TOWARDS A NORMATIVE APPROACH TO CITY DEVELOPMENT

Concept note prepared by Isandla Institute, July 2005

> *The future is not a probable place we are being taken to, but a preferred place we are creating. The tracks to it are not found and followed, but made by laying and constructing a trail.* (P Ellyard, quoted in Gaffikin and Morrissey 1999: x).

The Cape Town 2025 project takes a normative approach to city development as its starting point. What this means is that we envisage a future city which is firmly founded on a set of core social values and, more specifically, that these core values serve to guide what paths and tools we choose and construct to bring about this vision.

Developing visions for city planning is in itself not necessarily new. In fact, it characterises much of today's Integrated Development Plans in South Africa and other planning frameworks elsewhere in the world. Yet, such visions are often developed once every five years and refined annually by a small group of people. In the period in between, when real and perceived constraints present themselves or are imagined, urban policy makers and planners tend to turn to conventional approaches, tools and instruments. More often than not, these conventional approaches are de-linked from the guiding principles and normative outcomes that have been set out in the vision. In the process, visions tend to fade to the background and loose their power to function as a beacon – i.e. an inspiration, a guiding light and even a warning, if needs be.

Instead, the notion of 'vision planning' or in John Friedmann's (2000) words 'utopian thinking' starts with powerful, evocative, concrete, constructive and achievable images of preferred futures, rather than constraints on conscious action or immediate obstacles that are perceived as largely unchangeable. This does not mean that the complexity of change is underestimated or ignored. On the contrary, images of desirable futures for the city are informed by a profound grasp of the complex forces driving social change (Gaffikin and Morrissey 1999).
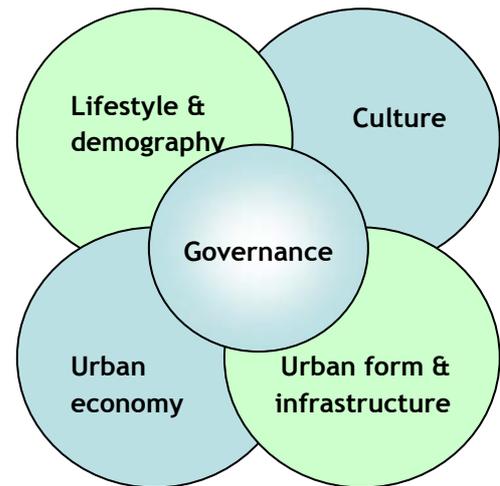
These images of the kind of city we want to create, in the interest of our own quality of life and for future generations, are not static, nor are these images without contestation. In fact, a key characteristic of a vibrant local democracy is that such images are open to political challenge and engagement, giving rise to the following kinds of questions:

- Whose image of the city is promoted and whose voices have not been heard in the process?
- How should values, or guiding principles, and actions be prioritised and sequenced?
- What are the most appropriate actions to help bring about the desirable future?
- How is progress evaluated and how does one determine whether the goal (vision) has been realised?

More importantly, where a normative approach distinguishes itself from conventional planning is that it focuses the discussion not only on the direction of change (where we want to go), but also why these changes and outcomes are desirable, and conversely, what factors may block such changes. In other

words, it creates an opportunity to consciously reflect on, discuss and engage with the values and principles underpinning the goal (vision) (Gaffikin and Morrissey M 1999).

Clearly, the construction of a shared image of the desired future for a city – a vision that is worth striving for – is not a once-off event or something that can be created by a relatively small group of stakeholders in city development. Instead, it needs to be founded on a process of inclusive engagement which in turn allows for broad-based ownership and inspired collective action to help bring about the desired future.

Cape Town 2025

The project *Cape Town 2025* seeks to initiate a process of discussion and reflection on the future of Cape Town and, more explicitly, on the values that will guide actors in the city to collectively strive for this preferred future. To facilitate this process of engagement, the project sketches the provisional contours of a vision and outlines tentative steps that are likely to help bring about this vision.

The following core values serve to guide the project:
- Social equity, i.e. the reduction of inequality and poverty
- Sustainability
- Integration

The project consciously fore grounds the notion of **inequality**, as this often remains the 'silent' issue in city development. Much more than poverty reduction, overcoming inequality is politically sensitive. Perhaps issues such as how inequality is created, reinforced and overcome in particular urban contexts are also not well understood. Yet, given South Africa's recent planning history and the resultant legacy of systematic exclusion, disregard and discrimination, social justice and equity need to be at the core of future images of our cities, Cape Town included. Moreover, given the tendencies of current global, national and local development trends to recreate and entrench existing forms of inequality, the active pursuit of equity is made even more pressing.

Sustainability is understood as sustainable resource use in the interest of a decent quality of life for current city populations, without compromising ecosystems and the rights of future generations to a decent and dignified livelihood. Defined as such, sustainability has an inter-generational and inter-species dimension of social justice. But it also has an intra-generational and intra-city dimension of social justice, as it assumes that all urban residents have not only rights but also responsibilities to live a decent quality of life within existing resource limits.

Given the divided nature of South African cities in general, and Cape Town in particular, in spatial as well as cultural terms, **integration** has been identified as the third core value guiding the *Cape Town 2025* project.

The project has identified five key driving forces of social change in Cape Town, each of which impacts significantly on current and future conditions in the city. These are:

1. *Lifestyle & demography*: Changes in the size, profile and structure of Cape Town's population will affect future demands and opportunities for development. More important than demographic trends per se are issues related to lifestyle, i.e. the values and aspirations,

consumption patterns and lifestyle choices (where to live, what to do for leisure, and so on) of different social groups in the city.

2. *Culture*: Culture is essentially about the values, perspectives and ways of living of a group of people, the cultural resources they draw on to 'make life and meaning' and their interactions with other groups of people. The apartheid conception of equating culture with race does not do justice to the range of factors that inform people's sense of belonging (or alienation) and their interpretation of their daily realities and practices.

3. *Urban form and infrastructure*: If anything, Cape Town's physical form seems to act more as a constraint than a force of change for the city's future. The question of urban form is not just about density and brown/green choices. It is about the spatial structure of human activities in the city and associated demands: for comfortable and convenient living spaces; appropriate services and infrastructure; places of work, learning and care, and so on.

4. *Urban economy*: The structure, performance and labour demands of the urban economy significantly impact on (in)equality, poverty, sustainability and integration. The challenge is to shape the future economy of Cape Town in such a way that it contributes positively to the creation and promotion of stable employment, decent and equitable incomes, redistribution, social justice and environmental sustainability (including a reduction in environmental poverty).

5. *Governance*: The nature of governance and governance arrangements play a fundamental role in shaping the four other drivers of urban change and the extent to which culture, lifestyle choices, the economy and the urban form and infrastructure contribute towards the reduction of inequality and poverty, enhanced sustainability and better integration.

The aim of the *Cape Town 2025* project is to create a platform for an explicit and focussed dialogue about how we can best intervene in the reproduction of the city so as to shift current, seemingly inescapable, patterns of inequality and exclusion towards a future that is more just, inclusive, sustainable and exciting. Welcome to our democratic conversation about the city as an act in celebration of everyone's 'right to the city.'

References
Friedmann J (2000), "The Good City: In Defense of Utopian Thinking", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol 24:2, pp.460-472.
Gaffikin F and Morrissey M (1999), "Introduction", in Gaffikin, F and Morrissey M (eds), *City Visions: Imagining Place, Enfranchising People*, London: Pluto Press.