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## POST-APARTHEID NATIONAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN SOUTH AFRICA – A BRIEF HISTORY

**Abstract:** Since coming to power in 1994 successive ANC-governments have engaged in a series of attempts at national spatial development planning in South Africa. These engagements have received scant treatment in the planning literature. In this paper a broad overview of these initiatives is provided, with an emphasis on the different instruments; the context in which they were developed; the institutions that were proposed and/or created in support of the instruments; and the extent to which the instruments were implemented and what their levels of success were. The paper concludes with a call for comparative research, including South Africa, in this arena.

**Keywords:** national spatial development planning, National Spatial Development Perspective, regional development, post-apartheid South Africa.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In what is a rare occurrence, *national spatial development planning* – i.e. a process by which a national/central government seeks to consciously plan for the spatial development of the territory of a country by using the location, timing, nature and scale of infrastructure investment and development spending to stimulate, support, strengthen and discourage growth and development in specific spaces/places<sup>1</sup> – has made national headline news in South Africa (see *inter alia* Mofokeng, 2009; Jazhbay, 2009; *SABC News*, 2009 and *Mail and Guardian Online*, 2009). And, while the reasons for it may be less about the concept, or the expressions of intent in a recently published document entitled

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<sup>1</sup> See Oranje (2002a) for a detailed discussion of such initiatives.

*Green Paper: National Strategic Planning*, and more so about the personalities involved,<sup>2</sup> it has brought into the public eye the existence, modalities, arguments for and implications of this level and type of planning.

This is of course not the first time that this has happened over the last two decades, as successive African National Congress (ANC)-governments have for the last 16 years engaged in a series of attempts at national spatial development planning. The fact that the media and the general public are not aware of it is definitely not evidence of absence, but rather of a limited engagement with it in the planning literature. This view is borne out by the fact that there have only been a handful of published documents that speak of, or about these attempts (see Platzky, 1998a, b; Harrison *et al.*, 2007; Todes, 2006; Oranje, 2007; Atkinson and Marais, 2006; Oranje and van Huyssteen, 2007; Merrifield *et al.*, 2008). In most cases these documents only cover a segment of these events, and none of them were written with the explicit aim of *telling the story of post-apartheid national spatial development planning*. As such they referred to it, but did so *in the process of telling another story about something else*. In all of the cases the existing material also pre-dates the most recent set of events following the ANC's Polokwane Conference in December 2007, the ousting of President Mbeki in September 2008 and the publication of the *Green Paper on National Strategic Planning* in September 2009.

In this article the focus is on providing a brief historical narrative of national spatial development planning post 1994. While explanations for historical events are sought, and offered, the paper does not delve into the multi-faceted theoretical and ideological perspectives on regional development, regional economics and regional geography. This does, of course, not mean that these events do not provide that opportunity, as they surely do, and as such, deserve to be explored from more theoretical perspective. It is just not the focus of this particular article.

While the paper covers a unique set of South African events, it should be of interest and value to readers in other countries, typically those that emerged like South Africa during the 1990s from periods of strong State control, and in which experimentation with more *laissez-faire* approaches to spatial and economic development have not delivered the desired responses. Included, but not limited to this group, would be the 'transition countries' of the former Eastern bloc, such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics (see *inter alia* Blažek *et al.*, 2004; Barta *et al.*, 2008; Kopačka, 2004 and Dostál and Hampl, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> The Minister in the Presidency responsible for the proposed new national planning function, Minister Trevor Manuel is disliked by the Left for his perceived key contribution to what are perceived to be a range of neo-liberal policies developed during the previous President Mbeki's time in the Presidency (see *inter alia* Mofokeng, 2009; COSATU, 2009a, b).

## **2. NATIONAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING – BACK IN BUSINESS**

National spatial development planning initiatives by central/national governments have undergone a revival over the last 10 to 15 years after falling from favour during the New Right-dominated 1980s and early 1990s. Novel national planning instruments of a variety of sorts have not only been prepared on the national level, as in the case of Ireland, Wales, Estonia and Belarus, and newer versions of earlier examples rolled out in Denmark and the Netherlands, but there have also been calls for such frameworks to be developed for Australia and the UK (see Oranje, 2002a and European Urban Knowledge Network, 2007). At the same time supranational planning instruments, notably the European Spatial Development Perspective, and frameworks to guide long and shorter-term investment have been prepared for the African continent (Faludi, 2002, 2007, 2008; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002; Oranje and van Huyssteen, 2005). Similar instruments have unofficially been proposed for the North American continent (Faludi, 2002, 2008).

This revival is, of course, not a universal phenomenon, and very different from its previous heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Not only is the driving force no longer a naive modernist belief in the ability of a strong State to singlehandedly, benevolently and rationally plan for 'its space'. It is also no longer a case of a belief that without a national spatial development plan a country is 'not on the map of nations' (Oranje, 2002a). Far more so, the current phase of national planning is driven by a growing awareness of scarcity and the need for wise resource management, challenges of multi-level governance, and pragmatic ways of dealing with differences in and between regions. As such, this new generation of plans, perspectives, reports and notes, seeks to provide (1) an arena for dialogue/engagement on spatial investment and development spending between various spheres of government; (2) a set of spatial principles to guide public infrastructure investment and development spending; and (3) creative responses to lingering differences in economic activity and quality of life in different parts of a country (Oranje and Biermann, 2002).

In contrast to earlier times when ideologies were more clear-cut and their proponents far more vocal, visible and certain about the wisdom of their positions, the new series of plans take freely from currents in regional planning thought that are in many cases far apart (see Ellis and Harris, 2004; Bell, 1997; Unger, 2005; Oranje, 2002a; Oranje and Biermann, 2002). In these new discourses on national spatial development planning, pragmatic, postmodern, nostalgic, pro-rural, anti-modern, anti-urban approaches are combined with deep-modernist statements on equality, spatial justice and balanced territorial development and territorial cohesion. Real-world concerns about lagging regions

are often attended to with more liberal approaches of exploiting comparative and competitive advantages (see Hubner, 2005; Commission of the European Communities, undated, 2006a, b; Brass, 2000; Taylor, 1998; Oranje, 2002b; Unger, 2005; European Commission, 2003, 2004, 2007; Ellis and Harris, 2004; Kopačka, 2004 and Ministers responsible for urban development in the Member States, 2007). Despite all their differences, the single shared characteristic is the urge to ensure outcomes, with the means and modalities often no longer of such concern (see Oranje, 2002b; Ellis and Harris, 2004; Government Office for the East Midlands, 2006; Sridhar, 2005; Commission of the European Communities, 2006b). At the same time, some similarities remain, such as the assumption that it is possible through state intervention in the economy, notably through infrastructure investment, to change the spatial pattern of economic growth and development (see Smeets, 2006; Faludi, 2002, 2007, 2008; Oranje, 2007). Similarly, that the deeper and richer the knowledge base of what is available in terms of resources, and the better the advantages/potentials of places/regions can be described, packaged and put on offer, the better the outcomes will be (see Department of Trade and Industry, 2007; Asheim *et al.*, 2006; Gertler and Wolfe, 2006). Lastly that strong institutions, (1) supported by solid supportive policy, legal and funding frameworks, (2) staffed by capable and dedicated actors, and (3) tied together by mutually supportive, collaborative relationships, will ensure the realisation of the stated (national) objectives (Oranje, 2002a, b; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002; European Commission, 2003, 2007; Sridhar, 2005; Council of the European Union, 2006 and Ministers responsible for urban development in the Member States, 2007).

### **3. THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE: 1994–2010**

In order to provide some structure to the narrative, and to assist readers not familiar with South Africa, the events are discussed under four headings: (1) *Contextual Conditions*, i.e. the societal, economical, ecological and institutional conditions in which the events unfolded, (2) *Instruments, Authors, Approaches, Objectives and Storylines*, i.e. the proposed planning instruments, the stories associated with the instrument and the actors involved, (3) *Institutions*, i.e. the framework of government departments, agreements, rules and regulations in which the instrument is located, and (4) *Implementation, Outcomes and Impacts*, i.e. whether the instrument was implemented, why this was done, or not, and if so, what was achieved and not.

### **3.1. Contextual Conditions**

When the ANC emerged as the victor in the first democratic elections in April 1994, it inherited a country with glaring differences in quality of life, economic activities in different parts of the country, huge differences in access to a decent quality of life and a huge public debt. Both in its 1992-policy document entitled *Ready to Govern* and its 1993/1994-Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) it clearly expressed its wish to rapidly address these differences (see ANC, 1992, 1994). This saw the creation of the RDP Office shortly after the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela in May 1994, and given the ANC's links to the former Eastern bloc, its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and its social democratic and socialist leanings, it was expected that the State would come up with massive, centrally controlled State plans and interventions in the economy. This was, however, not to be (see Platzky, 1998a, b). While the need was for massive intervention and change, limited funds and lack of massive investments from abroad worked against this. As Platzky (1998a, p. 4) remarks, 'Big reconstruction and development without growth was not possible'. This ideal was given a further blow when the RDP Office was abruptly closed down in April 1996 and those working in it 'redeployed' in national and provincial departments to continue the developmental work the Office had begun.

Whereas the RDP Office came to a sudden end, the challenges of deep-seated poverty, inequality and lack of access to opportunities did, however, not go away. In many quarters concerns were also growing that a lack of coordination in State expenditure and investment in the three spheres of government (national, provincial and municipal) and the many sectors in these spheres, were not resolving these conditions, and in some cases, even making them worse. And, as time went by and the lack of progress on meeting the targets of reducing inequality and ensuring shared inclusive and sustainable growth were becoming more obvious. Politically this found expression in growing dissent at the Mbeki government, also from within the ANC-alliance,<sup>3</sup> culminating in: (1) the former President's humiliation at the ANC's 52nd National Conference in Polokwane in December 2007, (2) the adoption of resolutions that suggested a far more interventionist, developmental state, and (3) the President's recall from office in September 2008. Six months later, in April 2009, President Zuma was elected as new President with a clear commitment for development of lagging rural regions and strong statements from leaders in the Party and the tripartite alliance that a more socialist order was in the offing.

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<sup>3</sup> This Alliance consists of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

### 3.2. Instruments, Authors, Approaches, Objectives and Storylines

The first two attempts at national spatial development planning were initiated roughly about the same time, i.e. middle to late 1995, early 1996 (Oranje, 1998). One of these, the so-called National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF), was commissioned by the RDP Office after being proposed in August 1995 (see Naidoo, 1996). This framework was an outcome of concerns about uncoordinated expenditure, and a lack of shared standards in infrastructure investment, amidst a realisation that the State did not nearly have enough funds to achieve its goals, even if it were to spend in a highly planned way. It was envisaged that the framework would start with the mapping of all State investment by making use of a GIS, after which the various key role-players involved in the expenditure so mapped would come together and through dialogue and persuasion change and tweak proposals for future investment and align these in accordance with an agreed future trajectory. In practice the exercise did not move beyond the initial phase of mapping, with very few stakeholders expressing any appetite for a situation in which they were to be prescribed to as to where (their) future investment should go.

The second initiative, the Spatial Development Initiative (SDI) was developed based on lessons learnt on regional development in the European Community and bearing in mind the harsh realities of the global economy (Platzky, 1998b, p. 9). This instrument entailed that attention and expenditure on social and economic infrastructure would first be focused in areas with potential for economic growth, and very aptly went by the name of Spatial Development Initiatives (Platzky, 1998a, p. 6; Oranje, 1998). Once the SDI-endeavours had proven to have been successful, there would be a shift of attention to more marginal areas (Platzky, 1998a, p. 6). While all of the SDIs did not have a linear corridor format, the most successful initiative, the Maputo-Pretoria-Gaborone-Walfish Bay Corridor, which stretches from the east to the west of the African continent, has. This assisted in establishing the development corridor idea as a key component of national government policy.

The third instrument with its origins located in the late 1990s, is the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) (see The Presidency, 2003, 2006). The NSDP arose from the lack of success with other initiatives by Government to coordinate infrastructure investment and development spending, notably the NSDF (discussed earlier) and a number of *ad hoc* intergovernmental coordinating bodies set up between 1996 and 1998 (Merrifield, 1999). Work began on the Perspective back in July 1998 in the Coordination and Implementation Unit (CIU) of the Office of the then Executive Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. Initially the idea was to prepare a set of 'Spatial Guidelines for directing public Infrastructure Investment and Development Spending' (SGIID). The primary

instrument to achieve this was a ‘mechanism’ to ensure alignment between the municipal strategic Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and the policies, strategies and plans prepared in the national and provincial spheres of government. Guiding the various planning actions and the various steps in the mechanism was a set of six indicative principles. Key to these principles was the introduction of the concepts of *need/poverty* and *development potential* in terms of which the national space economy would be described. The cornerstone of these principles was that fixed investment beyond the minimum basic level of services as guaranteed in the Constitution should be limited to places with development potential and that social development spending should be targeted in places with high poverty/need. This option of ‘people not places’, and the break with the conventional wisdom of the *watering-can approach*,<sup>4</sup> meant that the NSDP had a difficult journey to official recognition, with the first draft presented to Cabinet early in 2000, but not meeting with its approval. This was in all likelihood a reaction against a perception of it harbouring a pro-urban, anti-rural bias.

After having been dusted off in 2002 the NSDP was taken to Cabinet again early in 2003, where it was approved. In terms of this approval it was not only meant to be used as an indicative tool for guiding expenditure decisions by all three spheres of government, but all government actors were instructed to interrogate the document, comment on it, and evaluate their programmes and projects in terms of its logic. Government actors were also asked to assist in the refinement of the data in the NSDP. Key to the success of the NSDP, it was believed, was for it to be used to facilitate and structure a debate on State expenditure in and between spheres in all planning exercises. Despite all the criticism it suffered, the NSDP was updated in 2005/2006 and a revised version published in May 2007. In contrast to the 2003-NSDP, the revised NSDP, riding on the wave of optimism in the country at the time, and the hundreds of billions of Rands available for infrastructure investment, took a far more positive, assertive approach to State investment in the economy. Key to such investment would be: (1) more robust economic analyses, ‘proper’ spatial development planning and improved monitoring and review, (2) agreement on potentials and need, and (3) enabling and supportive actions to be undertaken by each of the spheres of government to give effect to exploit potentials and address needs.

Despite the 2006-NSDP including a toned down set of indicative principles on investment and spending than the 2003-NSDP, the unease created by the document, and what was perceived to be support for an unbalanced national spatial development profile, did not go away. This resulted in the fourth initia-

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to an approach adopted (and coined) post-1989 in the former East Germany in terms of which infrastructure investment and development spending is spread in an unfocused way over an area (see The Presidency, 2006).

tive, a series of initiatives from around 2004 onwards by the national Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to put in place a regional development programme or strategy. The first attempt at this was aptly called 'Geospread', and was in essence little more than a GIS-exercise aimed at identifying places with economic potential outside the metros. This was followed by the preparation of the Regional Industrial Development Strategy (RIDS) (see Department of Trade and Industry, 2007). The RIDS regarded the lack of economic growth in areas outside the three major urban/metropolitan areas as *regional inequality* that was largely attributed to apartheid (Department of Trade and Industry, 2007). This situation was to be rectified through the pursuit of *balanced development*, which would entail State support for economic development in non-metropolitan regions and small towns with limited asset-bases (*Business Day Reporter*, 2006). This was seen as an approach that could be adopted throughout the country, with no suggestion made that the development of all regions into viable and sustainable economic spaces would be very hard to achieve.

The fifth and latest initiative is still in embryonic phase and is set to emerge from what is currently a *Green Paper on National Strategic Planning* published for discussion purposes and a *Discussion Paper on Performance Monitoring and Evaluation*<sup>5</sup> (see The Presidency, 2009a, b, c).<sup>6</sup> The Green Paper sets out how government will, in collaboration with other role-players in the State and civil society, improve long-term strategic planning for the country as a whole. The Paper acknowledges that South Africa has had difficulty meeting its developmental objectives. In order to address this, the Paper proposes a long-term plan for the nation as a whole with key milestones and targets, located within a developmental state with the necessary technical, managerial and political capacities to act. It also recognises that lack of coordination in the efforts of the various spheres and sector of government has frustrated the pursuit of government's developmental objectives and that a single government term of office is too short to realise strategic objectives and outcomes. The development of a capable, effective and efficient developmental state, it argues, will be a multi-term process, the broad parameters and key components of which are set out in the Paper.

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<sup>5</sup> This document proposes the identification of 25 to 30 outcomes and ten priorities by the national Cabinet (The Presidency, 2009c). These will then be used to commit national sector departments and/or group of departments to delivery agreements that will specify roles and responsibilities against timelines and budgets. Progress on meeting these agreements will be monitored in meetings to be held on a six-monthly base.

<sup>6</sup> Cabinet approved the release of the Draft Green Paper on 12 August 2009. The document was subsequently launched at a Press briefing on 4 September 2009 and officially tabled in Parliament on 8 September 2009. A revised Green Paper was approved by Cabinet in December 2009 and launched at a Press briefing on 15 January 2010.



As for the long-term plan and its relation to other forms of planning, the Paper suggests that the plan with 2025 as its horizon will serve as a guide to medium and short-term plans. As such, its outputs will consist of ‘a long-term vision, a five-year strategic framework, an Annual Programme of Action, spatial perspectives and occasional research’ (The Presidency, 2009a, p. 10). This plan, it is argued, will provide answers to the basic questions people ask, such as in which sectors we will be working, what will have happened to poverty, what the rate of urbanization will be, what we will eat, what the productivity levels of rural areas will be, how we will move about, what crime will be like etc.

The Paper and the press statement that accompanied the launch went to some lengths to allay fears that it was not centralising planning in the Presidency, and that all other planning processes as provided for in the Constitution and legislation would continue, but within ‘clear national guidelines and frameworks’ (The Presidency, 2009b). These frameworks, the Paper notes, will include guidelines that will spell out government’s spatial priorities.

### **3.3. Institutions**

The NSDF would in all likelihood have required some or other form of national coordination and alignment, and an entity with the authority to forge synergy and drive implementation. While it never came to this, due to its premature demise, the Presidency would have been the most suitable home for it. The SDIs were driven by the Department of Trade and Industry and managed by teams for each SDI that reported to the Department. Often this corporate-style arrangement was seen as exclusionary and non-participatory by more locally-based actors. The RIDS did not include proposals for the creation of new institutions. The NSDP went through a variety of phases, also with regards to institutions. In its early phases (1999–2001), it was proposed that a Cabinet Committee comment and advise municipalities on their professed need and development potential. In its later versions, notably the 2003 and 2006-versions, reference was made to an intergovernmental body that would monitor the investment decisions of state actors. Throughout all these phases, however, the responsibility of the NSDP was located in the Presidency.

In terms of the proposals in the recently published Green Paper and the Discussion Document on Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, four new institutions will be created, i.e. (1) a National Planning Commission, (2) a Ministerial Committee on Planning, (3) a National Planning Secretariat, and (4) a Delivery Unit. The Paper furthermore suggests that the National Planning Commission, consisting of independent experts and strategic thinkers, will: (1) lead the preparation of a long-term vision, (2) be required to challenge government on its plans and seek answers, (3) base its understanding and decisions based on

dialogue amongst social partners, insights and research from a variety of sources and commissioned own research, and (4) indicate how the various partners will contribute to the realisation of the plan. The Ministerial Committee on Planning, will: (1) provide political guidance to the planning process, (2) support the planning ministry in planning, and (3) ensure and pursue planning and budgeting that is in adherence to and supportive of the long-term plan. These two institutions will be supported by the envisaged National Planning Secretariat. This body will not only provide technical and administrative support, but also ensure that the national plan is fed into the planning and budgeting processes of other spheres and sectors of government. The proposed Delivery Unit will consist of a team of experienced officials who can unblock failures in delivery based on lessons learnt and by facilitating change in a participatory and collaborative fashion.

### **3.4. Implementation, Outcomes and Impacts**

Implementation of post-apartheid national spatial development planning instruments has been mixed. With the closure of the RDP Office in April 1996 the work on the first NSDF came to an abrupt end with really only a folder of GIS maps of State investment to show. The SDIs have been a mixed bag, with only two of the eleven – i.e. the Maputo Development Corridor and the Lebombo Corridor – showing promise. Of late, corridors based on the SDIs for the regional Southern African Development Community, have caught the attention of investors and politicians, largely due to the renewed focus on the exploitation of mineral riches in countries to the north of South Africa. In addition to this, the national corridors have spawned a series of provincial and local corridors, with their presence often being felt stronger on paper than in practice. Lack of funding, technical competence, realism and political will were often the reasons for this. The NSDP has met a similar fate, with awareness of it being high, especially as a ‘note of observance’ in the section of local and provincial plans and policies where ‘homage is paid to the legal and policy framework in which the plan is located’. Generally, in provinces and municipalities that ranked high in terms of developmental potential and need, the reference to the NSDP tended to be higher than in places with low economic growth levels and development potential. In discussions around development, it would often be suggested that the NSDP was anti-rural, that it ‘sought to favour those that already have’ and was part of the neo-liberal ‘1996 class project’.<sup>7</sup> Given its perceived association

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<sup>7</sup> This is a reference used by the Left to label a small group of Ministers in the Cabinet of former President Mbeki, whom they argue were responsible for the unilateral adoption of what is perceived by the Left to be a neo-liberal policy document – GEAR: The Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (see Musgrave, 2009).

with the Mbeki-administration, it will in all likelihood be replaced by something else, or watered down to such an extent that it will no longer be recognizable as to what the 2003-NSDP set out to do. The RIDS was never launched as a strategy, and is in hibernation, largely due to lack of management support for it and vacancies in the unit dealing with it. Whether it will be resuscitated is an open question.

In the case of the most recent Green Paper and discussion document, its publication has not gone down well (see Winkler, 2009; SAPA, 2009a, b; COSATU, 2009b). While some have argued that this hostile reception was more about: (1) a lack of engagement of the Presidency with the alliance partners prior to the release of the document, and (2) personalities, with its political head Minister Trevor Manuel being associated with the Mbeki-administration, than content, it would seem that there may be more to it. Concerns have been expressed about: (1) the creation of super-Minister, with powers that surpass even those of the President, and (2) that the Presidency would seek to micro-manage other spheres and sectors and deny them their right to prepare plans and budgets in accordance with their mandates (see COSATU, 2009b; Mail and Guardian Online, 2009). However, as noted by Netshitenzhe (2009), who recently quit his position as head of the Policy Unit in The Presidency, the document does not suggest this at all. Rather, he argues, it makes numerous provisions for dialogue and political oversight of the actions of the Commission and the Unit in the Presidency by the Cabinet (Netshitenzhe, 2009; Mohammed, 2009). Furthermore, according to Manuel, the document was prepared in accordance with a resolution taken at the ANC's 2007-Polokwane Conference, which called for the setting up of such a commission (see *SABC News*, 2009; Marrian and Serino, 2009).

Government clearly took the concerns and critiques to heart, as in a recent revised version (January 2010) of the Green Paper the focus of the document was shifted primarily to the National Planning Commission (The Presidency, 2010). In the document the powers of the Commission were cut back<sup>8</sup> and its powers and functions *vis-à-vis* those of Cabinet and Parliament much more clearly defined (see The Presidency, 2010). In a conciliatory move, COSATU, following on from a call for the nomination of persons to serve on the 20-member Commission by 10 February 2010, nominated its (twelve) candidates, and suggesting some level of buy-in into the process (see *Business Day Reporter*, 2010; COSATU, 2010). While the mood has surely improved, the debate on agency, structure and power in this arena is in all likelihood not over, but simply dormant for now.

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<sup>8</sup> The major change revolves around the preparation of the Medium Term Strategic Framework, which was initially to be something that the Commission would be involved with, but which is now solely a function of the Presidency and the Cabinet only (see The Presidency, 2010 and Manuel, 2010).

#### 4. REJOINDER: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper sought to provide an overview of the post-apartheid 'experimentation' with national spatial development planning in South Africa. When comparing this to the recent revival of such endeavours in a wider, global setting, it reveals that the bulk of the initiatives, with the exception of the NSDP, sought to 'address/correct' the concentrated nature of economic activity in a small number of major urban areas in the country *vis-à-vis* the relatively low levels of activity in the rest of the country. As such, the bulk of the responses, again with the exception of the NSDP, have been: (1) anti-urban, with a distinct preference for 'giving the countryside a chance', and for protecting what is seen as an idyllic rural condition, (2) focused on achieving 'balanced development', as if such a state ever existed and as if it were an uncontested public good to be aspired to and achieved and sustained, (3) of a 'closed-country-system-zero-sum game nature', i.e. that investment and economic growth in one part of the country can only come about at a cost for another part of the country, and (4) based on the dual assumption that the space economy and the drivers that underlie and shape it, are highly malleable, and that the State has the power to direct, guide and plan economic activity across the national territory in terms of nature, scale and location.

In terms of *institutions*, the 16-year period has been marked by an initial creation of a centralised, super-planning agency (the RDP Office), followed by a period in which decentralised, yet rule-bound, intergovernmental engagement was seen as the appropriate vehicle. This in turn gave way again to the pursuit of centralised national planning with national government having the power to 'dictate' to others what they should do, where they should do it and how they should conduct their activities. This has of course, not been well received by all, both in and outside of government.

Turning to *implementation*, post-apartheid national spatial development planning initiatives have had far more of a life on paper than in practice. This is despite the fact that the proposals espoused in such documents were generally in line with the views of the governing party and its alliance partners. The reasons for the gaps in implementation, and the lackluster response the various planning instruments have been getting, have been the focus of numerous reports in and outside of government (see Merrifield *et al.*, 2008 for an overview of these reports and their contents). Based on these reports, the lack of implementation can largely be attributed to: (1) fears of micro-management by an all-powerful super-ministry and a loss of independence and planning, budgeting and implementation capacities, (2) concerns about the political fall-out of the implementation of the proposals, (3) inability and/or fear to deal with the vast sums of funds that may be involved, (4) a lack of understanding of the proposals, and (5) a short-term focus on immediate issues.

With government engaging on a road towards the institution of a new national planning system, a large degree of thought will have to be spent on deciding what form the system would require to make it function effectively and efficiently. Also, what the degree of (1) intervention and control on the one hand, and (2) facilitation and guidance on the other should be. And finally, given the fact that South Africa is not alone in the pursuit of national spatial development planning, a huge opportunity exists for comparative research on these initiatives in South Africa and a range of other countries.

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