



Unpacking the Perceived Scarcity of Town Planners in South Africa: A Graduate's Perspective

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Abstract

On the 15th of November 2022, during a question and answer session in Parliament, the President of South Africa was asked how the impact of apartheid planning was being addressed in the country. In response, he stated that the 'country does not have good town planners and transformation is slow.' This statement had the professional community up in arms, since many in the professional community remain unemployed. However, the statement reiterates the findings of numerous policies passed over the last 25 years, including JIPSA, LGTAS, ASGISA and NDP, which all emphasised the scarcity of professionals. In light of this, the article seeks to unpack the scarcity of town planning professionals using the definitions given

by the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA), as well as from a young planner's perspective. The study utilised a purposeful sampling technique which identified town planners via LinkedIn and conducted 105 online structured interviews. The interviews confirmed the scarcity in the profession, but not in the labour force. Rather, the scarcity is created through skills gaps, vague policies, lack of professional registration, and BBEE policies. As a result, the town planning capacity in the country is fragile due to the complex environment within which it operates. The current study provides insight into the lack of town planning professionals in South Africa and suggests recommendations to reduce this dilemma.

Introduction

As reported by Oakenfull (2021), just a year after democracy (1995), the shortage of town planners was identified as an obstacle to the spatial administrative and land-use reform of South Africa. As a result, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) provided bursaries to up-skill and educate town and regional planners (DHET, 2014). However, the shortage continued to be referred to in the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) policy, as well as in the Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS), and the National Development Plan (NDP) (2010–2030) (South Africa, 2008; South Africa, 2010). Additionally, the Government Gazette (No 45860, Notice 1727 of 2 February 2022) once more identified town planning as a national scarce skill, and later that same year, President Cyril Ramaphosa restated this sentiment in the question-and-answer session held in Parliament (Tshazi, 2022).

Town planning as a profession has existed for over a century and historically dealt with controlling land usage, as well as zoning and spatial policy implementation. However, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority added that a person with a Town Planning degree could also occupy positions such as: Community/Country/District Planner, Environmental Consent Planner, Land Use Planner, Natural Resource Management Consultant, Officer/Planner, Town Planner, Traffic and Transport Planner (LGSETA, 2016). Therefore, the president's statement seems to infer that South Africa has had a shortage of individuals who could plan, organise, and develop land and transport within the country over the past 25 years.

However, as a town planner myself, I have found that work opportunities are limited, and the unemployment rate amongst my colleagues is high. In light of this, one could question how scarcity was defined in the aforementioned policies. According to the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA, 2016), the shortage of qualified and experienced people could be either a result of: (a) skilled people not being available; (b) skilled people being available but not meeting the employment criteria; or (c) the fact that this is a new or emerging occupation and skills need to be acquired.

This could be understandable, considering the apartheid racial history and the previous educational exclusion caused by the Bantu Education Act of 1952. However, the country's universities have been open to all racial groups for the past 30 years, and government has provided bursaries since 2006 to individuals of colour to study the degree (DHET, 2016). In light of this, this paper seeks to unpack the evolving role of town planners in South Africa and to evaluate the shortage of town planners based on the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority definition, as well as from a young graduate's perspective (LGSETA, 2016). This paper starts by discussing the evolution of town planning as a profession in South Africa. It then explains the research methodology and discusses the findings of the structured interviews. Lastly, conclusions are drawn, and recommendations are suggested.

Evolution of town planning in South Africa

Town planning has always played a role in structuring human settlements both formally and informally. However, rapid urbanisation, haphazard high density development, lack of sanitation, and plagues even as far back as the industrial revolution called for a better spatial structure (Kumar, 2022). As a result, various policies, development strategies, regulatory aspects, and spatial models were legislated globally by national governments to improve cities' spatial structures and the quality of life of citizens (Duminy and Parnell, 2021). Thus, the question of who would be responsible for the implementation of these trans-disciplinary policies and strategies came about. Consequently, the term 'town planner' was introduced as one who would ensure the implementation of spatial policies related to housing, land, and green space development (Erickson, 2012; Davoudi, 2015). For example, the British Housing and Town Planning Act was passed in 1909, and town planning became a service that officially operated under local government. It was largely responsible for implementing blueprints of government-approved spatial planning policies and plans, but with limited interest in the social, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of the locality (Erickson, 2012; Cherry, 1993).

Similarly, in 1911, Sir Herbert Baker introduced planning controls in South Africa such as town planning schemes, township approval procedures, zoning, layout planning,

building regulations, height restrictions, and spatial policies in order to avoid spatial neglect and poor planning (Drake, 1993). However, as reported by Oakenfull (2021), during that time, there was limited knowledge of the South African context, and it was difficult to draft original town planning schemes. Furthermore, the education and training of South African town planners was run by the Town Planning Institute of Great Britain. Consequently, this lack of local knowledge and practices, during the early 1900s to the 1940s, resulted in town planners and land surveyors in South Africa merely implementing British town planning practices in a top-down manner (Cherry, 1993).

However, by the 1950s, the apartheid government came into power and sought control of the physical, social, and economic components of South African society. To achieve this, they implemented an apartheid spatial model which comprised of a single central business district (CBD), an industrial area, and surrounding residential suburbs in a blue-print manner (see Figure 1 below).

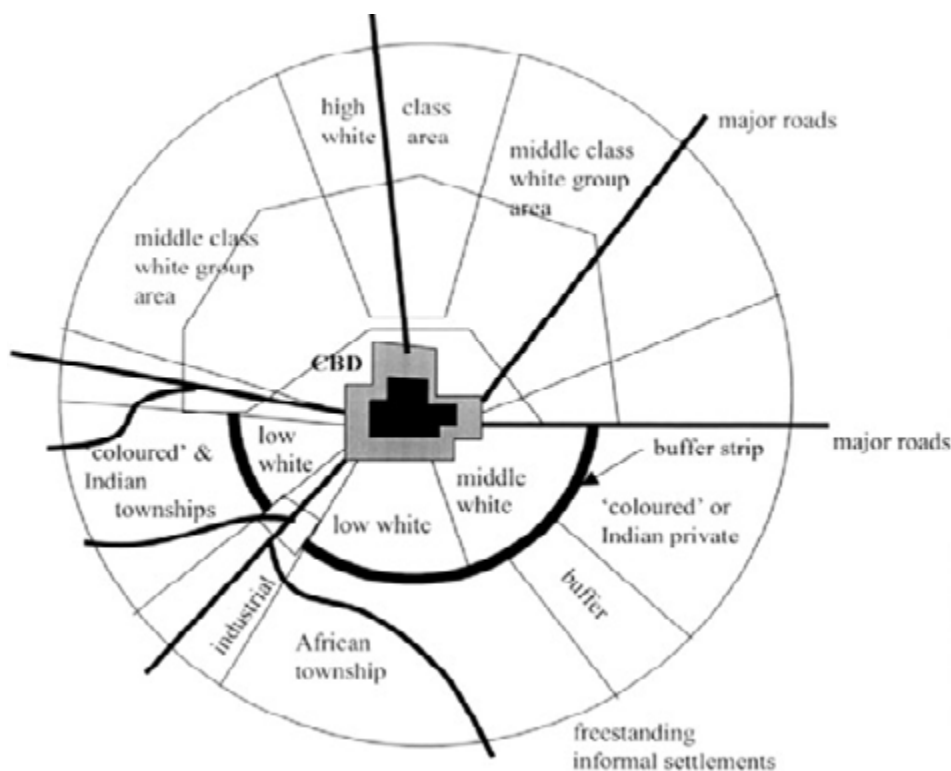


Figure 1: The apartheid city model (du Plessis and Landman, 2002)

These residential suburbs were classified according to race and were treated as separate administrative regions which were further governed, planned, and taxed independently (Harrison, Todes and Watson, 2007). Additionally, the apartheid national government implemented various laws restricting people of colour from integrating socially, spatially, economically, educationally, or politically (Oranje, 1999). One way in which control was enforced was through influx control measures which regulated migration between provinces. Alternatively, if a township needed to be established or if zoning was revised, an application was submitted to a local government. However, the outcome of the matter was determined by a Provincial Administrator and further reviewed by a Director of Local Government (Drake, 1993). Jones (1974) found that these restrictive laws made 'town planning' rarely necessary between 1950–1970, and local town planners were primarily employed by the state to ensure adherence to apartheid policies in their locality (Oranje, 1999). A lack of information exists

about how many town planners there actually were in the country during this period (SACPLAN, 2014).

However, by the early 1980s, a number of public protests arose to display growing dissatisfaction with town planning decisions made by the provinces. As a result, by the mid-1980s, state-employed town planners adopted a more 'development-oriented' approach to involve the community through public participation (Harrison et al., 2007; Drake, 1993). By 1986,

the Town Planning Act (19 of 1986) and Townships Ordinance Act (15 of 1986) were passed in Gauteng,

North West, and Limpopo Provinces and the planning community moved under the mantle of statutory control (Oakenfull, 2021). This demonstrated a more participatory planning approach and planning method (Laburn-Peart, 1993). However, due to planning activity previously having profound political overtones and being accountable to the state, a large section of the South African population distrusted the very concept of planning. Accordingly, the government sector required the assistance of private urban planners or consultants to assist with public participation and to report matters in a non-biased manner (Oranje, 1999).

Since the 1990s, there was a further shift from physical planning to policy planning, which allowed for the flexible interpretation of plans and permitted more liberal public participation. In a sense, town planning transformed from a top-down to a bottom-up process, and the planner's role changed from an administrator of the legislative process to that of a facilitator or team player (Oranje, 1999). This to a certain extent diminished the role of the town planner. Additionally, during the same period (1990–2000), influx controls were lifted and there was rapid migration into urban areas which resulted in haphazard development. These sprawling settlements meant that there were not enough town planners to assist with land usage (SACPLAN, 2014).

However, the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) employment policies which were also legislated during this period gave preference to people of colour to occupy government posts. Despite these opportunities, there were few non-white town planners in the country due to the previous employment and educational restrictions (Bantu Education Act, 1953). As a result, many planning posts were filled by officials who were not qualified as planners, which contributed to a loss of institutional knowledge and diminished the role and importance of town planning (SACPLAN, 2014). Subsequently, experienced town planners, architects, and engineers who were not absorbed by government departments started practicing as private consultants to the government sector. However, private as well as government-employed town planners lacked the skills to conduct public participation and implement participatory development policies (Harrison et al., 2007). These combined factors contributed to a 'skills

gap' and a scarcity of town planners in the government sector (Oranje, 1999). In response, the government provided bursaries to individuals of colour to study town planning (DHET, 2006).

To further address the issues of sprawl, the democratic government passed numerous laws and policies such as the Development Facilitation Act (1996), Municipal Structures Act (1998), Municipal Demarcation Act (1998), Municipal Systems Act (2000), provincial ordinances, and a vast array of other legislation on ancillary aspects of town planning. The key focus during this period (1990–2000) was to revise the fragmented apartheid model to form larger integrated municipalities with a 'one-city, one-tax base' principle. During this period, one could argue that town planners actually transformed into urban and regional planners. This was because the areas delimited were no longer just towns, but rather municipal regions that were made up of a number of towns and cities (Jeeva, 2019). These extensive municipal regions needed Integrated Development Plans and Spatial Development Plans to operate as integrated units to reduce spatial sprawl. However, there was no clear division of roles and responsibilities between the provincial and national governments on land use, environment, heritage, water affairs, and land subdivision. Neither was there a clear division of responsibility between local and district municipalities on the provision of services (Jeeva, 2019). Furthermore, there was also confusion as to how the legislation on delimitation and demarcation should be interpreted and implemented (Jeeva, Cilliers and Gumbo, 2022).

Additionally, the strategic environment within which the town planning profession operates has been in constant flux with the strategic objectives being vague. For instance, the National Development Plan 2030, which was announced in 2010, sought to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality (South Africa, 2012). Furthermore, in 2013 the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) promulgated the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) No. 16 of 2013 which sought to address social justice, spatial sustainability, efficiency, spatial resilience, and good administration through planning (South Africa, 2013). Similarly, in 2016, the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) sought to make

cities more inclusive, safe, productive, and resource efficient (South Africa, 2016). However, what exactly these factors entail in practice and how planners could achieve these outcomes was not entirely clear.

Consequently, the shift from rigid top-down planning to liberal bottom-up planning has all amplified the administrative burden of the system, delayed development outcomes, and created confusion around the role of town planners in the country (Van Wyk, 2010). This is because of the aspect of public participation together with the lack of clarity on policy terminology, implementation, and direction. This is combined with the delimitations of larger administrative areas; shortages of skilled employees in municipalities; vagueness around the role and responsibilities of municipalities, provinces, and national government; and the new components to planning (IDP and SDF). Resultantly, the country has continued to experience haphazard land-use, lack of service delivery, and lack of development reform (Ballard and Butcher, 2020). A direct effect of all of this is the existence of 163 dysfunctional municipalities due to poor governance, ineffective and sometimes corrupt financial and administrative management, and poor service delivery (Ramaphosa, 2023).

In an attempt to create some sort of system, in 2002, Section 2 of the Planning Profession Act (PPA) 36 of 2002 introduced South African town planning as a profession that brings about sustainable changes in the built and natural environment across a spectrum of 35 different geographic scales (region, sub region, city, town, village, neighbourhood). According to this Act, the main responsibilities of town planners are to delimit, regulate, and manage land uses; organise service infrastructure, utilities, facilities, and housing; and assist in the preparation of strategic and statutory policy and plans. Furthermore, this Act called for the establishment of The South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN) as a statutory council responsible for regulating the planning profession. This juristic body has the responsibility for professional training and registration of urban and regional planners, as well as the identifying work they are capable of delivering while ensuring high ethical standards.

As a starting point, according to the PPA, all professional town planners need to study at a

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SACPLAN-accredited tertiary institution which offers appropriate programs (SACPLAN, 2014). The council further recognised that the changing political environment has had a direct influence on the way in which planners operate. As a result, new skills need to be taught at an undergraduate level (SACPLAN, 2014). In light of this, upon graduation, SACPLAN requires graduates to have developed three competencies: 1. Generic competencies; 2. Core competencies; and 3. Functional competencies. Core and generic skills ensure that graduates understand planning theories’ guiding practices, and that they are able to analyse and apply concepts. Functional competencies, on the other hand, are the skills required to get the job done in an ethical manner. The latter would include aspects such as communication, negotiation, teamwork, and project management (SACPLAN, 2014). Furthermore, these competencies also cover contemporary issues such as gender equality, poverty alleviation, informality, appreciation of cultural diversity, and communication skills.

Upon completion of the degree or diploma, graduate planners are then expected to register with SACPLAN. The registration of planners, according to the SACPLAN policy document, falls into one of five categories (Lewis and Nel, 2020: 38) (see Table 1 below).

Member Category	Qualification and experience required
Student Planner	Full-time or part-time students enrolled in a planning education program.
Candidate Planner	Graduate of a SACPLAN-accredited planning education program.
Assistant Planner	Graduate of a SACPLAN-accredited planning education program with 12 months training.
Planner	Graduate of a SACPLAN-accredited planning education program with 24 months of practical training.
Professional Planner	Graduate of a SACPLAN-accredited planning education program with 24 months of practical training.

Table 1: Categories of planners and requirements according to SACPLAN (Adapted from SACPLAN, 2014).

According to SACPLAN (2014), graduates require an additional 24 months of practical training which entails different aspects of statutory and strategic planning under a professional planner, in order to qualify. Upon completion, planners who have a diploma are able to register as technical planners, while those who have a bachelor's degree or higher become professional planners. According to SACPLAN, the hierarchy is important since it is believed that certain types of planning work can only be signed off by professional planners, given the more advanced level of training (Denoon-Stevens et al., 2020).

In 2007, the JIPSA report found that there were approximately 4,125 South African graduate planners in South Africa. However, a study conducted by Ovens and Associates (2007) found that only 2,498 town planners were demanded in the country (see Table 2 below):

Organisation	Sub-total
National Government	96
Provincial Government	293
Metros	372
Local Municipalities	486
District Municipalities	101
Academic Institutions	68

Parastatals, NGOs / Research Institutions	34
Private Planning Firms	998
Corporate sector	50
Total	2,498

Table 2: Summary of demand for planners in 2007 (Source: Ovens and Associates, 2007)

Consequently, one could but question how scarcity was defined in the JIPSA (2007) report if an independent study found that the demand (2,498) for town planners was half that of the supply (4,125). Denoon-Stevens et al. (2020) found as part of the SAPER project that the country has 3,815 urban planners who were registered in various positions in the country (See Table 3 below).

	Planners registered on SACPLAN database at the time of survey
Professional Planners	2,245
Candidate Planners	1,262
Technical Planners	308
Total Registered Planners	3,815

Table 3: Number of urban planners in South Africa (Adapted from Denoon-Stevens et al., 2020)

These figures demonstrate that there was a drop of 310 planners over the 25-year period (1995–2020) in which the government had identified town planning as a scarce skill. However, the demand statistics for town planners from 2007 still reveal an excess of 1,318 planners. Nevertheless, it is difficult to say with certainty how many town planners there currently are or what the demand currently is due to lack of data. As a result, the estimated number of planners and the demand for them must be viewed with caution.

The recent statement by Cyril Ramaphosa which implied that the ‘skills in town planning are few and far between’ has two parts to it: 1. Lack of planning graduates (supply) and 2. Lack of appropriate skills (demand). These are two separate issues that relate to scarcity as defined by the LGSETA. Subsequently, this paper chose to purposefully interview town planners who were registered on the professional platform LinkedIn, in order to identify those who were looking for work but were not registered with SACPLAN. The next section explains the methodology followed by this paper to collect data.

Methodology

The aim of the interviews was to determine if there is really a scarcity of town planners in South Africa and what contributes to the scarcity (LGSETA, 2016). However, accurately depicting the employment status of town planning graduates is almost impossible due to the unavailability of actual data (Lewis, 2022). Subsequently, the researcher invited 200 purposefully selected town planners, based on education and experience, who were registered on LinkedIn, to participate in the study. Interviewees initially came from the 11 accredited institutions and had a range of experience. However, not all participants responded and, as a result, not all intuitions are covered in the findings. From the 150, planners, 105 (70%) responded, of which most were recent town planning graduates. Subsequently, the results are more a perception of graduates, with a few inputs from planners with more experience. Due to time and space constraints, a follow-up study was conducted with employees from town planning firms and heads of institutional departments to provide an alternate perspective. This used LinkedIn to collect input from planners who were not registered with SACPLAN and provided new insights into the profession.

Interviews were conducted between March 2022 and May 2022. The survey contained both open- and closed-ended questions and was made up of a variety of question formats. Responses to these questions were analysed as frequencies. The responses to the short open-ended answers were coded and used as quotes to unpack some of the wider dimensions of the quantitative findings. The key findings are captured below under the subheadings of scarcity as defined by the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority.

Findings

Over the past 25 years, numerous policies have mentioned the scarcity of planners. However, the reasons for the perceived scarcity have never been unpacked. The next section therefore discusses key findings from the semi-structured interviews under the three definitions of scarcity identified by the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority.

Skilled people are not available

The number of town planners estimated by JIPSA (2007), Oven and Associates (2007), and SAPER (2020) (see section 2) does not really reflect the supply due to emigration, deaths, retirement, or lack of engagement with the profession councils. The Local Graduate data or SAQA data do not factor in the number of South Africans who have studied abroad and returned to the country, or foreign nationals seeking town planning employment in South Africa. Moreover, SACPLAN or SAPI registration only provides a rough estimate, as membership is affected not only by the supply of planners, but also by their perceptions of the value of joining the Councils. Literature reveals that membership in Planning Councils (SAPI) dropped from 1,100 in 1996 to only 300 in 2001 as a result of weak and contested leadership (SACPLAN, 2014). The current membership numbers for SAPI are at least 1,964 active planners and 1,977 for SACPLAN (SACPLAN, 2023). However, there are also an unknown number who are practicing as planners but do not belong to SACPLAN or SAPI (SACPLAN, 2014).

This was confirmed through a telephonic conversation with the outgoing CEO of SACPLAN, Mr. Martin Lewis, in 2022 who stated that they did not have information on the number of planners in the

country. Resultantly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with town planners who were listed on LinkedIn to investigate their qualifications, experience, and skills available in the country.

The study found that from the 105 respondents, 15% had national diplomas; 37% had Bachelor's degrees; 21% had Honours degrees; 24% had Master's degrees; and 3% had PhDs in town planning. Of these respondents, 53% claimed to have an above-average pass, while 19% had exceptional passes. Furthermore, 36.2% of the 105 respondents stated that they had qualifications in addition to their town planning degree/diploma. These included: project management; architectural drafting, development studies; LLB; air traffic controls; transport and logistics; social science and housing; information technology; business entrepreneurship; infrastructure design and management; as well as film and video editing.

These additional courses were taken due to respondents feeling that there was a gap between their formal education and the working world. Many believed that they lacked functional competencies such as motivational writing, public speaking, negotiating, analytics, AutoCAD, and GIS to communicate their ideas to developers (Lewis and Nel, 2020). An older planner added that many 'new graduates simply did not have the basic skills to interact with social, environmental and cultural dimensions to come up with practical solutions.' As a result, many graduates feel under-prepared to enter the workforce, become discouraged, and choose to study additional degrees. This makes them 'more skilled but less experienced.' This is similar to the SAPER study (2020), which found that formal planning courses did not prepare students sufficiently for the workplace.

This study also found that SACPLAN as a professional body acknowledges the shortcoming and requires graduates to train under a professional to understand the dynamics of the environment before they can register as professional planners. Furthermore, professional planners have to complete CPD points to upskill and remain relevant (SACPLAN, 2014). This is in recognition that planning is dynamic and not everything can be taught in a degree. As a result, being skilled would not only refer to graduates (because we have those) but also professionals with the wisdom

and experience of tackling everyday issues on the ground.

However, some respondents stated that they studied further to 'move away from planning as there were no opportunities.' The study found that one of the main reasons for people moving out of the profession has been linked to the underrating of planning posts both in terms of the expertise required and the grading thereof. This is reflected in the number of municipalities which have employed people in planning posts who have only a matric, with some of these officials even managing the planning departments. This study further found that 52.4 % of the respondents were not practicing as town planners even though they had the qualification.

In conclusion, there are skilled town planners, but there is a lack of experience and relevant training. As a result, capacity is being lost.

They are available but do not meet the employment criteria

Even though there is skill and zeal to practice town planning, individuals require employment to sustain their lifestyles. South Africa has the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE) (53 of 2003) which seeks to advance economic transformation and enhance the economic participation of African, Coloured, and Indian people who are South African citizens in the economy (South Africa, 2003). According to this Act, preference of employment is given to females of colour over men. Of the 105 respondents, all of them claimed to have completed either their degree or diploma in Town and Regional Planning, with 61% of these respondents being female and 39% male. From this, 70.1% were Black South Africans; 17.1% were Indians; 8.6% were white; and 5% were Coloured. The majority (74%) of respondents were born after democracy and were aged between 20–30 years; 13% were between 31–35 years and a further 13% were older. In terms of meeting the employment criteria based on the BBBEE policy, the study found that there are individuals available to occupy planning posts based on racial profile and qualifications.

However, of these respondents, 45% were registered as candidate planners; 23.8% as professional planners;

and 1% as technical planners—while 25.7% stated that they have not registered as either with SACPLAN. The literature review revealed that registration with SACPLAN is a requirement for employment in the profession. Nevertheless, those who have not registered stated that they 'did not see the sense of registering', or 'don't have the money to pay for registration', or 'have not been employed', or have 'not completed registration.' Others added that they are 'not sure how the process works' and got 'discouraged and de-registered.' Subsequently, of the 105 respondents, 52.4% were not working as town and regional planners, and only 47.6% were employed as town planners.

Thus, there appears to be a vicious cycle between employment and professional registration. To be employed as a town planner, by either the private sector or the public sector, graduates need to be registered with SACPLAN. However, in order to register with SACPLAN, one needs funds and employment. Moreover, those who are not registered are often competing for internship positions which do not 'pay much.' One respondent claimed to only be paid 'R 5,000 per month' which was 'not enough to pay rent.' Thus, planners get discouraged and pursue other career options. Furthermore, respondents pointed out that many town planning jobs are listed on the SACPLAN website. However, if one is not registered with the council, one would not be able to access the

opportunity. This is a form of exclusion (See Figure 2 below).

Thus, Inch, Wargent and Tait (2022) concluded that an increasing proportion of town planners are being employed in the fields of engineering, architecture, management, scientific and technical consulting services, estate agents, auctioneers, housing officers, property, public relations and housing and estate managers. This indicates a diversification of the employment opportunities for town planning graduates which could contribute to the scarcity in the profession. Nonetheless, an older respondent added that they are frustrated that 'other professionals such as architects, engineers, developers all practice town planning, but they do not have the skills or the qualification' and 'we [planners] have to compete for work with them.' They further added that 'they [other professionals] undercut our [professional town planners] prices and we with the degree are left with no work.'

In synthesis, there appear to be graduates with the right racial profile to meet the employment criteria. However, they cannot be employed professionally without registration. As a result, many of them work in other professions which do not require registration with SACPLAN. Furthermore, the study found that there is a lack of work reservation for town planners, and professionals from other fields

are practicing as planners. This drives many town planners to look for alternative employment opportunities, resulting in many who end up encroaching into other professions. This feeds the 'scarcity' of the profession but also brings in a diversity of skills.

It's a new or emerging occupation

Literature has revealed that town planning has existed for over a century, and as a result it is not a new profession. However, planners were previously

employed by the public sector to implement and monitor physical planning policies in a top-down manner. Over the past 25 years, however, they have played a more socially inclined, participatory role

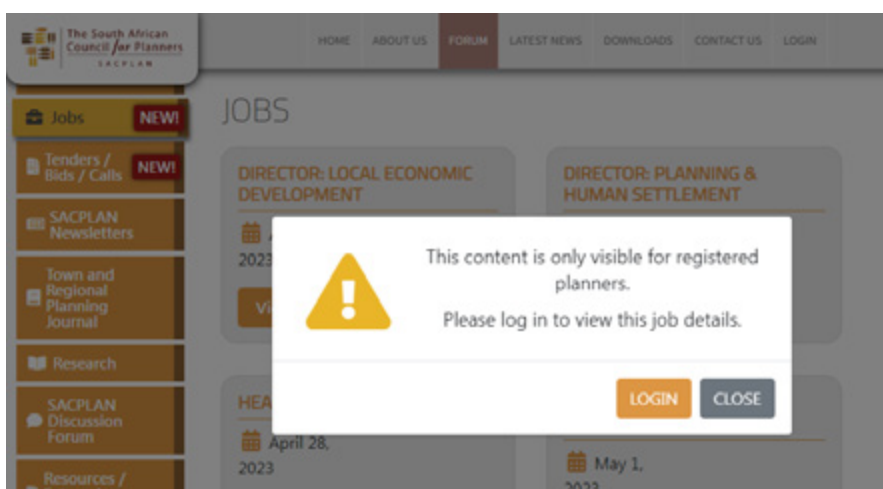


Figure 2: Employment opportunities on SACPLAN (Screenshot by author).

to ensure 'sustainable development' that balances 'environmental, social and economic aspects.'

Furthermore, planning previously was based on intensive settlement structure and layout, while contemporary planning is more extensive and includes the integration of multiple settlements under one administrative body (local municipality). Hence, there are two components to planning work: a) statutory planning (town planning) and b) strategic planning (regional planning) (Oakenfull, 2021). Hence, one could say that town planning has emerged as the domain of contemporary urban and regional planners.

Nevertheless, there has been limited change in the content of zoning schemes and land usage in the country since the 1980s. As a result, respondents added that statutory planning based on the Town Planning Act No. 19 of 1986 and Townships Ordinance Act 15 of 1986 'remain relatively outdated.' Subsequently, this aspect of town planning is 'mundane' and 'anyone can do this' (Denoon-Stevens et al., 2020).

Strategic planning or urban and regional planning integrates the provision of engineering and social infrastructure; the management and regulation of land use within the larger administrative region; and the preparation of spatial strategies for future urban growth within the municipal administrative region manner (Oakenfull, 2021). As a result, contemporary town planners also have to strategically address rapid urbanisation, informality, poverty, planning justice, public participation, and safety over and above the statutory planning matters within the municipality. However, the strategic spatial direction from national, provincial, and local government remains vague; it only provides broad guidelines on what it wants to achieve and then allows the planner, together with the public, to determine how it should be implemented (Erickson, 2012).

These are all emerging issues since municipalities were recently demarcated (in 2000) and still

needed to be planned in a holistic manner. There are still many previous racial areas which remain unequally developed and still have a lack of basic services. Subsequently, a thorough understanding needs to be developed before changes can be implemented on what needs to be achieved and how it will be achieved within the larger region (Barton and Ramírez, 2019; Wicks, 2015). However, the responsibility does not solely lie with planners, but also with the municipal teams responsible for the administrative regions.

The figure below provides a snapshot on how planning has evolved in South Africa.

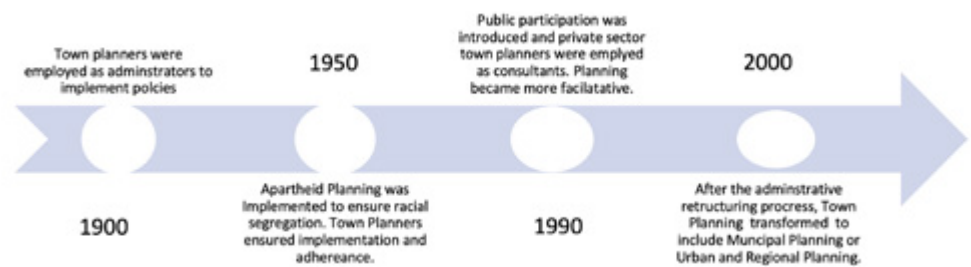


Figure 3: Phases of town planning as a profession in South Africa (Author's own)

The century-long development of town planning in South Africa displays considerable evolution in response to its environment (See Figure 3). Town planners have transformed from government employees in charge of implementation of plans in the early 1900s to more contemporary professionals working in government and the private service sector by 1990. The profession has grown from one that was apartheid policy-driven in the 1950s to a champion for the sustainable development and voice of citizen needs by 2000. It has extended its attention to the surrounding urban and regional (municipal) areas from a profession focused on land usage within a town or local vicinity. One could therefore confidently say that the role has evolved, and that the profession has metamorphosed (See Figure 3 above) (Kuvar, 2022). Resultantly, the skills required have also had to evolve to suit the new role, responsibilities, and environment. This evolution explains the emerging nature of the profession and the skills gap which urban planners are grappling with, and which feeds the perceived scarcity in the profession.

Conclusions

The study found that the role of town planners has changed drastically over the past century. Planners in the 1900s were only employed by the public sector to fulfil an administrative role to create structure, whereas by the 1990s, town planners began playing a more facilitative role in balancing the need for people-policy-processes with the hope of bringing about sustainable development. Consequently, the skills that they require have also had to adapt to the environment within which they operate (Barton and Ramírez, 2019).

The South African context is more complex because of apartheid planning prior to 1994. Subsequent to 1994, the administrative structure was revised, and town planners were required to make decisions to integrate the development of larger municipal regions. However, these regions were unequally developed and there was limited knowledge and lack of strategic direction as to how policies should be implemented spatially. Resultantly, their role transformed from a town planner to an urban and regional planner.

Moreover, BBEE policies restricted the employment of white individuals into government posts. However, there was a lack of non-white planners in the country, and as a result, individuals with no professional background were appointed to occupy government posts. Those planners who were not absorbed by the government practiced as private planners or consultants. However, neither public nor private planners knew how to implement participatory changes. The planning profession has tried to organise themselves under a council (SACPLAN) to ensure professionalism. However, to date, there is limited data on the supply and demand for the profession.

The limited data that is available from 2007 demonstrates an excess supply of planners which questions the 'scarcity' that is being referred to in the JIPSA (2007) policy documents. However, the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has defined the scarcity in three ways (See Table 4 below):

Definition	Finding
Lack of town planning skills	There are graduate skills, but these skills need to be matured and developed to make a difference
Does not meet the employment criteria	Graduates with the right racial profile are available but lack of registration hinders employment.
It is an emerging profession	It is an old field but with new administrative areas and policy approaches. It has transformed from town planning to urban and regional planning.

Table 4: Summary of key findings (Author's own).

Based on these definitions, the study found that there are many highly qualified graduates of different racial profiles passing through South African town planning tertiary institutions. However, many graduates are struggling to register with SACPLAN and are not getting employed as a result. The study also revealed that the contents of the degree are not always suited to address the daily challenges in South Africa. As a result, many graduates diversify from town planning while others remain in the profession. Of the 105 respondents, 52% were not practicing as planners.

“ there are many highly qualified graduates of different racial profiles passing through South African town planning tertiary institutions. However, many graduates are struggling to register with SACPLAN and are not getting employed as a result.

”

In summary, there is no shortage of town planners; rather, there is a skills gap to address the issues the country faces. Furthermore, it is an emerging profession, since the focus has shifted from town planning to urban and regional planning within the context of a larger administrative area. In light of this, the paper recommends that further research be conducted on the South African town planning profession.

Recommendations

There are three main recommendations that can be taken from the paper to reduce the scarcity of town planners:

More practical work in undergraduate studies

The study found that town planning education in South Africa was failing to demonstrate how theory can be applied to local contexts. Many respondents felt that even though they studied town planning and had the diploma/degree, they could not apply themselves practically. This was because they did not have the functional skills such as project management, public speaking, negotiating, report writing, cultural awareness, and GIS mapping. It is recommended that more practical development application during undergraduate years be considered. Furthermore, exposure to different cultures within the country and the teaching of native language during the undergraduate years might equip students to facilitate public participation meetings with more empathy. These skills, together with project management, financial skills, and monitoring and evaluation might build the confidence of graduates and equip them for the workplace.

Professional registration

Currently, graduates are responsible for finding their own employment and have to work under a professional planner for 24 months in order to register. This appears to be the biggest hurdle to registering, since most planning jobs are advertised on the SACPLAN website, and one cannot access these jobs unless registered. This discourages individuals and feeds the scarcity and unemployment in the profession. It is recommended that a system similar to that practiced in the medical field be

introduced, where town planning graduates are 'placed' in various municipalities for a year in a 'community service program.' After this, they are further placed in private registered firms at the cost of the government for a yearlong internship. This will provide the 24 months of training required to register as professional planners. This would help reduce the scarcity of town planners and assist in building up capacity in dysfunctional municipalities (Lewis et al., 2018).

Set clear expected outcomes

Given the highly diverse and rapidly changing nature of planning work in South Africa over the past 25 years, there is definitely a skills gap (Andres et al., 2018). Town planners in democratic South Africa are expected to plan in complex municipal environments which are riddled with extreme inequality, fragmented spatial structure and poverty while aspiring to global standards of sustainability. Furthermore, spatial policies are vague and require community participation which fosters different interpretations and complicates policy application. Also, owing to the past history, individuals of different racial groups know very little of each other's cultures and preferences. In some regards this creates conflicts of interest and a lack of common understanding of what is required to bring about transformation and integration. Hence, there is more of a skills gap over a skills shortage. Further research would need to be conducted to understand what is it that we as a nation require and where would we like to go. In light of this, a professional public service, staffed by skilled, qualified, committed, and ethical people, is critical to ensure effective state and planning policy direction.

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