1.1 Provinces…A Bright Idea?

The mid-twentieth century witnessed the renaissance of the region as a "functional space," an arena for renegotiating political power and promoting economic governance in an era of uncertainties (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; MacLeod, 2001; Deas and Ward, 2000; Keating 1998). With the renegotiation of the role of the nation-state and the subsequent rescaling and devolution of power to sub-national tiers of government, the region was canonised as a "fundamental basis of economic and social life; a vital relational assert for distilling learning-based competitive advantage" (MacLeod, 2001: 805). Without necessarily replacing the nation-state as a traditional space for negotiating power relations within a society, the sub-national tier was viewed as being strategically positioned to engage with the supra-national agencies as well as the national and local government structures. Like globalisation, new regionalism manifested itself in various forms depending on the political and socio-economic make-up of various polities.

Acknowledging the differences and variations in the administrative structures as well as different levels of economic and spatial sophistication, both developed and developing countries are influenced by globalisation and the subsequent political and economic reterritorialisation that defines it (MacLeod, 2001; Khan, 1998). Like globalisation, the new regionalist wave (Wheeler, 2000) has remoulded the way the nation-state engages with sub-national tiers of government. Put in other words, the nation-state has began to consider the sub-national tiers as well as the private sector and the civil society as influential role players that can help promote sustainable development. For some critics, the move from government (characterised by the dominance of the nation-sate as the main actor in decision-making) to governance (a model that cherishes networking between different stakeholders in the society) (Tewdwr-Jones 2002; Vigar *et al.* 2000; Amdam, 2000) has resulted in the exaltation of sub-national tier as a pivotal forum where spatial, economic and political governance can be harnessed. New Regionalism (NR) therefore is a paradigm that

acknowledges these dynamic shifts towards governance as well as the importance of the regional tier in negotiating with socio-economic and political changes.

1.2 Impact on Planning

As some critics (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Vigar *et al*. 2000) point out, the rise of the region as a fulcrum for promoting economic growth and political governance has had an impact on the way planning is approached. What emerged towards the dawn of the twenty-first century was a new way of thinking and new ways of perceiving planning. In North America and Western Europe in particular, the political devolution process in the late 1990s led to the emphasis on regional-scale planning. In the United Kingdom (UK) for instance, the establishment of regional development agencies in England and the proposal of a devolved Scotland and Wales marked a new trajectory for planning. Instead of focusing solely on planning at local level, countries like the UK turned to regions as invaluable spaces for promoting strategic planning (Hull, 1998; Healey *et al*. 1997).

In developing countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa, the decentralisation wave hit hard in the mid-1990s. As some critics point out, decentralisation in the South was viewed as one way of promoting governance and efficiency especially with regard to service delivery (Bird and Vaillancourt, 1998; Khan 1998). Given the centralist propensities that defined most political structures in the South and the subsequent failure of most nation states to deliver economic prosperity and political stability, decentralisation was seen as a panacea that could make all the problems disappear (Olowu, 2003).

With regard to planning however, most central governments in the South maintained their hold on this particular activity. In Nigeria for instance, despite the decentralisation process the central government made decisions with regard to spatial planning matters (Harrison and Oranje, 2002). In South Africa however,

commitment was made to decentralise power provinces as well as local authorities. Furthermore, strategic planning activities in South Africa were decentralised to the local government level in particular (Harrison, 2003; Oranje, 2001). Without engaging deeply into the South African planning system, it is opportune for one to outline the purpose of this research.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

In this regard, the purpose of this research is to try and investigate the purpose, role and relevance of provincial-scale planning in South Africa. As highlighted above, the region has been identified as a functional space that is strategically positioned to promote economic and political governance (Keating, 1998; MacLeod, 2001). Realising the importance of a region in engaging with socio-economic trends that define this era of globalisation, one tries to understand how South African provinces are coping with or adapting to the global changes.

Much focus is given to the functions that South African provinces have mainly been in promoting strategic planning. For a country like South Africa where there are vast socio-economic disparities as well as poverty, planning should be a tool that can help turn the tide against the abovementioned social ills (Camay and Gordon, 2004). The South African province therefore has a duty to commit itself to the developmental objectives of the country. As will be highlighted in the unfolding chapters, strategic planning at provincial level has a potential not only of unlocking the developmental of the region, but can also play a role in legitimating and cementing the political standing of this particular tier, making it more pro-active and responsive the needs of the community (Hague and Jenkins, 2005).

Acknowledging the different political contexts and processes that led to the formulation of provinces in South Africa, this research will try and analyse how regions in other countries approach strategic planning. As a transitional country, South Africa has much to learn from other countries (Camay and Gordon, 2004). In

the area of strategic planning for instance, there is an imperative for South Africa to be more innovative and creative when formulating planning policies and strategies. As Harrison (2002: 2) suggests, creativity or "creative intelligence" in planning is "a continuously experimental and evolving relationship between ideas and practice. Creativity, being linked with strategy can only be attained through a continuous trying out of ideas and these ideas are borrowed from other countries and other experiences. Without encouraging any duplication or transplanting of planning ideas from say the Netherlands to South Africa, the review and analysis of regional planning strategies from other countries only seeks to stimulate creativity and innovation in South African planning.

In this research report, provincial-scale planning is linked to the idea of regional planning. However, it should be acknowledged that there are other forums and 'regional planning' (including district planning.) This research is also driven by the current verve and determination demonstrated by various factions in South Africa with regard to provincial-scale planning. Recently, the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) has shown interest in the province as a sphere that can contribute immensely to strategic planning in the country. The drafting of PGDS guidelines (DPLG, 2005a) for instance is indicative of the DPLG's renewed commitment to provincial-scale planning. Even the Presidency has been involved in the strengthening of provincial-scale planning through the harmonisation of the PGDS with the IDP and the NSDP (Mohamed *et al.* 2004). Research institutions such as the CSIR are also playing an instrumental role in fostering strategic planning in South Africa through skills training and building capacity at provincial as well as local level. One might also add that South African academics are showing more interest in provincial-scale planning. This research therefore celebrates the rise of the province as a strategic sphere for spearheading planning in South Africa.

1.4 Identifying the Problem

With the transformation of the local government system, a plethora of planning legislations was passed by the national government giving the local government a sound legislative basis that sought to enhance its position as a developmental sphere. As outlined by Harrison (2003: 3) the arrival of the IDP marked a new generation of municipal planning and the Local Government Transition Act (LGTA, 1996), White Paper on Local Government (1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (2000) created a well-structured framework where a developmental local government was to flourish.

Recently, the national sphere of government has shown its commitment to promoting strategic planning by coming up with strategies such as the NSDP which is a progressive understanding of the space economy as well as a mechanism that seeks to guide and direct infrastructure investments to more strategic areas (Mohamed, 2004; Harrison, 2003; Oranje, 2002). Within the national level, another critical instrument that seeks to link policies and priorities of all departments is the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). This budgetary instrument is informed by the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) a tool that ensures that all sector departments at national and provincial level have well articulated policies and objectives that can be aligned with the MTEF (DPSA, 2004; Harrison, 2003). Although the abovementioned planning instruments have overarching, nation-wide objectives, they are driven by the national government.

In a discussion on the intergovernmental planning system in South Africa, Harrison (2003) points out that the local and the national level are striving to make the planning system work. Although most municipalities are struggling to meet their developmental mandate, the provincial sphere seems to be "the weak link in the [planning] system" (Harrison, 2003: 33). Although the PGDS was put in place after 1994, planning at provincial level did not take off as was expected and most of the

PGDSs formulated in 1996 were weak and not very strategic (CSIR, 2005). The main question that is asked in this research therefore is:

What is the current, and also the potential role of provincial government in promoting strategic planning, spatial integration and economic governance in South Africa?

To engage fully with the task at hand, some subsidiary questions will be posed and there are formulated as follows:

▸ *What is the intended role of each sphere of government in strategic planning?*
▸ *What is the current performance of each sphere?*
▸ *Why is provincial government performing inadequately?*
▸ *How can the provincial role be strengthened?*

The future of strategic planning in South Africa will be determined by the degree of coordination and cooperation between all spheres of government. Having weak provinces will certainly undermine the country's quest for sustainable development as well as integration. Prior to discussing the role that provinces should be playing one would try and understand the political processes leading to the formulation of this particular sphere. As pointed out by many critics (Camay and Gordon, 2004; Khosa and Muithien, 1998) the provinces in South Africa have been a subject of debate since their creation in the early 1990s. A discussion on the creation of provinces as a political compromise could give an insight to the current status of the province and the efforts (or lack thereof) made to legitimise this sphere as a sound functional space that can promote economic growth and political governance.

1.5 The Philosophical Stance

This research is premised on the understanding that the region is a critical space that has a major role to play in promoting economic, political and spatial governance. As outlined above the sub-national tiers particularly in Europe have proved to be more creative and innovative in their interaction with local, national and supra-national agencies (MacLeod, 2001). Critics such as Deas and Ward (2000), Vigar *et al.* (2000) and Keating (1998) among others have acknowledged the rise of

the region as a new institutional space that can promote strategic planning and economic development in a postmodernist era.

Although the new regionalist agenda gained currency in North America and Western Europe (McLeod, 2001), its relevance to the South cannot be doubted. The decentralisation wave that swept across the developing world in the 1990s resulted in regions or sub-national ties of government having considerable power to influence decisions at the same time promoting local governance (Bird and Vaillancourt, 1998, Khan, 1998). New regionalism therefore emphasises and encourages regions to be pro-active in their endeavour to promote sustainable development at regional level.

Writing on place identity and planning Hague and Jenkins (2005) emphasise the importance of territorial identity. In this era of globalisation were there is cultural fluidity, regions are faced with a challenge of networking with the global world at the same time remaining "locally anchored" (Schmidt, 2002 cited in Hague and Jenkins, 2005: 4). From a NR perspective, regional identity can be maintained through strategic planning at regional level. In other words, regional-scale planning becomes a way of legitimising the existence of the region as distinctive yet globally connected entity.

As will be outlined in the next chapter, the new regionalist approach is stems from the shift from government to governance (Deas, 2004; Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). This shift is characterised and defined by networking of role players from the public and private sector as well as the civil society. For Wheeler (2000) the new regionalist emphasis on networking is influenced by the New Public Management (NPM) principles. The NPM approach emphasises efficiency in the management of public affairs.

In NR, a *region* refers to the tier of government below the national and above the local level (Wheeler, 2000) depending on the federal structure, some countries use the term region, state or province to refer to the sub-national tier below the nation state, or the sphere independent of it. In this report, the terms *region* and *province* will be used interchangeably to encapsulate the same concept, unless stated otherwise.

1.6 Methodology

The South African planning system is still in the process of being refined – as highlighted above, the provincial sphere of government is still striving to define and legitimise itself as a *functional space* (Keating, 1998) where strategic planning as well as spatial governance can be promoted. Critics such as Harrison (2005) and Watson (2005) have pointed out the importance of countries in the South to try and engage with perspectives that are dominant in the North. In other words, a country like South Africa can learn from the North thus being able to blend local experience with international ones.

This research therefore seeks to explore international experiences and case studies on regional-scale planning. Countries such as the Netherlands, the UK and the Netherlands have a long history and experience in strategic planning particularly at regional level (Allmendinger, 2001; Wannop, 1995). It would be worthwhile therefore for one to analyse the administrative context and political processes that shape and inform regional-scale planning in this regard and particularly in the abovementioned countries.

In this research there will be a review of international literature on regional-scale planning. It should be pointed out from the onset however that much literature on regional-scale planning originates from North America and Western Europe. Although it would have been ideal for one to explore some African experiences on regional or sub-national scale planning, the shortage of literature on planning in

developing countries makes this task a daunting one. To avoid the problem of European bias, some regional planning experiences from India will also be explored.

As a way of exploring provincial-scale planning experiences in South Africa, Mpumalanga province will be employed as a case study. The study of Mpumalanga is not only a contribution to the literature on provincial-scale planning in South Africa; it is also a way of unravelling the challenges faced by this province in fostering strategic planning. The Mpumalanga planning instruments such as the PGDS and the Mpumalanga Integrated Spatial Framework (MISF) will be explored. Apart from analysing the PGDS and the MISF, this research will rely on the targeted interviews conducted with government officials from Mpumalanga and the DPLG as well as the views of others intimately involved in regional planning in South Africa, including personnel from planning related departments and institutions such as the DPLG, SALGA, CSIR, DBSA.[1] The main focus of the interview process was to try and understand what officials thought about the role that provinces should be playing in fostering strategic planning in South Africa. Furthermore respondents were asked what their opinion was on the current intergovernmental planning system.

1.7 Structure of the Research Report

Following this introductory chapter, the *Chapter two* focuses on the literature associated with NR and regional-scale planning in the UK (with focus given to Wales) the Netherlands and India, offering a detailed analysis of NR and its influence on regional-scale planning. It should be noted however that this is not a comparative analysis *per se*, but it is an engagement and a detailed discussion on different planning systems. Attention is given to the role the relationship between different tiers of government and the authority that the province has in promoting strategic planning.

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[1] See questionnaire in Appendix A.

Chapter three is a detailed outline of the current South African planning system. In this chapter the role of the province as a distinctive sphere operating within a cooperative governance structure is reviewed. *Chapter four* focuses on Mpumalanga case study, which outlines, assesses and reviews the PGDS itself as well as the process to formulate it. Furthermore, the interrelationship between the PGDS and the MISF as a spatial instrument is discussed in this chapter. *Chapter five* offers policy recommendations as well as alternative ways of approaching strategic planning in South Africa, inspired by already published work and personal opinion, and will also form the conclusion to this research report.