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Critical pragmatism in planning : The case of the Kathorus Special Integrated Presidential Project in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary South African planning practice is rich in detail, complexity and innovation born out of a need to fulfil a post-apartheid development agenda. This practice warrants theorising.

This dissertation aims to advance the concept of *critical pragmatism* into an analytical framework that will facilitate the analysis and theorising of one such complex planning case, and its delivery.

The case study examines the Kathorus Special Integrated Presidential Project (KSiPP) – an ambitious, large-scale strategic planning programme that was by many accounts successful in achieving a substantial range and scale of outcomes in an exceedingly complex underdeveloped and violence-ridden context. This case provides the material for a deeper analysis of what actually happened in the project, through the application of my framework.

Within the dissertation I define critical pragmatism as a concept for exploring planning practice as:
An analytical framework for examining the actual processes and outcomes of planning practice that is contextually situated; that operates within and through pervasive power relations, which are exercised through and influenced by multiple rationalities, and practice in which the planning choices that are made are value-laden and mutable.

This framework is comprised of five interrelated elements. These are: context, outcomes, power, rationality and ethics. These are derived through a study of the philosophical roots of critical and pragmatic schools of planning. My interrogation of these roots and planning traditions, especially with reference to thinkers such as Dewey, Habermas, Foucault, Harrison, among others, finds that while the critical traditions predominantly foreground power, the pragmatic traditions predominantly focus on action and outcome. Each tradition is limited and a conversation between them, in an integrated critical pragmatism produces a framework that can address the sort of complexities manifest in the KSiPP. Out of this conversation and the identification of ethics as an element somewhat lacking in both traditions, a contemporary critical pragmatic analytical framework is derived and substantiated, with significant implications for the discipline of planning. My own involvement as a practitioner in the project provides close methodological benefits and insights for the thesis.

The research methodology employed in this thesis focuses on case study techniques, with a strong leaning on practice writing. An in-depth literature review research into theoretical concepts in planning and philosophy has enabled the development of an appropriate framework for analysis. The application of my framework yields deep and nuanced findings of the KSiPP. These include the extent to which context and circumstances contributed to the project, whose means and ends were multifaceted. The explicit assessment of power in the project illuminates its many faces in its institutional, collaborative and personal forms. A precise examination of the rationalities that were at play finds competing political and technical rationalities, and

their relationships with power and action. Finally, an assessment of the project against the ethical question of justice, found it lacking and modified the sense of the KSiPP as an entirely successful endeavour.

The value of critical pragmatism is that it enables a conversation between the analytical efforts to understand planning practice and outcome, and the efforts to analyse the power, rationality and ethical choices inherent in planning processes. It also takes what is implicit within such frameworks and particularly in the work of Forester, who has written of a critical pragmatic approach to planning, and makes this explicit and thus available for use in further evaluation.