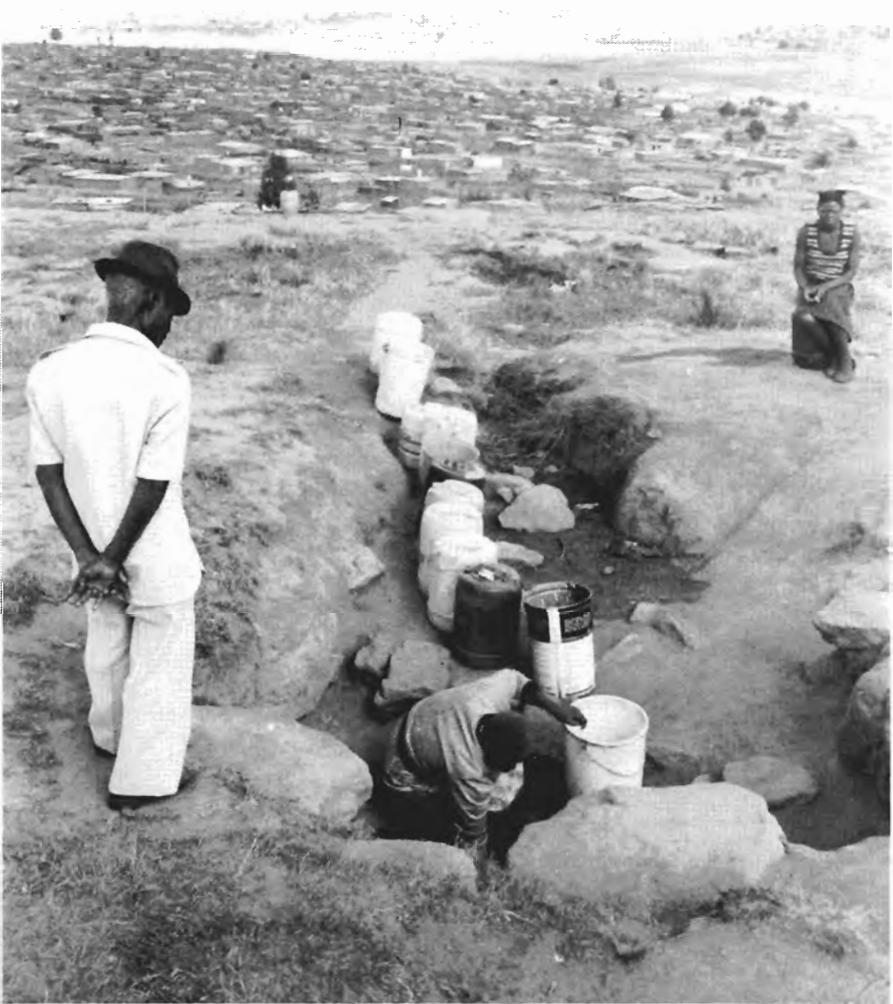
(Photograph: Natal Witness)

depend, for the bulk of their income, on remittances from one or more household members working as migrants in either urban core or inner periphery. In this zone the primary issue is one of survival. Households have evolved complex survival strategies that may include sending members with the best economic bargaining power to cities for work, investing in the primary and sometimes secondary education of one or two children who show the most promise in terms of future earning capacity; using other children to tend the livestock (usually seen as an investment); while others engage in some subsistence farming. Strategies of this type are frequently overlaid by complex intra- and inter-family dependency patterns. People living in these areas also experience an almost universal need for basic services and facilities: clean water for domestic use, gardening and building; access roads linking rural villages to the network of government-maintained roads; primary health care, schools, shops, telephones, public transport and jobs. There is also a pervasive need for access to information and advice regarding day-to-day problems such as pensions, unemployment insurance.

To a certain extent some of these facilities can be provided at rural service centres, which are intermediate, embryonic small towns situated in rural areas at a level in the settlement hierarchy between rural villages and the towns of the inner periphery.²² But for the most part basic needs have to be provided in and around the homestead, which depends

largely on the efforts of individuals. The issue here is one of assisting individuals and communities to provide for themselves until such time as public agencies are able to supply and maintain basic services.

There is a widely held misconception among administrators and professionals working in the outer periphery that rural people are incapable of expressing their needs or formulating priorities. Evidence from projects in the region confirm that this is a fallacy²³ but herein lies a fundamental problem — that planning and implementation tend to be prescriptive in terms of what rural people need, ignoring the needs, preferences and capabilities of local communities. The result of this disjunction is that what scarce resources are deployed in the outer periphery are often used on inappropriate or unwanted projects.



A problem for planners is the provision of basic services.

(Photograph: Natal Witness)

Conclusions

What are the implications and challenges for urban and regional planners? There can be no doubt that their conventional skills will continue to be needed in planning land use and facilities, ensuring separation of conflicting activities and making continuous adjustments to meet the evolving requirements of cities, towns and rural areas. The rate of urbanization and the pressures this places on land ensures that planners will not be idle in the decade ahead.

Just as all professional or technical fields of activity are influenced by the environment within which they occur, so too is it incumbent on the practitioners of a discipline to adapt to changing needs. Urban and regional planners are currently facing the need to re-assess their roles²⁴ in order to contribute most effectively in the years ahead. On the basis of their training and experience as generalists in the field of land use and development, planners could fill a number of potential roles in addition to those outlined above. These may be seen as challenges to planners in the closing years of this century.

Co-ordination

This involves linking 'top-down' with 'bottom-up' initiatives; acting as an intermediary merger between different interest groups and sectors; and mediating at the interface between agencies that provide services (suppliers) and those who use them (users), between local, regional and national priorities, and between public and private sectors. To a large extent this is a management function which planners are well placed to undertake.

Problem-solving

The urban and regional planning context is fraught with multi-issue, multi-level and multi-faceted problems. Planners could play a particularly useful role in understanding the inherent conflicts and unravelling these problems, in working out the range of feasible options and presenting decision-makers with the basis upon which well-informed choices can be made.

Consultation

The need to consult with people and communities as an integral part of the development process has been widely accepted by government departments, quasi-government agencies, private sector corporations, professionals working in the development field, community workers and non-governmental organizations. Yet the practice of such consultation is still in its infancy and the implications of engaging in meaningful consultation are seldom fully understood by the organizations promoting the idea. Planners operate at the interface between the communities with whom consultation is desired and those bodies wishing to consult. Planners are thus well placed, firstly to assist in making the process of consultation are seldom fully understood by the organizations promoting circumstances, and secondly to help find a balance between the aspirations of both groups.

Opportunity-space

Arising from a recognition that neither planning nor planners can resolve all the problems of any particular situation is the notion that planners should focus their activities more sharply on creating

opportunities (in both physical and organizational senses) within which individuals and groups of people can realize their aspirations.²⁵ The opportunity-space concept stands in contrast to the highly prescriptive, blue-print approach in which the technical/professional knowledge of planners informed the choices for people whose future was being planned. The latter view is on the wane and, as we enter the 1990s, the way is opening for planners to develop more feasible responses to the needs of the region and its people.

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