

# Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe's Central Urban Issues

Vanessa Watson

*[Paper first received, December 2007; in final form, August 2008]*

## Abstract

Urban planning in many parts of the world reflects an increasing gap between current approaches and growing problems of poverty, inequality, informality, rapid urbanisation and spatial fragmentation, particularly (but not only) in cities of the global South. Given past dominance of the global North in shaping planning theory and practice, this article argues that a perspective from the global South can be useful in unsettling taken-for-granted assumptions about how planning addresses these issues. The article takes a first step in this direction by proposing a 'clash of rationalities', between techno-managerial and marketised systems of government administration, service provision and planning (in those parts of the world where these apply) and increasingly marginalised urban populations surviving largely under conditions of informality. It draws together theoretical resources beyond the boundaries of conventional planning theory to understand the nature of this conflict, and the nature of the 'interface' between those involved, where unpredictable encounter and contestation also open the possibility for exploring alternative approaches to planning.

## Introduction

The joint meeting of the World Planners Congress and the UN Habitat World Urban Forum, in Vancouver in June 2006, signified a major shift in global thinking about the future of cities. There were two important aspects to this shift. The first was a recognition that, by 2008, for the first time in history, the majority of the world's population would

live in cities and, in future years, most of all new global population growth will be in cities in the 'developing' world. The second important insight was that the rate and scale of this growth, coupled with impending issues such as climate change and resource depletion, posed massively serious problems in the cities of the global South and required specific intervention. In effect, UN Habitat was recognising that the profession of urban

**Vanessa Watson** is in the Department of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, Cape Town, 7700, South Africa. E-mail: Vanessa.Watson@uct.ac.za.

planning needed to be fundamentally reviewed to see if it was able to play a role in addressing issues in rapidly growing and poor cities. UN Habitat Executive Director Anna Tibaijuka (2006) called on planning practitioners to develop a different approach that is pro-poor and inclusive, and that places the creation of livelihoods at the centre of planning efforts.

The reasons why systems of urban planning have been less than adequate in addressing issues in the cities of the global South are complex and cannot always be blamed on planning itself. Yet the fact remains that in most of these regions the planning systems in place have been either inherited from previous colonial governments or have been adopted from Northern contexts to suit particular local political and ideological ends. The need for planning systems to be pro-poor and inclusive has therefore not been given much consideration. In many cases, these inherited planning systems and approaches have remained unchanged over a long period of time, even though the context in which they operate has changed significantly.

This article argues that additional and alternative theoretical resources must be brought to bear to allow planners a better understanding of the now-dominant urban conditions and to provide a framework for thinking about planning actions. However, the intentions of this article are to do no more than identify some potentially useful strands of theoretical thinking which will contribute to this shift and to organise these conceptually in relation to the notion of 'conflicting rationalities' (Watson, 2003, 2006). The position taken here is that a significant gap has opened up between increasingly technomanagerial and marketised systems of government administration, service provision and planning (including, frequently, older forms of planning) and the every-day lives of a marginalised and impoverished urban population surviving largely under conditions

of informality. The gap between entrenched (and sometimes static) planning systems and new forms of urban poverty is of course not the only one of relevance. Urban space is also increasingly shaped by the workings of the market and the property industry in cities, which may align with urban modernist visions of city governments, but which do little to benefit or include the poor. I suggest here that the conflict of rationalities between state and market (which can also find themselves in conflict) and survival efforts of the poor and marginalised makes the task of meeting the demands of UN Habitat particularly difficult, and thus demands a fundamental rethink of the role of planning.

This article views planning as a central tool through which government manages spatially defined territories and populations: the issue of power is therefore inextricably linked to an understanding of planning systems. The particular position on power adopted here (with writers such as Rose, Scott and Corbridge) holds that these 'problems' in the planning field have not emerged simply because states are ignorant or tardy (although this can happen): rather, there may be a range of reasons (arising within the state and beyond it) for the continuation and manipulation of established planning land rights and institutions, and sometimes strong resistance to changing them. Also with these authors, however, this does not imply that such power is one-directional or totalising, or always negative or repressive. The space for resistance and struggle, and hence other outcomes, is usually present and this article offers a framework for understanding these.

The article begins by briefly contextualising the argument that planning systems in many parts of the global South are increasingly seen as inadequate and often inappropriate. It then moves to make the argument that conditions of urban life in cities (particularly but not only in the global South) are subject to new forces and are displaying new characteristics

which any shifts in urban planning would need to take into account. While not attempting here to define precisely what these shifts would be, the article then suggests a way of thinking about this issue which recognises the nature of the 'interface' between two important imperatives: that of survival and that of governing. The argument put forward here is that a starting-point for thinking about the possibilities of planning lies in understanding the potentials which emerge from the highly varied nature of interactions across this interface.

The intention is, quite specifically, not to suggest a dual or multiple set of planning perspectives (one for the global North, one for the South, etc.), particularly given what appears to be a growing convergence of urban issues in a globalising world. Rather, the intention is to call for a widening of the scope of planning thought while grounding it specifically in the highly differentiated contexts within which planners work. Hence, I suggest that a 'view' of planning from outside the global heartland where it has its origins—i.e. a view from the global South—provides a useful and necessary unsettling of taken-for-granted assumptions in planning, essential for a conceptual shift in the discipline.

## The Problem with Urban Planning

UN Habitat (2009) and other such agencies may well have grounds for asking planning practitioners to reconsider their role in the rapidly urbanising and impoverished cities of the South. Remarkably, much of the global South, as well as parts of the North, still use variations of an approach to urban planning which emerged in Europe and the US in the early part of the 20th century, adapted to forms of government and urban conditions which have changed significantly.

This early 20th-century approach to urban land management usually comprises a detailed land use plan depicting the desired future of

an urban area some 20 years hence and it is underpinned by a regulatory system (zoning) which assigns use rights in land, and manages any alteration of these, in conformance with what is called a 'master plan'.<sup>1</sup> Master planning has, almost everywhere, carried with it a particular vision of the 'good city' which reflects the thinking of early urban modernists such as the French architect Le Corbusier.<sup>2</sup> Urban form is shaped by a concern with aesthetics (order, harmony, formality and symmetry); efficiency (functional specialisation of areas and movement, and the free flow of traffic); and modernisation (slum removal, vertical or tower buildings, connectivity, plentiful open green space). In the early 20th century, master planning and zoning, as tools to promote urban modernist ideals, were enthusiastically adopted by middle and commercial classes who were able to use them as a way of maintaining property prices and preventing the invasion of less desirable lower-income residents, ethnic minorities and traders. At the time, it was noted that the supposed 'public good' objective of planning had been turned into a tool by the wealthy to protect their property values and to exclude the poor (Hall, 1988).

In some parts of the global North, this approach to planning was severely criticised during the mid 20th century. This was largely because its assumptions about the nature and dynamics of cities, and the ability of planning to control market forces, had not held, particularly with the retreat from Keynesianism. New approaches to 'forward planning', such as the more flexible 'structure' and 'strategic' plans emerged, but the underlying concept of zoning has generally persisted. In countries of the global South, there has been a long history in planning of the transfer of models, processes, policies and regulatory measures from the imperial heartland of the UK, Europe and the US to other parts of the world (see Nasr and Volait, 2003; Ward, 2002). In these contexts, planning

was used in part to create acceptable urban environments for foreign settlers and also to extend administrative control and sanitary conditions to the growing numbers of indigenous urban poor.<sup>3</sup> In some respects the imperial territories (particularly those under French control) were used as laboratories for testing out ideas about planning and administration, for later use at 'home'. Processes of diffusion were never smooth or simple: the ideas themselves were often varied and contested, and they articulated in different ways with the contexts to which they were imported.

In much of the global South, master planning, zoning and visions of urban modernism are still the norm.<sup>4</sup> For example, many African countries still have planning legislation based on British or European planning laws from the 1930s or 1940s, but revised only marginally. Post-colonial governments tended to reinforce and entrench colonial spatial plans and land management tools, sometimes in even more rigid form than colonial governments (Njoh, 2003). Similarly in India, master planning and zoning ordinances introduced under British rule still persist. Ansari (2004) notes that some 2000 Indian cities now have master plans, all displaying the problems which caused countries such as the UK to shift away from this approach, and yet the main task of municipal planning departments is to produce more such plans. In other parts of the global South, particularly in Latin America, there has been some experimentation with new forms of master planning and strategic planning, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

In a study of nine cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Devas (2001) found that most had planning and building standards which were unsuited to the poor. Fernandes (2003) makes the point that in effect people have to step outside the law in order to secure land and shelter due to the élitist nature of urban

land laws. It could be argued, therefore, that city governments themselves are producing social and spatial exclusion as a result of the inappropriate laws and regulations which they adopt. Other authors have suggested that this mismatch between planning requirements and the ability of poorer urban-dwellers to meet them, is not innocent. Yiftachel and Yakobi (2003) suggest that in ethnocratic states, and elsewhere, urban informality can be condoned or facilitated by governments as it allows them to present themselves as open and democratic while at the same time using this as a planning strategy to deny particular groups access to rights and services.

Older forms of planning are thus often confronted with a contradiction: on the one hand, top-down, bureaucratic forms of land use control and rigid plans are cast as outdated and inappropriate in the context of 21st-century governance policies and rapidly changing urban environments and, in many ways, this is correct; on the other hand, these same plans offer protection to entrenched and exclusive urban land rights, promote modernist views of urban form which property developers can support and offer a regulatory system which can be used in opportunistic ways by those with political and economic power. Traditional forms of planning may thus appear to be somewhat of a dinosaur in 21st-century cities, but their persistence is not accidental and will not be easily changed.

## The New Context for Planning

Cities in all parts of the world have changed significantly over the past several decades. Cities and towns undergoing rapid urbanisation in weak economies have long parted company (other than in élite enclaves) with the visions of orderly development and urban modernism of earlier days. As rates of urbanisation and the number of people living in

urban 'slums' rapidly increase (UN Habitat, 2003),<sup>5</sup> there is a widening gap between the norms and objectives informing planning and the harsh realities of everyday life in cities of the global South.

In 2008, for the first time in history, the majority of the world's population lived in cities and, in the years to come, 90 per cent of all new global population growth will be in cities. Significantly, however, the bulk of this growth will be taking place in the global South. A rapidly growing proportion of this population will be urban: in 1950, less than 20 per cent of the population of poor countries lived in cities and towns, but by 2030 this will have risen to 60 per cent (National Research Council, 2003). The implication of these figures is that, globally, cities will increasingly become concentrations of poverty and inequality and hence important sites for intervention, but will at the same time present urban management and planning with issues which have not been faced before.

Compounding all of these problems, this rapid urban growth is taking place in those parts of the world least able to cope: in terms of the ability of governments to provide urban infrastructure, in terms of the ability of urban residents to pay for such services and in terms of coping with natural disasters. The inevitable result has been the rapid growth of urban 'slums', referring to physically and environmentally unacceptable living conditions in informal settlements and in older inner-city and residential areas. The 2003 UN Habitat Report claims that 32 per cent of the world's urban population (924 million people in 2001) lives in slums on extremely low incomes and is directly affected by both environmental disasters and social crises. New forms of planning will have to find ways of responding to rapid and unpredictable growth, in contexts where land and service delivery rely to a far greater extent

on community and informal providers, rather than the state.

Within these rapidly growing and changing urban environments, the nature of economy and society is also changing. Globalisation of the economy and the liberalisation of trade over the past several decades have brought economic benefits to some parts of the global South, and to some groups, but have also succeeded in widening gaps between geographical regions and within them. Countries which report economic growth are also reporting growing numbers of unemployed and households in poverty, together with a burgeoning informal 'sector' which increasingly includes households previously categorised as the middle class (National Research Council, 2003). Al-Sayyad and Roy (2003) argue that these recent economic trends have given rise to an exploding informality in cities of the South which is taking on rather different forms than it has in the past. There appear to be new processes of polarisation within the informal economy, with informal entrepreneurs moving into sectors abandoned by the public and formal private sectors, but many as well swelling the ranks of 'survivalist' activities. In effect, informality (in terms of forms of income generation, forms of settlement and housing and forms of negotiating life in the city) has become the dominant mode of behaviour—in many urban centres it is now the norm and no longer the exception (Roy, 2005; Al-Sayyad and Roy, 2003; Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2003).

Economic liberalisation and growing income inequalities have had obvious implications in terms of high levels of poverty and insecurity, but they have implications for other aspects of social and political life as well. In a context of shrinking formal economies, competition between people and households becomes intensified, promoting both the need to draw on a wide range of networks (familial, religious, ethnic, etc.)

and continually to manoeuvre, negotiate and protect the spaces of opportunity which have been created (Simone, 2000, 2004). Intensified competition, Simone argues, means that economic and political processes of all kinds become open for negotiation and informalisation. Networks with the state become particularly valuable, both in negotiating preferential access to resources and in avoiding control and regulation, with the result that, increasingly

public institutions are seen not as public but the domain of specific interest-groups, and indeed they become sites for private accumulation and advantage (Simone, 2000, p. 7).

The relationship between state and citizens, and between formal and informal actors, thus becomes undercodified and underregulated, dependent on complex processes of alliance-making and deal-breaking, and particularly resistant to reconfiguring through policy and planning instruments, and external interventions.

As a result, assumptions of a relatively stable, cohesive and law-abiding civil society, on which the enforcement of regulatory planning and support for the urban modernist vision depend, must also be brought into question. In cities in both the global North and South, societal divisions have been increasing, partly as a result of international migration streams and the growth of ethnic minority groups in cities and partly because of growing income and employment inequalities which have intersected with ethnicity and identity in various ways. Thus, assumptions in the 1960s that cultural minorities would eventually assimilate, gave way in the 1990s to the acceptance (in the planning literature at least) of persistent multiculturalism (Sandercock, 1998) in cities and ideas about ways in which planners could engage with cultural difference. This is giving way again, in the post 9/11 era, to growing concerns about how planning can engage with civil

society in a context of deepening difference (Watson, 2006).

Yet it is vital for planning to recognise that civil society takes on very different forms in different parts of the world. In parts of Africa, de Boeck (1996, p. 93) suggests, understood dichotomies such as state/society or legal/illegal no longer capture reality. In an “increasingly ‘exotic’, complex and chaotic world that seems to announce the end of social life and the societal fabric as most of us know it”, the state is but one (often weaker) locus of authority along with traditional chiefs, warlords and mafias. Definitions of legal and illegal constantly shift depending on which groups are exerting power at the time. Even in contexts that are less ‘chaotic’ than these, researchers point to the extent to which urban crime and violence, often supported by drug and arms syndicates, have brought about a decline in social cohesion and an increase in conflict and insecurity (National Research Council, 2003). Participatory planning approaches which are based on the assumption that civil society is definable, relatively organised, homogeneous and actively consensus-seeking, have frequently underestimated the societal complexity and conflict in such parts of the world (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

Of particular importance for planning, is that urban growth and socioeconomic change has impacted on socio-spatial change in cities in dramatic ways, but with global forces mediated by local context. In essence, however, planners and urban managers have found themselves confronted with new spatial forms and processes, the drivers of which often lie outside the control of local government.

Socio-spatial change seems to have taken place primarily in the direction of the fragmentation, separation and specialisation of functions and uses in cities, with labour market polarisation (and hence income inequality) reflected in major differences

between wealthier and poorer areas. Marcuse (2006) contrasts up-market gentrified and suburban areas with tenement zones, ethnic enclaves and ghettos; and areas built for the advanced service and production sector, and for luxury retail and entertainment, with older areas of declining industry, sweatshops and informal businesses. While much of this represents the playing out of 'market forces' in cities, and the logic of real estate and land speculation, it is also a response to local policies which have attempted to position cities globally and attract new investment. 'Competitive city' approaches to urban policy aim to attract global investment, tourists and a residential élite through up-market property developments, waterfronts, convention centres and the commodification of culture and heritage (Kipfer and Keil, 2002). However, such policies have also had to suppress and contain the fall-out from profit-driven development through surveillance of public spaces, policing and crime-prevention efforts, immigration control and dealing with problems of social and spatial exclusion.

In many poorer cities, spatial forms are largely driven by the efforts of low-income households to secure land that is affordable and in a reasonable location. This process is leading to entirely new urban ('ruralopolitan') forms as the countryside itself begins to urbanise, as in vast stretches of rural India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Egypt, Rwanda and many other poorer countries (see Qadeer, 2004). As well, large cities spread out and incorporate nearby towns leading to continuous belts of settlement (such as the shanty-town corridor from Abidjan to Ibadan, containing 70 million people and making up the urban agglomeration of Lagos; see Davis, 2004), and as the poor seek a foothold in the urban areas primarily on the urban edge. It is these sprawling urban peripheries, almost entirely unserviced and unregulated, that make up the bulk of what

is termed slum settlement and it is in these areas that most urban growth is taking place. These kinds of areas are impossibly costly to plan and service in the conventional way, given the form of settlement, and even if that capacity did exist, few could afford to pay for such services. In fact, the attractiveness of these kinds of locations for poor households is that they can avoid the costs associated with formal and regulated systems of urban land and service delivery.

The context of government and administration also shows important changes (as well as continuities) which are of relevance for planning. Planning and urban modernism originally emerged in contexts in the global North characterised by relatively strong and stable liberal democratic governments, often with comprehensive welfare policies, and in which rates of urban growth and change were relatively slow, predictable and amenable to regulatory control. Within the past three or so decades, and closely linked to processes of globalisation, there have been significant transformations in government in many parts of the world, making them very different settings from those within which planning was originally conceived.

The most commonly recognised change has been the expansion of the urban political system from 'government' to 'governance', which in the global North represents a response to the growing complexity of governing in a globalising and multiscale context as well as the involvement of a range of non-state actors in the process of governing. In the global South, understanding 'the state' implies comprehending the discourse of the neo-liberal reform agenda which has been promoted through the major aid and development agencies and which has moved through the three phases described as 'structural adjustment', 'good governance' and most recently 'social capital' (Slater, 2004). These "changing modalities of neo-liberal thought",

Slater argues, have not replaced each other, but rather represent an extension of the

discursive terrain [so that] by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the economy, the state and civil society have been represented and situated as part of an evolving regime of truth (Slater, 2004, p. 98).

The implications of all three of these phases for state–society relations have been profound, extending well beyond technical reforms of state and economy to encompass the (continued) inculcation of Western values as well.

At the same time, continuities with past, and sometimes regionally distinct, governance regimes are important. There is no doubt that the processes of colonisation and imperialism fundamentally changed relations between parts of the world, articulating with pre-existing social and governing structures in colonised territories in multiple and complex ways. Such histories continue to express themselves through patterns of inequality affecting economy and society and, importantly, respect for knowledge and expertise (Connell, 2007). Authoritative sources for thinking about urban development and planning, as well as what constitutes a desirable modern city, also reflect these inequalities and partly explain the dominance of particular ideas in this field. As new imperial powers emerge and begin to make themselves felt (for example, China in Africa), it is likely that regional regimes of government and economy will shift again, setting up new relations both to a new metropole and to local citizenry.

Within the post-development literature, the emergence of the neo-liberalised state in parts of the global South has been used to explain the repeated failure of development projects, the widening of inequalities and the depoliticisation of the development effort (Escobar, 2004; Nederveen Pieterse, 2000; Nustad, 2001; Schuurman, 2000). Neo-liberalism, these authors argue, appears to

introduce a new, or perhaps newly framed, set of values to the conduct of political, social and economic life and to seek actively to hegemonise them. At one level, these values direct institutional change: minimising the role of the state; encouraging non-state mechanisms of regulation; privatising public services; creating policy rather than delivering services; introducing forms of performance management, etc. Yet at another level they seek to penetrate further. Brown (2003) argues for the recognition of a new neo-liberal political rationality which is a mode of governance not limited to the state but also produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organisation of the social. The essence of these values is the submission of all spheres of life (including the political and the personal) to an economic or market rationality, such that all actions become rational entrepreneurial action, seen in terms of the logic of supply and demand.

There are, of course, significant parts of the world where the model of the neo-liberalised state does not hold. While certain regions of China are beginning to show these characteristics, it has been argued that the dominant ‘political rationality’ in this country remains one in which an independent civil society is difficult to define, given that the family is seen as an integral part of, and a direct extension of, the state (Leaf, 2005). Theocratic regimes (such as Iran) also operate within a rather different political rationality and conception of civil society, as do ethnocratic regimes (Yiftachel, 2006a).

These shifts have had profound implications for urban planning, which has often been cast as a relic of the old welfare state model and as an obstacle to economic development and market freedom. In a context in which the power of governments to direct urban development has diminished with the retreat of Keynesian economics, planning has found itself to be unpopular and marginalised. It has also found itself at the heart of contradictory



pressures on local government to promote urban economic competitiveness on the one hand, while on the other dealing with the fall-out from globalisation in the form of growing social exclusion, poverty, unemployment and rapid population growth, often in a context of unfunded mandates and severe local government capacity constraints (Beall, 2002).

### Conceptualising ‘Conflicting Rationalities’

The purpose of this article is to consider what strands of thinking can be brought to bear to understand what is perceived as an inability of current planning practices to deal with issues confronting particularly cities in the global South, but increasingly cities in many parts of the globe. I suggest that this exploration requires an understanding of a ‘conflict of rationalities’ arising at the interface between, on the one hand, current techno-managerial and marketised systems of government administration and service provision (in those parts of the world where these apply) and, on the other, marginalised and impoverished urban populations surviving largely under conditions of informality. While an understanding of planning as part of the rationality of government (governmentality) is not new in the planning literature (see Huxley, 2006, 2007), the idea here is that this confronts a different rationality—shaped by efforts of survival—which in turn operates with its own logics and imperatives.

Bridge (2005) develops a concept of rationality which he traces to the Chicago School, to Dewey and to Habermas, who proposed a split between the instrumental rationality of the system (economic rationality and bureaucratic rationality) and the communicative rationality of the life-world. Bridge argues for a somewhat different view of communicative rationality, that moves away from Habermas’ dichotomy; that “involves bodies

and gestures, as well as speech and thought” (Bridge, 2005, p. 6); that understands these communicative actions as qualities of a particular situation and context rather than universal qualities; that accepts dissensus as being as much a part of a communicative situation as consensus; and that (drawing on recent work by feminist pragmatists) sees communicative action as implicated in systems of dispersal of power (in a Foucauldian sense) as well as being in resistance to power. Relating these ideas to an understanding of the city and space, Bridge argues that rationality is not necessarily confined to ‘a community’ as members operate in diverse communities which overlap and collide in various ways. Similarly sharp distinctions between structure and agency dissolve through a focus on power working through social/technical networks and in the constitution of the self.

This perspective on rationality is useful for framing a way of thinking about conflicting rationalities in the environments in which planning operates. It also helps to make the case that, for analytical purposes, planning theory should start from the assumption of a conflict model of society, rather than the prevailing consensus model. Work in planning theory that argues for an ‘agonistic’ view of society—the “permanence of conflict, non-reciprocity and domination” (Hillier, 2003, p. 37)—has begun to move in this direction. For normative purposes as well, there are arguments that the goal of consensus in planning processes needs to be treated with caution. While planning would certainly not seek deliberately to create conflict (although sometimes this is inevitable), there may be circumstances in which consensus-driven processes serve to marginalise rather than to include. Hillier (2003, p. 51) draws on Lacan to argue that conflict should be recognised and not eliminated through the “establishment of an authoritarian consensus”. Porter has argued, in the context of Australia, that a

process which assumes that all stakeholders, including an indigenous traditional landowner group, have equal voice

fails to appreciate their unique status as original owners of a country that was wrested from them by the modern, colonial state (Porter, 2006, p. 389).

The argument then, is that planners (particularly, but not only, in cities of the global South) are located within a fundamental tension—a conflict of rationalities—between the logic of governing<sup>6</sup> and the logic of survival (both highly diverse and overlapping), in which governing has to do with control *and* development and in which development is generally driven by notions of modernisation and the creation of ‘proper’ communities living and working in ‘proper’ urban environments (Watson, 2003). Pile *et al.* (1999) graphically refer to attempts by functionaries of government to extend the grid of formalised and regulated development over what is often termed the ‘informal’ or sometimes ‘unruly’ (or unrule-able?) city, where what is generally referred to as the ‘informal’ represents the survival efforts of those excluded from, or only partially or temporarily included in, regular and secure forms of income generation (or the ‘formal’ economy). With a restructuring of labour markets occurring in many cities, this informality is reaching new scales and new forms in urban areas in all parts of the world. In effect, informality (in terms of forms of income generation, forms of settlement and housing and forms of negotiating life in the city) has become the dominant mode of behaviour—in many urban centres it is now the norm and no longer the exception (Roy, 2005; Al-Sayyad and Roy, 2003; Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2003). Finding a way in which planning can work with informality, supporting survival efforts of the urban poor rather than hindering them through regulation or displacing them with modernist

mega-projects, is essential if it is to play a role at all in these new urban conditions.

By contrast, technical and managerial systems of governing which now operate in many Southern urban areas have embedded within them rationalities which, in many cases, have been inherited from other (often Northern) contexts and are strongly shaped by neo-liberalism. The marketisation and privatisation of services and infrastructure, the on-going promotion of urban modernist forms, the insistence on freehold tenure and the recasting of urban citizens as urban consumers, are all part of this shift. Significantly, however, planning as “a spatial technology of liberal government” (Huxley, 2007, p. 134) continues to be bound up with these interventions. Here, a ‘governmentality’ perspective is useful in understanding the sometimes contradictory workings of power, which can be directed at both the ordering and control of space as well as at its development and improvement—usually shaped by some or other utopian urban vision (Huxley, 2007; Dean, 1999, in Huxley, 2007). Traditional and control-oriented forms of planning therefore find their place in modern governments, where they can serve both progressive and retrogressive ends.

To date, mainstream planning theory has provided little guidance to planners working within such tensions, and few informants for the reconceptualising of urban planning systems (Harrison, 2006; Roy, 2005; Watson, 2002a; Yiftachel, 2006b). Thus a central task for planning and urban theorists is to explore the analytical, evaluative and interventive concepts which could help planners faced with such conflicting rationalities, paying attention to what may be termed the ‘interface’ between the rationality of governing and the rationality of survival. However, it is important that this notion of interface does not set up a questionable binary: between a ‘will to order’ and something that

escapes it (Osborne and Rose, 2004). While techno-managerial and marketised systems of administration, planning and service provision often appear to be entirely sound in their own terms, and may follow 'international best practice', problems arise at the point at which they interface with a highly differentiated and 'situated' urban citizenry. Responses to these interventions are always varied: people in their everyday lives engage with the systems in diverse and unpredictable forms—making use of them, rejecting them or hybridising them in a myriad of ways. It is where linkages occur across the interface that some of the most interesting possibilities for understanding, and learning, arise.

This raises a number of questions. How do we understand and conceptualise this interface between conflicting rationalities, and how do we understand the relationships which it generates? How do we also begin to be able to identify where there is an articulation of interests or benefits across the interface and hence where interventive processes and outcomes can be evaluated as beneficial or destructive? Further, what conceptual strands and theoretical resources might be pulled together into an 'organisation of perspectives', to understand what goes on, and what could go on, at the interface?

Some potentially useful sources for these theoretical perspectives are to be found within existing planning theory, but this source is insufficient. The historical divide between planning theory, which has largely originated in and is addressed to, the global North, and development (and post-development) theory, often also originating in the global North but addressed primarily to the problems of cities and regions in the global South, is an impoverishing one. This intellectual divide has parallels in the one identified by Robinson (2006) between the field of urban studies, which draws on particularly the global cities of 'the West' to explore and celebrate urban modernity, and the urban

development literature concerned with policies to improve life in cities, especially for the poorest, and usually in the cities of the South. If planning theory is to secure its relevance in what is rapidly becoming the globally dominant urban condition, then it too needs to overcome this divide and engage with theories which seek to understand and address the socio-spatial and environmental problems which confront what is now the majority of the world's urban population.

The next section of the article identifies some theoretical strands which could be drawn together to understand the nature of this clash of rationalities, between the will to survive and the will to govern.

### **The Interface: A Zone of Encounter and Contestation**

This article suggests that a central concern for planning is how to locate itself relative to conflicting rationalities—between, on the one hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by the rationality of governing (and, in market economies, modernisation, marketisation and liberalisation), within a global context shaped by historical inequalities and power relations (such as colonialism and imperialism) and, on the other hand, organisations, institutions and individuals shaped by (the rationality of) the need and desire to survive and thrive (broadly the 'poors' and the 'informals'). I am not suggesting that these are the only rationalities at play or in conflict in cities (Bridge, 2005), but I am suggesting that they are key ones for planning. It is also undoubtedly the case that individuals are not fixed in positions on either side of some imaginary divide. Bridge's (2005) point that individuals occupy diverse communities is relevant here. For example, it is not unknown for functionaries in government to live in an informal settlement or slum, or conduct informal

income-generating activities during or after formal work hours.

The interface is a zone of encounter and contestation between these rationalities and is shaped by the exercise of power. For the poor and the informals, it is a zone of resistance, of evasion or of appropriation. It is the point at which state efforts at urban development and modernisation (provision of formal services, housing, tenure systems), urban administration or political control (tax and service fee collection, land use management, regulation of population health and education, etc.) and market regulation and penetration, are met, or confronted, by their 'target populations' in various and complex ways, and these responses in turn shape the nature of interventions. The nature of interactions at the interface can vary greatly: some products or policy interventions can be of direct benefit and improve the lives of poor households without imposing unnecessary burdens (the incredible spread of cell-phones to even the poorest households suggests that this technology articulates closely with felt needs); some interventions (informal settlement upgrade or 'urban renewal') may benefit some households but may result in the forced removal of others and often the imposition of costs that many cannot afford, and this may be met with resistance; some interventions may be appropriated and hybridised so that they are useful in ways which had never been anticipated or intended.

An illustration of how interventions can be appropriated and hybridised is evident in the way in which formal and informal land markets are beginning to work together in Enugu, Nigeria (Ikejiofor, 2008; Nwanunobi *et al.*, 2004). Finding ways to deliver urban land is a critical issue in rapidly urbanising cities, as formal planning mechanisms are unable to keep up with demand for land supply (it meets only 15 per cent of demand

in Enugu) and usually impose costs which most households cannot meet. Further, the individualisation of property rights which occurs through formal land delivery transforms social and economic relations in sometimes problematic ways. Much urban land is therefore delivered through informal mechanisms, but this can lead to conflicts and land use patterns that are difficult to service. Also, informal landholdings preclude recourse to courts of law to resolve conflicts—an option which is available when tenure is formal.

In Enugu, actors in the informal (customary) sector have begun to develop practices that interrelate more closely with the formal land market system. Community leaders are ensuring orderly lay-outs, forms of land transfer registration and tenure security. Further, intricate relationships between government structures, formal land institutions and indigenous landowning groups are emerging. Obtaining formal title to land acquired through customary sources is now possible through the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Town Planning, which will consult the landowning community and the register which most communities keep. If there are no community objections, then the Ministry will issue a title deed if the land is within an approved lay-out, or a Certificate of Occupancy if it is not. Indigenous communities in Enugu have thus begun to 'borrow' from formal rules and imported land development practices to solve internal problems. It should be possible to learn from these adaptive practices at the 'interface' between different systems, to develop urban development approaches which are more appropriate to the conditions of rapidly urbanising and poor cities.

Theoretical perspectives which have tried to understand the nature of this interface, incorporating an acknowledgement of power, are useful here. Arce and Long (2000) develop an anthropological perspective on the encounter between Western visions of

modernity and the *modi operandi* of other cultural repertoires. They explore how

ideas and practices of modernity are themselves appropriated and re-embedded in locally situated practices, thus accelerating the fragmentation and dispersal of modernity into constantly proliferating modernities (Arce and Long, 2000, p. 1).

Thus people do not experience the arrival of 'modernity' as something which can simply replace their 'old' or pre-existing world. Rather, they juxtapose and interrelate different materialities and types of agency and embrace aspects of modernity and tradition together—it could be added, often foregrounding elements that offer opportunities for the exercise of power.

From the field of critical development studies, Corbridge *et al.* (2005) undertake detailed ethnographic work in India to analyse the nature of state–poor encounters and to ask how poorer citizens 'see the state'. They examine the new 'human technologies of rule' in India (associated with a good governance agenda and development) to find where new spaces of citizenship are being created or alternatively remain closed. This involves work on both sides of the interface, to look at 'government in practice' and to see how the state matters to poor people, or where it is something to be avoided or feared. They focus specifically on the everyday-ness of how people inhabit and encounter the state—for example, how an *adivasi* woman negotiates for an appointment with a *sakar*, how she may have to use a local broker to do so, and how she is treated in a formal encounter.

Embedded in the work of both Scott and Rose (who follow a decentred and dispersed concept of power) as well as in the work of a variant of the post-development school (including Corbridge *et al.*, 2005; Williams, 2004, and others) is the belief that power can never be totalising. Therefore there is always the possibility of resistance and struggle

('weapons of the weak' for Scott; 'quiet encroachment' for Bayat) and hence the opening of space for other outcomes. Corbridge *et al.* (2005) argue that the 'good governance' agenda in parts of India, for example, has opened possibilities for improvement in the lives of the poor. In other parts of India it has not and hence the need for grounded research on the 'practices of government' and responses to them (how ordinary people see and regard the state) to determine what makes this difference. Osborne and Rose (1999)—Corbridge *et al.* draw significantly on Rose<sup>7</sup>—make a related point: advanced liberal strategies of government, following the logic of the market, conceive of citizens as active in their own government incurring both rights and obligations in which "rights to the city are as much about duties as they are about entitlements" (Osborne and Rose, 1999, p. 752). These strategies of governing are inherently ambiguous, as what they demand of citizens may be 'refused, or reversed or redirected', and may 'connect up' and 'destabilise larger circuits of power'.

Of course, the question of state–society interaction around planned interventions has been a major preoccupation of planning theory in the form of 'communicative planning theory' or 'collaborative planning', associated particularly with the work of Forester (1999), Innes (2004), Healey (1997) and others. Within development theory as well, the concept of public participation in development projects has been a central concern (see especially the work of Robert Chambers, 1997) and, in some parts of the South, participation has become an accepted part of government and international agency discourse. However, while the two areas of theorising (in planning and in development) have been grappling with the same issues, there has been very little connection between them.

Both, and particularly planning theory, reflect a turn in normative theorising of the processes of intervention and how such

processes might involve planners and development workers, along with citizens or stakeholders, as a way of working towards acceptable plans and projects. The recognition that there are 'different voices' within civil society which represent what may be valid and valuable points of view is vitally important in the South where planning and development interventions in the past have often been top-down or impositionary. There is now a significant body of critique in both literatures, however, which points to the limitations of these processes: the difficulties of reaching meaningful consensus, especially in contexts of 'deep difference' (Watson, 2003, 2006); the varied forms of civil society and different approaches to organised resistance (Bayat, 2004); the need to recognise power (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Yiftachel, 1998); the problem with placing undue faith in processes at the expense of outcomes; and the need to consider broader sustainability and equity issues which may escape local processes (Fraser, 2005). The shift in planning theory away from an assumed consensus model of society, and towards one which instead assumes conflict and 'agonism', has been referred to earlier.

Development theorists have accused participatory exercises of being a form of depoliticisation and a covert mechanism for furthering the aims of liberalisation (for example, Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Williams (2004) provides a useful summary of these arguments in development theory but argues, following a Foucauldian concept of power, that the space for unintended consequences of participation, positive or negative, is always present. He argues for a process of examining ways in which the practices of participatory development play out in concrete situations and a search for opportunities for their repoliticisation. The idea of the interface as a zone of contestation reflecting various and unpredictable forms of encounter across it, is compatible with this thinking.

Understanding what goes on at the interface and how planning interventions impact positively, negatively or are hybridised to suit particular local contexts, requires research of the kind carried out by Corbridge *et al.* (2005) and others: in-depth, grounded and qualitative case study research on state-society interactions and the 'dispersed practices of government'.<sup>8</sup> It requires those in the planning field to draw on this wider Southern literature and to consider how understandings such as these can assist in the reshaping of planning thought and action.

## Conclusion

This article represents an early attempt to stake out the terrain for a shift in planning theory and practice which acknowledges: first, that approaches to planning which have originated in the global North are frequently based on assumptions regarding urban contexts which do not hold elsewhere in the world (and often no longer hold in the North as well); secondly, that the global demographic transition, whereby Southern cities and their growth dynamics are now the dominant urban reality, requires that planning turns its attention to these kinds of issues; thirdly, that the sharp divide in these cities between an increasingly informalised and marginalised population and techno-managerial and marketised systems of government (within which older and persistent forms of planning occupy a sometimes contradictory position) gives rise to a 'conflict of rationalities'. This conflict between the rationalities of governing and administration, and rationalities of survival (of those who are poor and marginalised), offers one way of understanding why, so often, sophisticated and 'best practice' planning and policy interventions have unintended outcomes (which is not to deny that other less explicit intentions may be driving these interventions).

A further central argument of this article is that expanding theorising in planning to incorporate issues of the global South requires tapping into other literatures. Here, the development (and post-development) studies literature, which has tended to focus on issues of the global South, offers important opportunities. Turning the concept of conflicting rationalities into a useful analytical and normative tool for planning requires an understanding of what goes on at the interface between these imperatives and ways in which such interaction can take positive, negative or hybridised forms. Strands of development literature can make an important contribution to this understanding. The suggestion here is that understanding these interactions (the spaces of citizenship, the successes of encroachment, the cracks, spaces and moments of alternative practice, or the positive hybridities) can provide an important basis from which to develop new and normative insights for planning. The step beyond this will be to explore how we balance these possibly small initiatives with the wider imperatives of resource depletion, environmental crisis and growing global income inequalities.

## Notes

1. The concept of land use zoning, a basic element of master planning, originated in Germany and was adopted with great enthusiasm across the US, Britain and Europe in the early part of the 20th century. It subsequently took different forms in different parts of the world. See Booth (2007) for an explanation of why British planning law developed in a different way from European planning law.
2. The Charter of Athens (initiated in 1928) and later strongly influenced by Le Corbusier, was an important document (by 1944) in terms of establishing modernist urban principles.
3. See Huxley (2006) on the 'sanitary' role of planning
4. Although master planning has given way to various forms of strategic planning in Australia, South Africa and parts of Latin America. Starting in 1986, the UN Urban Management Programme also made efforts, in various parts of the world, to introduce more flexible and integrated forward planning. Success has been partial (UN Habitat, 2005).
5. As well as new impending threats from climate change and natural resource depletion.
6. It can be argued that the logic of governing takes different forms in countries with different socio-political systems and in some parts of the world may be only weakly exercised, but that it is always present to some degree.
7. Rose works within a Foucauldian framework (see Rose, 1999).
8. Also, see Watson (2002b) for the use of case study research in planning.

## References

- Al-Sayyad, N. and Roy, A. (Eds) (2003) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.
- Ansari, J. (2004) Time for a new approach in India, *Habitat Debate*, 10, p. 15.
- Arce, A. and Long, N. (Eds) (2000) *Anthropology, Development and Modernities*. London: Routledge.
- Bayat, A. (2004) Globalization and the politics of the informals in the global South, in: N. Al-Sayyad and A. Roy (Eds) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*, pp. 79–102. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.
- Beall, J. (2002) Globalization and social exclusion in cities: framing the debate with lessons from Africa and Asia, *Environment and Urbanization*, 14, pp. 41–51.
- Boeck, F. de (1996) Postcolonialism, power and identity: local and global perspectives from Zaire, in: R. Werbner and T. Ranger (Eds) *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, pp. 75–106. London: Zed Books.
- Booth, P. (2007) The control of discretion: planning and the common-law tradition, *Planning Theory*, 6, pp. 127–145.
- Bridge, G. (2005) *Reason in the City of Difference: Pragmatism, Communicative Action and Contemporary Urbanism*. London: Routledge.

- Brown, W. (2003) Neo-liberalism and the end of liberal democracy, *Theory and Event*, 7, pp. 1–19 ([http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v007/7.1brown.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v007/7.1brown.html)).
- Chambers, R. (1997) *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Connell, R. (2007) *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Crows Nest, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Cooke, B. and Kothari, U. (Eds) (2001) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
- Corbridge, S., Williams, G., Srivastava, M. and Veron, R. (2005) *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, M. (2004) Planet of slums, *New Left Review*, 26(March/April), pp. 1–23.
- Dean, M. (1999) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage.
- Devas, N. (2001) Does city governance matter for the urban poor?, *International Planning Studies*, 6, pp. 393–408.
- Escobar, A. (2004) Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements, *Third World Quarterly*, 25, pp. 207–230.
- Fernandes, E. (2003) Illegal housing: law, property rights and urban space, in: P. Harrison, M. Huchzermeyer and M. Mayekiso (Eds) *Confronting Fragmentation: Housing and Urban Development in a Democratising Society*, pp. 228–243. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (1998) *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Forester, J. (1999) *The Deliberative Practitioner: Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fraser, N. (2005) Reframing justice in a globalizing world, *New Left Review*, 36, pp. 69–88.
- Hall, P. (1988) *Cities of Tomorrow*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harrison, P. (2006) On the edge of reason: planning and urban futures in Africa, *Urban Studies*, 43, pp. 319–335.
- Healey, P. (1997) *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Hillier, J. (2003) Agonizing over consensus: why Habermasian ideals cannot be ‘real’, *Planning Theory*, 2, pp. 37–59.
- Huxley, M. (2006) Spatial rationalities: order, environment, evolution and government, *Social and Cultural Geography*, 7, pp. 771–787.
- Huxley, M. (2007) Planning, space and government, in: K. Cox, M. Low and J. Robinson (Eds) *Handbook of Political Geography*, pp. 123–140. London: Sage.
- Ikejiofor, U. (2008) *Planning within a context of informality: issues and trends in land delivery in Enugu, Nigeria*. Case study prepared for *Revisiting Urban Planning: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*, UN Habitat, Nairobi (<http://unhabitat.org/grhs/2009>).
- Innes, J. (2004) Consensus building: clarification for the critics, *Planning Theory*, 3, pp. 5–20.
- Kipfer, S. and Keil, R. (2002) Toronto Inc? Planning the competitive city in the new Toronto, *Antipode*, 34, pp. 227–264.
- Leaf, M. (2005) Modernity confronts tradition: the professional planner and local corporatism in the rebuilding of China’s cities, in: B. Sanyal (Ed.) *Comparative Planning Cultures*, pp. 91–112. New York: Routledge.
- Marcuse, P. (2006) Space in the globalizing city, in: N. Brenner and R. Keil (Eds) *The Global Cities Reader*, ch. 44. London: Routledge.
- Nasr, J. and Volait, M. (Eds) (2003) *Urbanism: Imported or Exported?* Chichester: Wiley-Academy.
- National Research Council (2003) *Cities Transformed: Demographic Change and Its Implications in the Developing World*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2000) After post-development, *Third World Quarterly*, 21, pp. 175–191.
- Njoh, A. (2003) *Planning in Contemporary Africa: The State, Town Planning and Society in Cameroon*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Nustad, K. (2001) Development: the devil we know?, *Third World Quarterly*, 22, pp. 479–489.
- Nwanunobi, C., Ikejiofor, C. and Nwogu K. (2004) *Informal land delivery processes and access to land for the poor in Enugu, Nigeria*. Working Paper No. 2, International Development Department, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham.



- Osborne, T. and Rose, N. (1999) Governing cities: notes on the spatialisation of virtue, *Environment and Planning D*, 17, pp. 737–760.
- Osborne, T. and Rose, N. (2004) Spatial phenomenotechnics: making space with Charles Booth and Patrick Geddes, *Environment and Planning D*, 22, pp. 209–228.
- Pile, S., Brook, C. and Mooney, G. (1999) *Unruly Cities? Order/Disorder*. London: Routledge.
- Porter, L. (2006) Planning in (post) colonial settings: challenges for theory and practice, *Planning Theory and Practice*, 7(4), pp. 383–396.
- Qadeer, M. (2004) Guest editorial: urbanization by implosion, *Habitat International*, 28, pp. 1–12.
- Robinson, J. (2006) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy, A. (2005) Urban informality: towards an epistemology of planning, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71, pp. 147–158.
- Sandercock, L. (1998) *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities*. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Schuurman, F. J. (2000) Paradigms lost, paradigms regained? Development studies in the twenty-first century, *Third World Quarterly*, 21, pp. 7–20.
- Scott, J. C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Simone, A. (2000) *On informality and considerations for policy*. Dark Roast Occasional Paper Series, Isandla Institute, Cape Town.
- Simone, A. (2004) *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Slater, D. (2004) *Geopolitics and the Post-colonial: Rethinking North–South Relations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tibajjuka, A. (2006) *The importance of urban planning in urban poverty reduction and sustainable development*. Paper presented at World Planners Congress, Vancouver.
- UN Habitat (2003) *The Challenge of the Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*. London: Earthscan.
- UN Habitat (2005) The legacy of the urban management programme, *Habitat Debate*, 11(4).
- UN Habitat (2009) *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements*. London: Earthscan.
- Ward, S. (2002) *Planning the Twentieth-century City: The Advanced Capitalist World*. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Watson, V. (2002a) The usefulness of normative planning theories in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, *Planning Theory*, 1, pp. 27–52.
- Watson, V. (2002b) Do we learn from planning practice? The contribution of the practice movement to planning theory, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 22, pp. 178–187.
- Watson, V. (2003) Conflicting rationalities: implications for planning theory and ethics, *Planning Theory and Practice*, 4, pp. 395–408.
- Watson, V. (2006) Deep difference: diversity, planning and ethics, *Planning Theory*, 5, pp. 31–50.
- Williams, G. (2004) Evaluating participatory development: tyranny, power and (re)politicisation, *Third World Quarterly*, 25, pp. 557–578.
- Yiftachel, O. (1998) Planning and social control: exploring the dark side, *Journal of Planning Literature*, 12, pp. 396–406.
- Yiftachel, O. (2006a) *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Yiftachel, O. (2006b) Re-engaging planning theory? Towards south-eastern perspectives, *Planning Theory*, 5, pp. 211–222.
- Yiftachel, O. and Yakobi, H. (2003) Control, resistance and informality: urban ethnocracy in Beer-Sheva, Israel, in: N. Al-Sayyad and A. Roy (Eds) *Urban Informality: Transnational Perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*, pp. 111–133. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.