

Planning Africa Conference, 2018 – Report

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The Commonwealth Association of Planners awarded me the opportunity to attend the Planning Africa Conference, held in Cape Town, South Africa, 14-17 October 2018. This experience allowed me to better understand planning trends in Africa. Trends included theoretical insights as well as practical examples. It was insightful to learn about the unique challenges faced by planners who practice in Africa - specifically South Africa - on a daily basis.

South Africa is a relatively young democracy (24 years old, since 1994). Therefore, challenges are often a direct aftermath of the previous Apartheid regime. Characterised by discriminatory legislation (i.e. *The Group Areas Act, Act no. 41 of 1950*) the Apartheid regime caused for spatial, social and economic imbalances. These imbalances are also observed in past planning processes. Top-down planning processes forced communities to relocate to homogenous landscapes based on race, culture, religion, income class etc. Decisions were made by experts without any negotiation with the communities' being affected. With the democratic turn in South Africa (1994), the inclusion of various stakeholders and their opinions through public participation became an important planning principle.

This conference created a platform for important conversations. Conversations revolved around the restorative power of planning. This included restoration on various spheres which include, national legislation (i.e. *The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013 (SPLUMA)*); local policies and frameworks (i.e. *Local Spatial Development Frameworks* and *Local Municipal Planning By-Laws*); and small-scale initiatives by individuals and non-profit organisations (NGOs).

In order to enable planning as restorative tool, the training of planners in Africa need to be revisited. Currently, planners are educated through the learning of international examples of best practice, theories and concepts (mainly informed by Global North countries). Planners in Sub-Saharan Africa need to be educated in order to respond to Africa-specific challenges. Africa-specific challenges faced by planners include unemployment, poverty, inequality, discrimination etc. Young planners should be educated on the importance of context. Understanding the context of a specific area earmarked for planning intervention, will allow for planners to collaboratively negotiate decisions on a bottom-up manner. Planners should act as facilitators of the planning process through active community engagement. Active community engagement may encourage individual community members to partake in small-scale initiatives in their community. As an end-product, active participation in small-scale initiatives may promote inclusion, safety, resilience and sustainability in local African communities.