

Think Planning – Think Global

Planning Challenges in the Commonwealth

Thursday 22nd March 2018. University of Birmingham

Seminar Report by Mike Beazley, University of Birmingham

The University of Birmingham and the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) held a seminar on Planning Challenges in the Commonwealth on March 22nd 2018. This was organised by staff from the South Africa Planning Education Research Project (SAPER) and was part of the RTPI West Midlands CPD programme that is supported by RTPI West Midlands and No5 Chambers. It provided an ideal and timely opportunity for people to share their ideas and approaches and to explore opportunities for on-going collaboration to deal with planning challenges in the Commonwealth.

The seminar was opened with a warm welcome by Clive Harridge, Secretary-General, Commonwealth Association of Planners/Head of Planning, Transport and Design, Wood Plc. Clive has a long standing interest and commitment to addressing the planning challenges in the Commonwealth. There were a number of presenters including Commonwealth planning experts and scholars who had agreed to contribute to the seminar.



Figure 1: The Line Up of Contributors

Clive introduced John Acres, the current President of RTPI who also welcomed the delegates and talked about the importance of planning and the important role of planning education in helping to equip planners with the skills required to address such challenges.



Figure 2: John Acres, President of the RTPI welcoming delegates

Clive began by further elaborating on the significant planning challenges facing the 53-member Commonwealth countries including issues such as rapid urbanisation, promoting social justice, addressing poverty and responding to the impacts of climate change. He made reference to the Commonwealth Charter that has shared principles of democracy, development & peace. It also promotes the spirit of co-operation, partnership and understanding among Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth Charter had also brought all its members together in 2013 who had signed up to its core values and principles.



Figure 3: Clive Harridge in the opening address

Most of the Charter's Principles are relevant to planning, governance and sustainable development. Clive expanded on the planning challenges in relation to slum development, available resources, food security, planning legislation, climate change, natural disasters, gender, youth and sustainability. He felt that planning has a key role to play in addressing these issues but a lack of available planning resources was identified as a critical factor. There is a need for training and developing the right education and skills for planners across the Commonwealth, but it was stated the planning education does not exist in many small Commonwealth countries.

A key issue identified about planning was whether it was fit for purpose in many Commonwealth countries. Clive pointed out that in some Commonwealth planning legislation was based on the historical English 1947 Town and Country Planning Act model and was out of date and inappropriate for use in the 21st Century. So there is clearly a need for the planning legislation to be looked at to ensure it provides the right set of tools and mechanisms for addressing the challenges identified.

Hector Pearson, an independent consultant and former Planning Policy Manager at National Grid talked about the international work of the RTPI. He focused on three areas: 1) The nature of international challenges; 2) What is happening at the RTPI nationally? and 3) The West Midlands International Committee. In terms of the key challenges he made reference to the current refugee crisis, the lack of infrastructure, and the impacts of climate change in many Commonwealth countries. In terms of the RTPI, the International Committee links all areas of Institute activity to planning outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It guides and shapes the Institute's relations with planning organisations and institutes in other countries, and it develops and strengthens the Institute's international links and reputation. It developed the RTPI International Strategy which is based on a 1) commitment to achieve a more sustainable world through spatial planning and 2) to promote the RTPI as a world leading advocate of the value of planning and planners. Finally, he touched on the revival of the West Midlands RTPI International Committee that indicates the interest in international planning at the regional level.

Dr Lauren Andres, Senior Lecturer, University of Birmingham, talked about urban challenges in relation to the everyday planning activity and education in South Africa. She introduced the South Africa Planning Education Research (SAPER) project that she leads and talked about some of the interesting findings that were beginning to emerge out of the project. This is a joint research project between the University of Birmingham and the University of the Free State in South Africa that is looking the appropriateness, usefulness and impact of the current planning curriculum in South African Higher Education. This research draws upon the hypothesis that an increased focus on the Global South in teaching and training will create more socially-inclusive outcomes. Developing a critical and reflective understanding of post-colonial planning education in South Africa and Africa more widely is crucial to establishing how important the discipline is in structuring local and regional economic development, addressing community welfare and thinking about adequate tools and policy to address and alleviate poverty. Lauren talked about the apartheid legacy and the issue of decolonisation and how these created unique challenges that had to be addressed. The research is underway and the evidence emerging points to the significant challenges facing the planning

system and education in the country but that there was clearly a positive commitment among planning practitioners and educators to addressing these challenges and making a difference. Urban planners in South Africa are playing a meaningful role in the development and transformation of the country, although there is still much to be done.



Figure 4: Dr Lauren Andres discussing the early findings emerging out of the SAPER project

Philip Clarke, Policy & Projects Manager at Warwick District Council & Vice-chair of One World Link (OWL) in his presentation on Bo (also known as Bo Town) provided a useful context for planning in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone has a population of 7 million with 45% of the population under 15-years old. Just over 35% of people lack daily food and only 36% of households have access to piped clean water. In terms of infant mortality – 267 children out of 1,000 die before the age of 5 (UK is 6). Life expectancy is 47-year-old (UK is 78). The city is ranked 177th out of 187 Countries in the UN on the Human Development Index. Half of the government revenue comes from outside donors, there is a 51% illiteracy rate and 70% of the youth are underemployed.

He picked up on the issues raised by Lauren by talking about planning for rapid urbanisation and the Prince's Foundation's Rapid Urbanisation Toolkit project which is being pilot tested in Bo.



Figure 5: Philip Clarke talking about the Rapid Urbanisation Toolkit in Bo City, Sierra Leone

Dr Riette Oosthuizen, Partner, HTA Design LLP, who is originally from South Africa but has lived in the UK for more than twenty years introduced us to an interesting planning concept called 'phronetic planning' developed by planning theorist Bent Flyvbjerg. This explicitly highlights the issue of power in planning and raises 4 key questions: 1) Where are we going with planning? (2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power? (3) Is this development desirable? (4) What, if anything, should we do about it? This was a planning approach that clearly transcends boundaries and makes the issue of power and who decides what goes on as a central focus of attention. Riette also identified key concepts of place, space and home as important elements as to how people determine how and where they live.



Figure 6: Riette Oosthuizen talking about the concept of a phronetic approach to planning that transcends boundaries

Dr Louise Brook-Smith, Partner, Arcadis LLP, HonDtech, BSc (Hons), Dip TP, FRICS, MRTPI then made a presentation on the importance of sharing best planning practice for the benefit of local communities. She was the first female Global President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (2014-2015). She has had many roles in planning and policy making. She championed diversity and inclusivity and lead a series of ground breaking initiatives including the RICS Inclusive Employers Quality Mark and the Property Strategy for Sub Saharan Africa. The critical role of professional bodies and technological linkages through RICS were discussed in relation to stakeholders, associations and the importance of collaboration among them. She discussed the issues regarding risk, unstable business environments and corruption perception in Sub-Saharan Africa which creates a challenging context in which to work. But clearly positive progress is being made.

She highlighted some positive examples of partnership working and collaboration amongst the professional disciplines working across Africa and pointed toward the importance of planning education and engagement in this process. Kenya, for example, has good education provision and planning education in place which contributes to the growth and development of the region.



Figure 7: Dr Louise Brook Smith talking about the importance of sharing best practice

Cliff Hague, Emeritus Professor of Planning and Spatial Development at Heriot-Watt University, was the last of the presenters. He has been widely involved in international planning issues across the world for many years. He is clearly a passionate advocate of the potential power of planning as a force for good in attempting to deal with many of the planning challenges that had already been identified. He is the lead author of a recent UN-Habitat publication *“Leading Change: Delivering the New Urban Agenda through Urban and Territorial Planning”* which was launched at the World Urban Forum in Kula Lumpur in February. It sees planning as part of the solution to many of the challenges many countries face and

as a means to promote planning as a key instrument of sustainable urbanisation and development. This is available to download [here](#).



Figure 8: Cliff Hague's passionate outline of the new urban agenda

Mike Beazley, Central for Urban and Regional Studies, School of Geography, University of Birmingham, provided a brief overview of the discussion during the morning and chaired a short question and answer session. All the speakers had clearly outlined the significant planning challenges facing us. The key learning points seemed to be:

- A need to continue to develop and further our understanding of the issues and their complexities.
- A need to be creative – to rethink planning and perhaps develop more innovative solutions that relate to the contexts in which they operate, e.g. Bo's Rapid Urbanisation Toolkit.
- An approach that sees planning as spearheading the response to these issues and as a force for good e.g. the new Urban Agenda. Planners want to make a difference.
- A recognition of the importance of the theory/practice nexus and exploring new approaches to planning that perhaps can transcend boundaries e.g. phronetic planning
- A need to work together to share best practice e.g. the work of RICS and the RTPI.
- A need to ensure that international organisations work together more effectively – the international bodies, the public and private sectors, the professions and the NGO's. Need a joint multi-layered response.

- A need to address the global shortage of planners and to think about how planning is done. Do planners have the right skills and the appropriate training for the job at hand? Key implications here for planning education e.g. the SAPER project.
- A need to recognise the importance of doing this with people rather than to people. Importance of public participation and working with communities. Need to use bottom-up solutions that maximise the use of local knowledge and adopts an inclusive approach.



Figure 9: Mike Beazley summing up and chairing the discussion at the end

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