

CONVERSATIONS IN PLANNING THEORY  
AND PRACTICE BOOKLET PROJECT



# VANESSA WATSON

PLANNING FROM THE SOUTH  
LEARNING FROM ACADEMIA  
PRAXIS AND ACTIVISM

**Aditya Kumar**

Executive Director of Development  
Action Group (DAG)

**Ananya Ramesh**

Consultant, World Resources  
Institute India, Bangalore



## AESOP Young Academics Booklet Project Conversations in Planning

### Booklet 10

Aditya Kumar, Ananya Ramesh and Vanessa Watson @ January 2021

ISBN: 9789082819168

Internal And Cover Design  
Shaimaa Refaat, Piece Of Art Egypt

### AESOP YA Booklet Project

Editor-in-Chief

Chiara Belingardi

Senior Research Fellow (Post Doctoral)

DIITET – CNR (National Research Council) - Italy

### Other editorial board members

Giusy Pappardo

University of Catania, Catania, Italy

Mennatullah Hendawy

Technical University Berlin, Berlin, Germany;

Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt;

Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner, Germany.

Sina Shahab

Lecturer in the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University, UK

Lead of the Spatial Planning and City Environments (SPACE) Research Group

Lena Greinke

Researcher and Lecturer at the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz University Hannover, Institute of Environmental Planning, Germany

### Senior Adviser

Mona Abdelwahab

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Alexandria, Egypt

Chandrima Mukhopadhyay

Senior Research Associate (Post Doctoral), OPTIMISM project, School of Arts and Science

Ahmedabad University, India

### Authors

Aditya Kumar

Executive director Development Action Group (DAG)

Ananya Ramesh

Consultant, World Resources Institute India, Bangalore

Vanessa Watson

School of Architecture Planning and Geomatics, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

### AESOP YA Booklet Project

Published by Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)



## Authors Bio

# WATSON

## PLANNING FROM THE SOUTH: LEARNING FROM ACADEMIA, PRAXIS AND ACTIVISM



**Aditya Kumar** is the Executive Director of Development Action Group (DAG), based in South Africa. Adi has extensive experience in the development sector having worked across the globe in India, South Africa, Lebanon, United States, Kenya and Uganda. Previously he worked a Deputy Director for Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) (affiliated with Slum Dwellers International) and as the Head of Design and Planning for Nahr El Bared Palestinian Camp Reconstruction Project with the United Nations, Lebanon (UNRWA). His projects were shortlisted for the 2013 cycle of Aga Khan Award for Architecture. He was also Project Manager for Earthquake Rehabilitation Projects with Caritas India in Gujarat, India and worked extensively on planning projects in Boston and Los Angeles in the private and non-profit sector. Over the two decades, Adi has become a specialist in post disaster & post conflict reconstruction; housing & land rights; and informal settlement upgrading. He has presented his work at several global forums, exhibitions and conferences around ranging from disaster reconstruction and to pro-poor urban development. His work has fostered multi-stakeholder partnerships between local communities, CBO's, government bodies, academic institutions and International NGO's, with a key focus on strengthening community participation and activism.



**Ananya Ramesh** is currently working as a planner at World Resources Institute India, Bangalore. She is involved in projects concerning land, governance, urban resilience and spatial mapping. During her tenure at CRDF, CEPT University, she co-authored an illustrated handbook for Indian cities 'LAP for Transit' that presents and demonstrates an Indian model of Local Area Planning around transit, to achieve the goals of Transit Oriented Development. As a budding urban practitioner, she is keen on exploring aspects of peri-urban development, socio-spatial dynamics & politics of land and urban governance.

## Preface and Acknowledgements

This publication on the work of Prof Vanessa Watson started as far back as 2015. Despite the several years and immense patience by the publishers, it has truly been an exceptional journey for us. We would like to acknowledge all those that assisted in putting this publication together. First, to the editors of 'Conversations in Planning Theory and Practice Booklet Project' for their guidance and patience in completing this publication. This publication will undoubtedly open new ways of thinking for the young and upcoming planners. Secondly, we would like to thank Prof Watson's peers, students and colleagues for their immense time and contribution from across the globe. The enthusiasm and positive feedback made this process incredibly interesting and lively. Thirdly, to Prof. Watson for giving us significant time and energy over interviews, frequent emails and constant dialogue. This publication is by no stretch a critique or comprehensive catalogue of Prof. Watson's work. Rather it is a concise monograph of her work, set against the backdrop of Global South finding its voice in the dominant planning dispensation. As practitioners, we found Prof. Watson's work inspirational and relevant to our cities and contexts. We hope this booklet is provocative for other students, academics and practitioners.

## Editor's note/introducing YA booklet

*"Planning from the South: learning from academia, Praxis and activism"* is the tenth booklet published as part of the AESOP Young Academics 'Conversation in Planning Theory and Practice' project that facilitates learning through conversations across generations of planners. In its first phase, booklets were divided in three series, such as the use philosophical theories in planning, planning theories, and planning practices. Then we have combined these series into a sole and comprehensive structure. The current booklet comes along with a common project of the entire editorial board: the edition of a Special Issue on planning theories and practices from / of the Global South.

From a pedagogical perspective, the uniqueness of the project is learning through conversations. The booklets aim to provide an introduction to the theories and ideas of senior scholars: what and how they contributed to the field of planning; what and who influenced the development of these theories; and how this implicated/reflected on planning debate in theory and/or practice. The young academic authors not only learn from the senior scholars about their work, but also get involved in conversation with them in order to make sense of how the senior scholars have used these theories in their work, and how such theories are applied in planning theory and practice.

Since Urban Planning is a practice-oriented discipline, many raise questions about the role of theories in the discipline. Most of our published booklets have addressed the debate and interdependency between theory and practice in planning. Previous booklets also demonstrated various ways of understanding planning theory, urban theory, or critical theory. The booklets show how the academic discipline of urban planning evolved over time, in different times and contexts, often cross pollinating with other disciplines, and creating new branches.

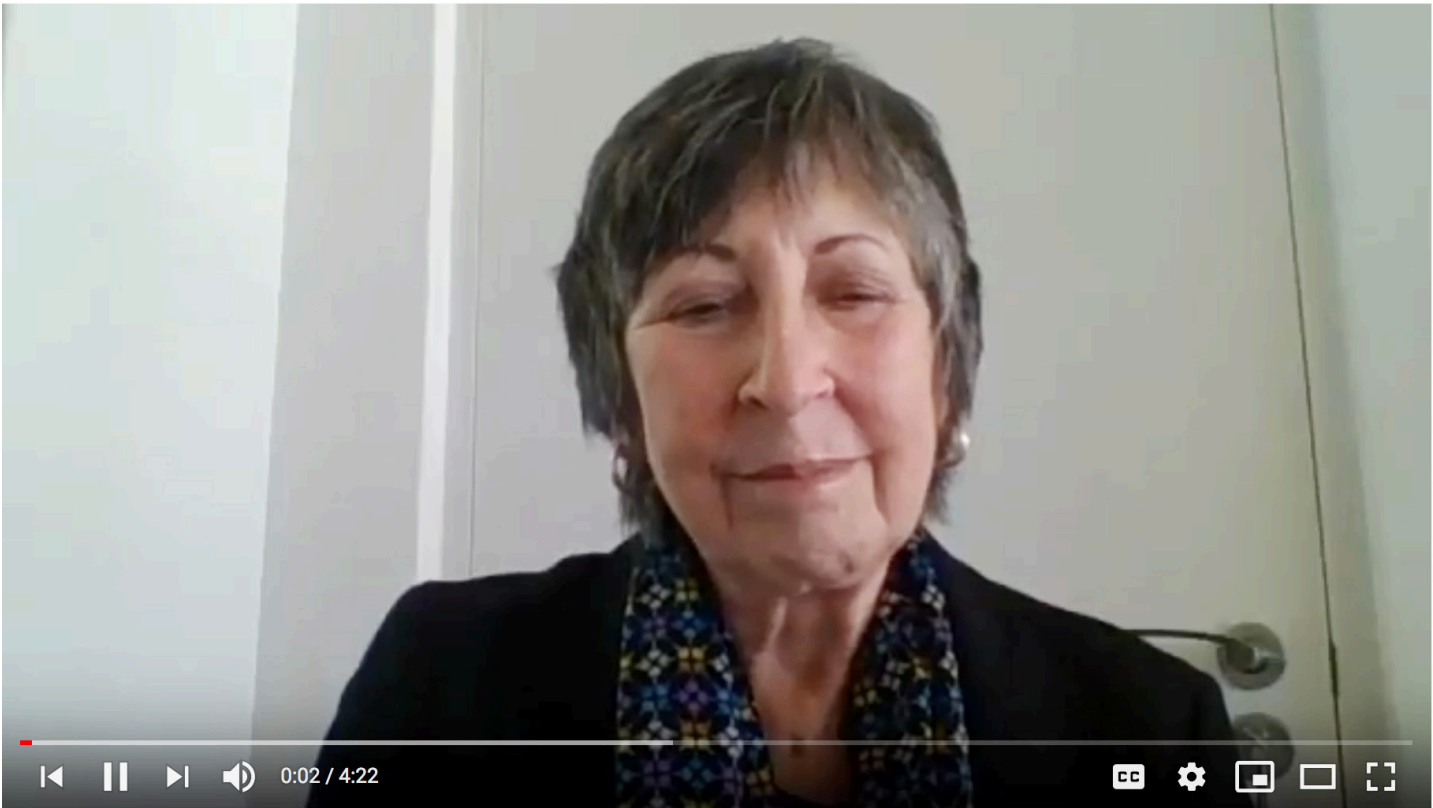
This booklet regards the role of engaged scholars and the innovation that a critical perspective can bring to the planning theories and practices. The perspective that comes from Global South, that Vanessa Watson contributed to define and promoted during her entire career path, provide the entire planning community new tools and frameworks to deal with the challenges of contemporary cities and regions. While there has been debate about internationality of international planning journals, both in terms of authors and editors, Vanessa Watson is one of the very few scholars who has extensively published in international planning journals, besides being the Global South Editor of Urban Studies. Her contribution is valuable not only to the planning community in the global South, but to the entire global planning community.

The booklets are, in a way, open peer-reviewed which improves its rigor. We would encourage both the young academic community as well as the senior scholars to use the booklets in their teaching. Being open-access, they can be easily circulated. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the senior scholars of present and forthcoming booklets who have not only enthusiastically agreed to take part in the project but have also relentlessly supported our YA authors in spite of their very busy schedule.

With thanks and regards,  
"Conversations in Planning" Booklet Team

# Foreword

Prof. Vanessa Watson’s video



Prof. Vanessa Watson's video











# Contents

---

Introduction .....	11
Engagements and Contributions as an Academic and as a Practitioner .....	14
Timeline: 1970s to present .....	16
Influences: People, institutions and events .....	26
Research contribution: Pioneering Southern thinking .....	31
Adaptive Practice - Planning and Activism .....	40
Conclusion .....	47
Appendix .....	48
Works cited .....	50

# Introduction

*“So, Vanessa’s work, alongside that of several other key planning theorists has served to challenge a dominant theoretical paradigm from the particular perspective of urban realities in the Global South. This has undermined the attitude of universality that often characterizes work produced in the Global North (i.e. if something is true for the US or Europe, it must be true for all contexts). She has been at the forefront of a movement that sees planning as an inherently political activity that, in some cases, is itself directly involved in the reproduction of socio-spatial inequality.” James Duminy*

*“Watson’s Inaugural Lecture (2005) and her critiques of the validity of ‘universalism’ and the widespread practice in planning to import ideas from the North as ‘best practice’ were timely, in that the Republic of South Africa state was in the midst of aggressively formulating a wide range of mainly neo-liberal policies and strategies to guide development for the post-Apartheid state.” Cecil Madell*

Prof. Vanessa Watson is one of the most prolific Global South planning theorists. Her research and writing on Southern cities and the complexities of urban politics is unprecedented. In particular, Watson’s work on “conflicting rationalities”, “deep difference” and “seeing from the South” presented a new way of thinking about co-production and participatory processes. It emphasises the idea that ‘place matters’ and Global North concepts and approaches cannot be ‘universalised’ to the African continent. Her ongoing critique of the neoliberal African ‘world class cities’, as an aspirational European or North American city, has informed key gaps in planning and land regulations across the continent. To address this gap through planning education, Watson was amongst the founding members of the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS). AAPS has currently established a network of close to 50 planning schools in the continent. She is also a founder of the African Centre for Cities at University of Cape Town, which has grown to become a pioneering research centre across the continent. Through her sustained commitment, several collaborative pursuits, through Association for African Planning Schools and African Centre for Cities, and between academia and civil society, were conducted leading to new ways of thinking about the African city. AAPS and Watson have been instrumental in rethinking planning pedagogy and curriculum for the Global South- a milestone achievement given the pressures of complying with European and American norms.

Besides being an active scholar and academic, Watson has on numerous occasions demonstrated her passion for activism and struggle for the urban poor. In 1986, Watson was one of the founding members of Development Action Group (DAG), an organisation that advocates for land



and housing rights. On several occasions, she has taken strong positions on key urban development projects and processes despite facing the repercussions of debating political agendas and confronting business lobbies. She has inspired and mentored many different activists to utilise their planning skills in order to make cities more inclusive and liveable. As the first female professor at the planning school at University of Cape Town, Watson continues to play a key role in shifting the perception of gender biases in planning education and practice, which have primarily been male dominated.

Watson's scholarship evolves from deep and deliberate reading, reflection and response to the socio-political, economic and cultural context as well as the everyday realities of the economically weakest segment of society in South Africa. By questioning and revisiting the normative frame, Watson encourages us to root planning within its context and power relationships. Figure 1 presents our reading of the reciprocal arrangement between context, concepts, praxis and pedagogy and the cyclic nature of this process, ensuring situated learning and knowledge creation. This is indeed an invaluable contribution to cultivate a relevant and rooted discourse across diverse development contexts.

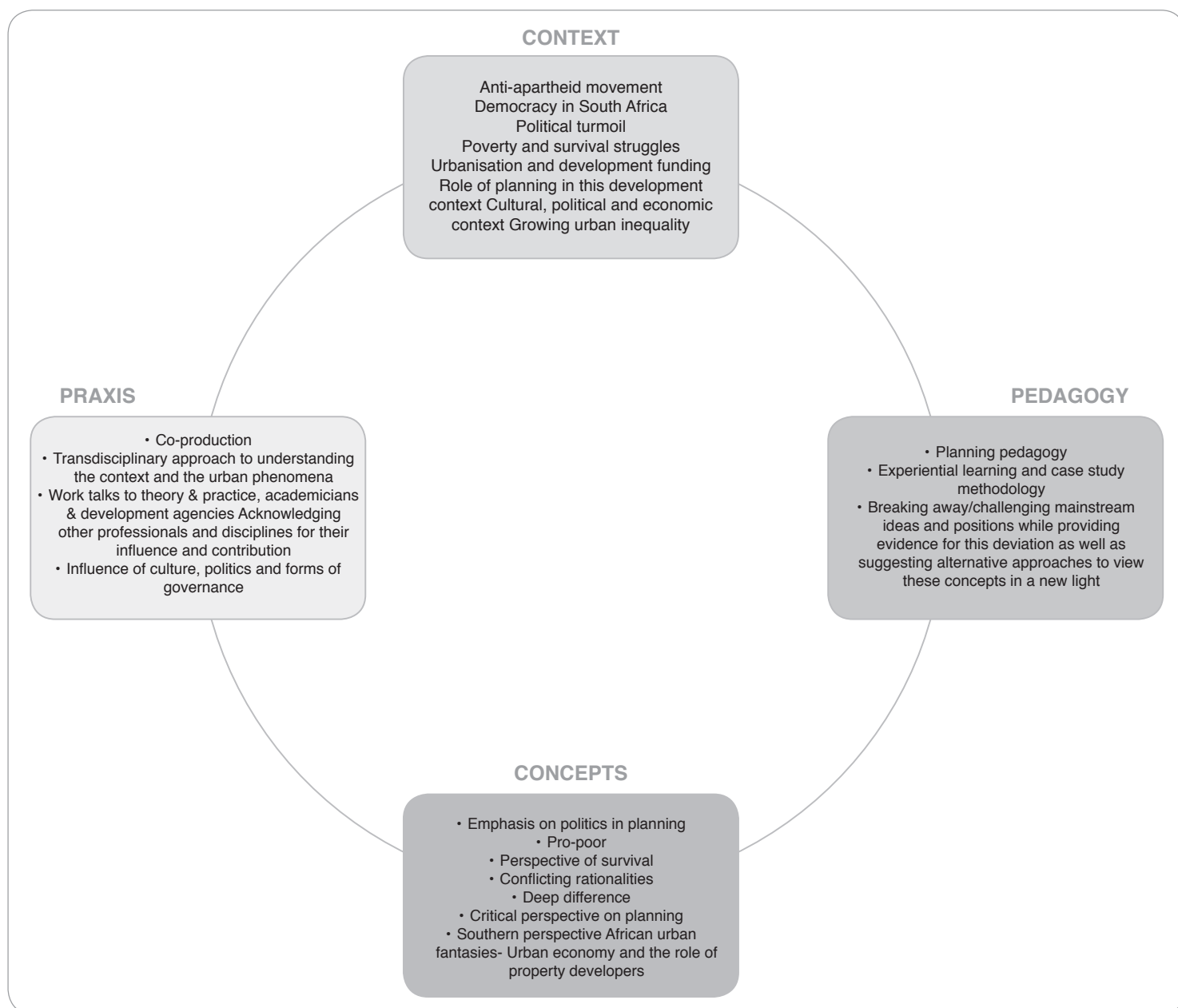


Figure 1: Reciprocal elements and cyclic process

Watson is an inspiration to many in the planning fraternity. This publication is in many ways, a tribute to Watson and inadvertently hopes to inspire upcoming planners to view activism as an integral part of planning practice.

# Engagements and Contributions as an Academic and as a Practitioner

To gain insights into the course of Watson’s work and contribution to planning thinking, education and practice, Figure 2 traces a chronological structure (1970s to present), in three layers. One, reading the broader **South African context**, reflections and responses, two, a detailed **timeline** that encompasses education, research contribution, academic positions held, international recognition and praxis and three, **key influences** over the years including people, institutions and events. The timeline, influences and research contributions are further detailed in the following sub-sections.



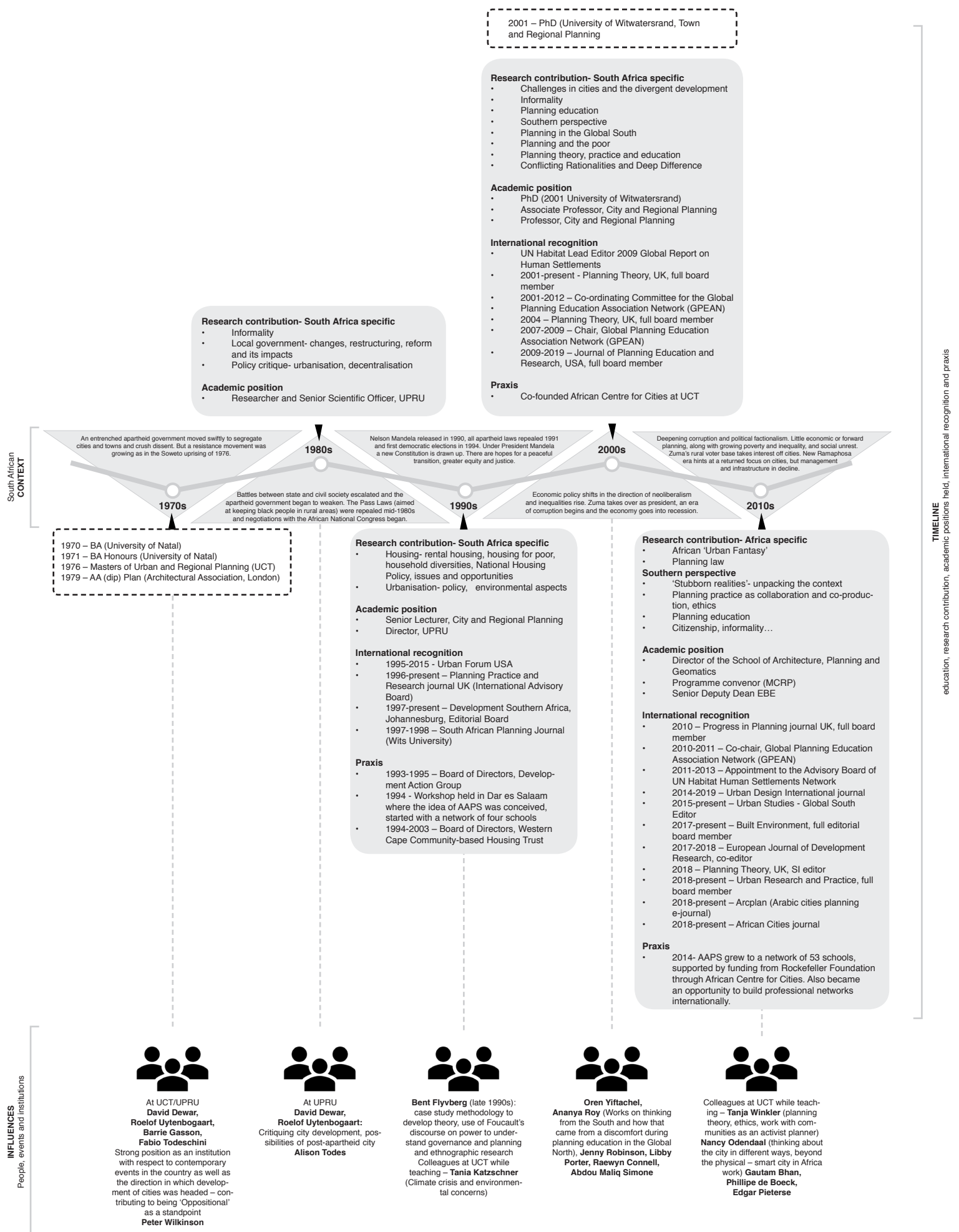


Figure 2: Timeline - Engagements and contributions as an academician and practitioner

## Timeline: 1970s to present

### 1970s

The ambition of pursuing something that can truly make a difference, led Watson to pursue a Master in Urban and Regional Planning at University of Cape Town (UCT) completed in 1976 after a Bachelor (Hons) in Geography from the University of Natal in 1971. The University's strong position in opposing the apartheid government and its distinct approach to planning, resonated with Watson's personal standpoint, leading to a conscious decision to pursue higher studies at UCT. This has been a consistent standpoint in her academic as well as professional pursuits. Time spent at UCT, the networks developed and the interactions during the two years have been pivotal in shaping her mindset as a planning professional and her outlook about cities and the world. After the completion of her master's, the political climate as well as the responses from the people during professional engagements, left her feeling helpless about the situation. This prompted Watson's move to London, to pursue a post-graduate planning degree at the AA (Architectural Association) School.

### 1980s

Determined and renewed to return to contribute in home ground after the experience in a foreign context, led to a career at Urban Problems Research Unit (UPRU) initiated by David Dewar and Roelof Uytenbogaart, for over one and a half decades. Starting in 1980, she began working in the capacity of a researcher and went on to be the Director between 1991 and 1996. While UPRU observed the political ideology entering the practice of planning apartheid cities, as an institutional position, it was critical of the contemporary city and engaged with ideas and vision for the post-apartheid city. This played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping Watson's position — critical perspectives on planning, opposition as an entry point and planning activism — which are persistent till the present.

As described by Watson, research at UPRU was an alliance of analytical and normative thinking as well as planning activism. The analytical processes attempted to develop a data-based understanding of the impact of apartheid on people, communities and the city. Additionally, assumptions as well as approaches of the North American and European planning models were unpacked. The normative component involved developing a vision for the urban future of South African cities post-apartheid, based on grounded reality rather than best practices. Synchronously playing two roles, Watson worked as a researcher at UPRU and as an activist. Donning the activist planner hat, she worked with anti-apartheid organisations such as United Women's Organisations (UWO) and Cape Town Housing Action Committee (CAHAC), during the night. She helped them understand the dynamics of the current situation and guided them on how to negotiate with the government. She has also been instrumental in the formation of civil society organisations like the Development Action Group (DAG), as a means of supporting communities facing forced evictions. Beyond being a mode of practice, this approach of Watson has offered an ideology, a tool and a new dimension to planning, the element of

resistance. Not only did this help to build stronger and more complete arguments against an approach (the State's approach in this case) but continues to push planners to take stronger positions on forced removals, township establishment and other practices that are agnostic to the sensitivities and sensibilities of the local. Despite developing the vision for the future through research at UPRU, there continued to be a disconnect between the planner's and state's approach to communities, negatively impacting urban growth. This led Watson to propose the idea of "Conflicting rationalities" (Watson, 2003) that not only helped explain the clashes but also provided the explanation for the shift from an equity-based approach to a market-based, neo-liberal approach.

### 1990s

The 90s witnessed a series of political changes and promise of democracy, bringing with it the hope and imagination of a better South African society. But, through the decade, this enthusiasm started to dwindle when there was a mere "*replacement of racially divided cities with class divided cities and the differences continued*"<sup>1</sup>. While these historical events influenced development and shaped cities, it also prompted planners to use a critical lens to view and practice planning. It also urged planners to debate what planning can do within the challenges of power hierarchies and ongoing political discourse. This emphasised a key consideration, to consider activism as integral to achieving outcomes across different socio-economic groups. Living and working in this environment influenced Watson, cumulatively leading up to her PhD in 2001 at the University of Witwatersrand, in Town and Regional Planning. The Doctoral thesis sought to enquire, why, despite so much political and rhetorical commitment, plans to transform post-apartheid cities haven't materialised. Particularly in post-apartheid Cape Town, Watson analysed how power influenced and informed the role of planners in the public sector and inadvertently, compromised the fulfilment of a transformative agenda.

This decade of international recognition of Watson's work, reflects how the fraternity viewed, accepted and engaged with Watson's contributions and her standpoint on planning and development within the South African context. This included her efforts to highlight the distinctiveness and importance of context and therefore urge academicians and practitioners to view, analyse and make propositions based on place and context. She has been on the editorial boards of several national and international journals. This includes *Planning Practice and Research, UK, Development Southern Africa, Johannesburg, South African Planning Journal and Urban Forum*, among others. Through public appointments, such as to the National Housing Forum (created to direct South Africa's post-democracy housing policy), she further combined her efforts in research and academia with activism. Her position and that of the sub-committee she served on was to avoid a one-house-one plot freehold approach for all and instead promote a range of tenures and housing forms depending on location in

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview by Aditya Kumar, "In conversation with Watson" on 26th August 2015.



the city. Ultimately, the policy was adopted, and while the intent is progressive, its implementation has been widely criticised as a major factor promoting sprawl and inequality. During two tenures, Watson served as a Senior Lecturer (1989-1996) and Associate Professor (1996-2002) in the Department of City and Regional Planning at University of Cape Town. After the end of the apartheid regime, connections began to be established with other African countries.

In 1994, during a workshop in Dar es Salaam, the idea of AAPS (the Association of African Planning Schools, and similar to AESOP in Europe and ANPUR in Brazil) was initiated with a network of four schools. As one of the founding members, the AAPS initiative was conceived as an attempt to bring together research, theorisation, practice and pedagogy (Watson and Odendaal, 2013). This reflects the conviction, continuity and consistency in Watson's standpoint and approach.

## 2000s

In the paper "Seeing from the South: refocussing urban planning on the globe's central issues" (Watson, 2009b), Watson introduced the term "Southern Planning Theory" acknowledging the growing importance of Southern cities and the need for context-related understanding. While retaining the Southern perspective, the question was, how to make this discourse open to a wider geo-political context.

*"...expanding out of the argument about the critique of Northern dominant theory into an argument that we have to try and develop something that contributes to a more international planning theory..."<sup>2</sup>*

Another key planning theory concept during this decade was recognition of social difference (Watson, 2006) which challenged assumptions in much of Northern planning theory that, regardless of class or cultural groupings, people could communicate equally in process debates about planning proposals and outcomes.

Watson's body of work expanded to build on the need to revisit current planning theory, the geographies of its origin and application as well as practice and pedagogy such that it is carefully and deeply connected to and cognizant of the context it is applied in, given the deep differences in culture, politics, economy as well as the physical form of cities. Her proposition of regional specificity and a paradigm shift in planning, echoed with the theme of UN Habitat's (2009) Global Report on Human Settlements - Planning Sustainable Cities, for which, Watson was appointed as the lead editor, and worked with a team from across the globe. This report acknowledges and identifies the mismatch between planning approaches and the ground reality and challenges in 21<sup>st</sup> century cities, especially in

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

the context of efforts towards sustainable urbanisation. It advocates the need for responsive and democratic approaches that account for environmental, demographic, economic as well as socio-spatial challenges. This engagement in many ways, influenced the article “The planned city sweeps the poor away ... : Urban planning and 21st century urbanisation” (Watson, 2009a) which addresses planning in both the Global North and South with regard to its exclusionary nature and offers ideas for pro-poor planning, reiterating the need for each of them to be adapted for respective contexts. For example, the approach and discourse of ‘Slum Free Cities’ particularly in India, sought to homogenise informality and slums, and was used as a means to mass evictions and forced removals. While proposing these potential planning approaches and “hope” attached to planning, Watson clarifies the limitations of what it can solve and how this depends on the larger ecosystem. She alerts the reader to deliberate on these challenges and processes within a wider context of political, institutional and socio-economic forces which are associated with material and human resources.

Through an in-depth and extensive review of changes in urban settlements in the Global North and South, Watson (2009a) discusses the impacts of globalisation on cities and in parallel traces how planning has not evolved to accommodate these changes, rather it has systematically excluded the poor. While debating the problems with the “idea of borrowing”, she also discusses new planning approaches in the Global South, innovations in process, institutional architecture and regulatory changes but concludes by reiterating that there are no ready-made solutions for the South and to derive from the “hope” attached to planning, we need to work towards synergies between the political, administrative and regulatory systems. This would also form the grounds for implementation of the various innovative ideas discussed and would deliver the desired outcomes. Drawing from different pieces of Watson’s work, we see how she not only urges a shift in perspective but also proposes an alternative to planning thought and approach:

- which views, acknowledges and accordingly addresses the specificities of a context
- which acknowledges the role of the government (countering the mainstream agreement of limiting the government’s role and depending on civil society – since the capacity and position of the civil society to get together, build a case on their needs and leverage their agency to negotiate with the government is highly debatable, not just in the South African context but across most developing economies)
- which considers the material basis of identity struggles (across contexts battling severe poverty, the dynamic shift towards that of survival and complex intersections of identity socially as well as spatially)
- which accounts for social and environmental impacts of spatial interventions
- which is context-specific and considers the heterogeneity within societies
- where planners are “street-wise” to be able to negotiate

At the time, Jenny Robinson, Oren Yiftachel, Ananya Roy and Libby Porter were influential voices from within the urban studies and planning community. Watson, in the spirit of her interdisciplinary approach, drew inspiration and inputs from similar research being carried out in fields of sociology (Raewyn Connell), psychology, law and medicine.

## 2010s

Growing international recognition, continued collaborations and academic contributions addressing global issues. Watson continues to offer Southern as an entry point to revisit the assumptions and approaches of planning theory.

With the wealth of contribution Watson brings to academia and praxis, not only has she initiated a paradigm change in Southern thinking but has also been a forerunner, showcasing the Southern perspective at several international forums. This includes publications in international peer-reviewed journals, appointments to several international journal editorial boards as well as advisory committees. Since 2015, Watson has been the Global South Editor for the Urban Studies Journal and co-editor for the European Journal of Development Research between 2017 and 2018. She has also been on the editorial boards of several prestigious journals including Progress in Planning, Built Environment, Urban Research and Practice and the African Cities Journal among many others.

This decade also brings several international committee memberships, carving out a niche of Southern scholarship, bringing Southern planning thought to the forefront. Watson was invited to be on the advisory boards of several initiatives pursued by different institutions including the UN Habitat Human Settlements Network, Aga Khan Foundation, Sheffield University, Bartlett School of Planning, University of Westminster and others. Representing the AAPS, she was part of the co-ordinating committee, and for a while, Chair for the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN). Watson was also appointed to be on international panels for research evaluations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to evaluate proposals from SDI and CORC, European Research Council Synergy Grants review panel, the Global Challenges Research Fund (RCUK GCRF) and the like.



## Vanessa Watson and the Possibility for Critical Planning Pedagogy – Haim Yacobi

The academic writing on Global South planning has grown over the last decade, highlighting the crisis of planning as a discipline on both the local and global levels. Within this evolving body of knowledge Vanessa Watson's voice is clear and inspiring, suggesting a critical understanding of the challenges of planning in the Global South – and highlighting the necessity to view power dis-balance in planning as a multi-layered phenomenon: political, economic, and epistemological. This line of critic in general, and Vanessa's writings in particular were very influential while I have started my academic career, in searching for a conceptual and theoretical vocabulary in planning and urban studies that will enable me to explore how colonialism, urban planning and space production in Israel/Palestine.

I do remember the excitement of reading Vanessa's article "Seeing from the South: Re-focusing urban planning on the globe's central urban issues" (2009) that enabled me to look at my main site of study through Vanessa's critically lenses that question the common liberal, Western, Eurocentric ideological contexts that overlook structural-political mechanisms of domination and that view planning from outside its origins in the global centres of power. This discussion was also echoed by Vanessa years later in a teach-out event during the March 2018 strike at UCL, where we discussed with some other colleagues the role of universities and knowledge production as sites of power and resistance.

There is an additional significance in Vanessa's work, namely reading her extensive work as a call for a critical planning pedagogy. I see this as one of the substantial contributions of Vanessa's work, also manifested in her latest co-edited book "The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South" (2018, co-edited with Gautam Bhan and Smita Srinivas). Planning pedagogies and knowledge production are the foundations of the very act of planning, she claims. The spatial histories of cities in the Global South, as well as those cities' current conditions and aspirations, could be understood in relation to the distinctions between the planners' professional knowledge, which they gained from higher education and practice, and the residents' local knowledge, which is based on intuitive perceptions and images of the city, derived from their daily routine practices in it.

Knowledge production is indeed central to Vanessa's work, and has been well developed in her article "Co-Production and Collaboration in Planning – the Difference" (2014) where she

argues that one should understand knowledge as a relationship, rather than as an instrumental in the hands of experts. This somehow provocative argument – at least in the mainstream planning sphere that still dominates planning practice – calls for acknowledging that significant knowledge resides neither in the planner nor in the community, but rather is the result of process of co-production based on interaction among multiple actors and their ideas. Watson's pedagogy is clearly ethical and political, as she encourages us to see that equality is based on collective action as the most effective strategy of less powerful:

*“Given the unprecedented global threats of environmental destruction, rapid concentrations of poverty and disease in the third worlds, and potentially explosive social conflicts in most parts of the world, I suggest that as planners we need to look for new moral philosophical sources to inform our thinking on issues of value and judgement”* (2009: 46)

Indeed, Vanessa's extensive writing captures both practice and context, which enables to build our understanding of what we are planning, for whom, and how it is located within a given context. My reading of Vanessa's critical planning pedagogy offers an opportunity for a struggle over democratic participation and co-production of urban space. It provides us with opportunities to question the power that produces inequality and offers an alternative to the outcomes of planning as a site for democratic decision making. Some of these ideas are beautifully articulated in “Deep Difference: Diversity, Planning and Ethics” (2006) calling for “alternative sources for thinking about questions of value and rationality, and reconsider the faith in consensus-seeking processes as a sole informant of decision-making” (2006: 32).

While following Vanessa's work, I can see the possibility for critical planning pedagogy that importantly questions the tendency to distinguish between theory and practice; by asking participants to put learning into practice, by developing cross-sectors solidarity and by identifying how political activity creates radical opportunities for learning and changing the world.

Southern thinking and a complementing planning pedagogical approach secured an independent and critical voice internationally with several invitations to knowledge-sharing platforms extended to Watson from the Southern counterparts as well as Northern. An invited speaker at the World Planning Schools Congress in 2016, Watson presented her outlook on planning education and curriculum, urging planners to think of it beyond its colonial past, sharing insights from African experiences. She consistently advocates the need to root curriculum and pedagogy in context, while consciously moving away from its colonial and Global North predecessors. AAPS network has grown to include over 50 schools and Watson continues to share the role, vision and partnerships she envisions for AAPS through her writing as well as presentations at multiple forums. Invited to the Bartlett Development Planning Unit's 60th Anniversary Conference, Watson shared her fruitful collaborations and co-productive efforts with AAPS and Slum Dwellers International (SDI) which have positively influenced planning education in Africa. Watson played a leading role in two key compilations addressing planning in the current times i.e. "The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South" (Bhan, Srinivas and Watson, 2018) as editor and contributing author and "The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory" (Gunder, Madanipour and Watson, 2017), as one of the editors. The former is a highly thoughtful curation of authors who are urban practitioners, each with a different entry point to planning practice, bringing with them rich contextual understanding of case studies, thereby contributing to planning theory and practice. This is a landmark contribution that sets an independent stage for Southern planning and not just as filling the gap in mainstream planning approaches. In response to the changing role of planning, and challenges in different contexts, the latter is a compilation of innovative thinkers from across the globe sharing their views on contemporary planning theory and its potential trajectories of evolution.

Building on Yiftachel's (2006) call for a new paradigm in planning while planning in contexts characterised by 'stubborn realities', Watson (2013) reviews the discourse in response to this idea. She offers a set of assumptions for when one sets out to plan in such a context which highlight the distinctness in the context. These assumptions refer to the condition of the state which could potentially be weak and corrupt, seeking planning as a means for political gains, unevenness in the civil society based on economic terms and political leanings and thereby the possibility of engagement turning to aggressive means. She elaborates how the nexus between state and private actors lays the ground for NGOs which are established to support communities or initiatives, to serve their own interests. These reiterate Watson's propositions of the undeniable power play in each of the planning interactions, raising questions about the possibility and relevance of participative and consensus-based planning approaches. Reviewing the scholarship in South-eastern and Southern thinking, she identifies emerging approaches, some as an evolution from old ideas while others emerge as responses to the new challenges. Integrating these new approaches along with the comparative case study method, Watson believes, will initiate new possibilities for cross-learning across Southern and Northern

contexts, expanding the source of ideas and experiences to a global scale.

Watson continues to write extensively on planning practice and one of the key pieces that connects some her key standpoints is 'Co-production and collaboration in planning – The difference' (Watson, 2014b) which was listed as one of the most popular articles in *Planning Theory and Practice Journal* 2014-2015. It has influenced many practicing and aspiring urban practitioners to deliberate not only on the contextual specificities but on processes, methodological approaches as well as normative positioning. Renewing the efforts of breaking the binary of the North and South while being wary of not replaying the dangers of universalisation and homogenisation of ideas, Watson offers another compelling insight, the limits of case-based theorising and its application. Given the global networks within which different Southern economies operate, one cannot dismiss the power constellations that influence these networks and affect city processes as well as the qualification of knowledge emerging out of these centres.

Not just South Africa, but Southern thinking and planning at large, gains immensely from the idea of the "African Urban Fantasies" article (Watson, 2014a) which unpacks the detrimental nature of imposition of foreign ideas not just through planning but also a market rational and the complementing real estate forces that shape not just the city form but deeply affect the quality of life of its residents. Mismatch between the vision and lived reality, selectively seeks to serve economic and political interests, under the guise of concepts such as 'smart cities'. This misses the human and social dimension, raising questions of social justice. Further, it skews the government's funding away from local needs of infrastructure, towards the needs of investors and new users of these developments. Watson alerts the reader to what course such an approach can take. In contexts with 'conflicting rationalities' and 'deep difference' such as that in African cities, it would deepen the existing divides and add new ones while exacerbating the existing vulnerabilities. This paper received high critical acclaim and was widely circulated by several news networks.

The confluence of several initiatives that sought to promote the case study method as a highly suitable and important tool in African planning studies and practice was the book (Duminy et al., 2014) 'Planning and the case study method in Africa: the planner in dirty shoes'. This book also serves as a handbook for planners and urban practitioners at large, guiding them on context-specific approaches, nuances and specificities and offers ways to distil learnings from the same. This recapitulates the deep links between planning theory and practice.

Upholding her critical standpoint while simultaneously speaking to the global discourse on planning, Watson (2016, 2019) raises vital questions in response to some of the recommendations presented by

---

the New Urban Agenda (NUA) at the Habitat III conference in Quito in 2016. NUA's push for city-centric development based on concepts such as the 'city-region' and its application across the globe is debated. She highlights the critical discourse regarding this 20<sup>th</sup> Century European regional planning model of the 'city-region' concept, its rejection owing to the realities of global networks, contextual variations and non-overlapping administrative boundaries and the extent of growth. She questions why NUA has been limited in its response while advocating these debated ideas despite this background. Its relevance in the Global South context and its role in achieving the goals of the NUA are challenged, presenting yet another case of imposition of Northern ideas across diverse geographies, networks, institutional arrangements and capacities, agnostic to the globalised nature of economy.



## Influences: People, institutions and events

To fully appreciate the contribution of Watson as an academic, it is important to acknowledge the contexts under which she began and continues her journey. The geo-political, socio-economic and the context of planning as a discipline, in her view, must always be directed towards improving the lives of the poor and disenfranchised. Living and working in South Africa, in the capacity of a researcher, as an activist as well as on public appointments, Watson holds an immersive experience and understanding of the trajectory of planning, development and everyday life during and after apartheid. Watson remarks how the apartheid government used planning as a tool to spatially and institutionally segregate the population. They justified this by citing best practices such as the garden city concept and township development. This context-agnostic approach, fuelled Watson's conviction to work towards an alternate framework to view the specificities of Southern cities as integral to planning in the South and today, the concepts of the Global South, Southern Urbanism, Southern Theory are relatively more well-known and well-accepted. Watson's interest in the aspect of power in planning, drawing from Foucault, enabled several links with international scholars. As a founding member of the AAPS, critique of planning and the workings of power expanded to a global scale and the theoretical perspectives of different contexts and scales. As she took the position of critiquing 'mainstream' planning theory, acknowledging the dimension of power and argued for production of knowledge rooted in context, scholarship that drew on Foucault's concept of power, resonated with her. This included works of Bent Flyvbjerg, Oren Yiftachel, Margo Huxley, James Scott, Nicolas Rose among others. Her emphasis on the role of planning as a collaborative practice is evident in her collaborative research and academic pursuits with academics from across the world, most notably-

- Oren Yiftachel was influential in drawing attention to thinking about planning, which was informed by the specificities of context, and in his writings, this was the conflicts over land and planning in Israel/Palestine. Yiftachel wrote about perspectives on planning from the East, a concept which suggests a distancing from the planning ideas which had developed in the Global North, and a universalizing of these ideas. Watson (2009a) refers to the concept of 'dark side of planning', discussed by Yiftachel and Yacobi (2003), which distinguishes between the outcomes of planning actions and the planning system itself. Viewing informality in cities through this lens helps unpack the conscious effort of planning to exclude certain populations as a political tactic.

- Bent Flyvbjerg was highly influential in Watson's work, building on conversations that started at a PhD workshop in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Some of his key concepts that impressed Watson are, the use of Foucaultian ideas and his understanding of power, adding to the discourse to understand governance and planning and developing theories using the case study methodology.

- In the 1990s and 2000s Watson collaborated with planning colleague Peter Wilkinson and Prof Andrew Spiegel, an anthropologist, to undertake ethnographic research on where black African residents of Cape Town considered 'home'. The research methodology used by anthropologists was

very influential to Watson's work, emphasizing the importance of context and agency through in-depth interviews. Spiegel, Watson and Wilkinson (1996) examined how families are 'stretched' between urban and rural homes, challenging theoretical assumptions of migration as a linear process from rural to urban areas.

### **On Vanessa Watson's Mentorship and Being her Student - Baraka Mwau**

In September 2009, I obtained my first degree, in urban and regional planning, from the University of Nairobi. So, the last quarter of that year and the coming year, 2010, was a very crucial time- I hoped to launch my urban planning career or at least land on a job. The excitement of graduation had fizzled-out, and a hostile job market- in a country where unemployment among graduates (or youth) was quite high and even worse today. Fortunately, an opportunity came calling from Muungano Support Trust (MuST), now SDI-Kenya, part of the Kenya affiliate organizations of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI). At the time, I had limited ideas on how planning with communities can be like, and many questions about urban formality- why our cities and towns are the way they are. Luckily, I had grown interest in urban formality during my final year of bachelor's degree. I submitted a case study research report that focused on an informal street market in Nairobi, a learning process that albeit it's coming late in my degree, ended-up being a significant 'turn' in my perspectives on urban planning.

So, I knew my job with MuST, an organization that worked with a federation of slum dwellers (*Muungano wa Wanavijiji*), would require critical reflections on how urban planning, as taught in our planning schools, was useful to its work. It was increasingly getting hard to reconcile these realities with much of what I was taught at the planning school. But the job was exciting and challenging, something I viewed as 'different' from what the traditional planning practice offered at the time. My journey of 'unlearning' would start with this job, and in my pursuit of more knowledge, planning ideas etc., I came across the work of Vanessa and got interest in her theoretical perspectives on urban planning for Global South cities. In the coming year, 2011, I had the opportunity to meet Vanessa in Cape Town, through a joint 'learning exchange' organized by SDI and AAPS. At the time, in MuST, I was part of a team conducting a community planning studio in Mathare, one of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi. During the learning exchange in Cape Town, we had a brief chat with Vanessa, and she encouraged me to enrol in a post-graduate program at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I got interested in a new program that the African Centre for Cities (ACC) had started, an M.Phil. in Urban Infrastructure: Design and Management, which I enrolled in 2012 and completed in late 2013. This

meant that I relocate to Cape Town, where I juggled post-graduate studies and part-time work with SDI and its affiliates in Cape Town. Part of work assignments was with the joint SDI and AAPS studio program in which Vanessa was instrumental in its design and implementation. The program intended to expose planning students to urban informality, and I was tasked with facilitating studios in Malawi and Tanzania. This gave me the chance to interact with Vanessa, outside the classroom, and it became a platform of critical conversations about how urban planning is taught (its education and theory) and works in different African countries.

From these interactions, and reflecting on my experience with communities, it became clear that 'context' and its 'deep difference' are critical, a notion that Vanessa has emphasized in her work, as well as that of 'conflicted rationalities'. Needless to mention the emphasis this program had on promoting the notion of 'people-centred' or 'pro-poor' urban planning. Indeed, lessons from this program echoed Vanessa's views on how urban planning and practice in many African cities have tended to conflict with its realities-of urban informality through which the survival the majority is made possible. I find these theoretical propositions, and overall Vanessa's work on the 'Southern Turn' in Planning theory, provide a vital opportunity to recalibrate urban planning education and theory, as well as practice, to suit urban realities in this region. That way, urban planning can become an important tool for addressing the myriad challenges African cities face. Without such rethinking, the discipline will perhaps remain under-utilized or even part of the problem as witnessed through impacts of bad planning decisions.

Vanessa has been my supervisor throughout my post-graduate studies at UCT. In 2013, through her guidance, I effectively completed my dissertation that focused on 'Informal Rental Tenements in Nairobi', and graduated on time. It was eye-opening working with Vanessa on this dissertation, a process of critical thinking that sparked my interests in urban planning theory and urban governance. But I couldn't immediately move from my master's to PhD. Circumstances at the time dictated that I had to return to Kenya, where I started urban planning consultancy in 2014. But I did not lose contact with Vanessa after my master's and the subsequent return to Kenya. We kept in touch and had another chance to work with her in another round of SDI-AAPS studios, this time managing a Kenya project- others were being implemented simultaneously in Namibia and Uganda. Importantly, Vanessa continued to support my academic growth. In many occasions, we had conversations on various topical issues on Global South cities. These conversations expanded my interest to in researching new cities and how urban planning is practiced in African cities. Out of these interactions, my PhD journey was conceived.

Vanessa's support at the time was invaluable- she offered academic guidance and sent very useful readings at a time I couldn't access such vital resources. I was not registered as student then, which makes it a great honour to have had such opportunity- many would wish to pursue a PhD but never get such an opportunity, to be guided and prepare in advance for the journey ahead. Even when I would 'disappear' for months, Vanessa didn't give-up on me. I had just started a family and busy with consultancy, but I was motivated and working with Vanessa was further motivation and it build my courage to enrol in a PhD. I finally decided to enrol, a process that started with building my research proposal for pre-registration and then full registration, a phase that became a journey of stimulating academic conversations, and deep reflections on urban planning theory. It was also a phase of patience and encouragement and unwavering intellectual guidance, which culminated in my successful PhD registration in October 2018. I registered my PhD, a research on urban planning and governance issues related to new town developments, using a case study of Tatu City, Kenya. Since then, I have been undertaking my PhD remotely based in Kenya where I continue to undertake my case study research, with annual campus stay at UCT. Throughout the period, Vanessa has been very supportive, as always, and usually available for a conversation, and with timely review my work. I must also point that Vanessa's mentorship and supervision has not been limited to academic guidance, her patience, kindness and understanding has been very useful to my journey, as well as her supportive role in facilitating access to financial support for my studies. As I look forward to completing my PhD in the coming year, I am grateful for the guidance and support I continue to receive from Vanessa, as well as her colleagues at the faculty, and looking ahead to a successful completion.



- From 2010 AAPS collaborated with Slum Dwellers International (SDI) to introduce experiential learning into planning curricula. Watson had raised significant funding through Rockefeller to develop this project. In several African planning schools, students worked with SDI in informal settlements to understand the realities of informality and worked with communities to develop planning proposals. These new approaches to planning curricula were published in Watson and Odendaal (2013). This funding also supported the development of a new master planning programme at the University of Zambia, in collaboration with Dr Gilbert Siame who currently heads the programme. Most new professional planners in Zambia are now graduated through this school. Working with SDI also alerted Watson to the value of how SDI worked with communities to address power relations between them and the state through what is called co-production. This relationship with SDI was also in response to rampant evictions and forced removals by several African countries and cities using the discourse of 'slum free cities' agenda and Cities Alliance tagline of 'Cities without Slums'. In Watson (2014b) she compared Global North ideas of collaborative planning to co-production processes and how the latter took into account the realities of urban informality.

- Watson collaborated with Gautam Bhan (Indian Institute for Human Settlements) to edit the first volume on planning in the Global South (Bhan, Srinivas and Watson, 2018). Bhan has strongly promoted the idea of developing understanding and planning ideas from a deep understanding of context. Context can give rise to new theoretical concepts which can then be tested in other case study areas and over time can develop into broader constructs of Southern planning theory. Watson agrees with Bhan that there is no such thing as a planning theory for the Global South (it is not simply a geographical concept and is more of a relational concept). However, many Global South cities are distinctive in terms of having a majority of poverty and informality, and in this sense some geographical differences do exist.

- Raewyn Connell's (an Australian sociologist) ideas of "Southern Theory" were influential, breaking the binary of different theories for Northern and Southern contexts. Connell takes a political-economy and global approach, suggesting that we must understand relationships between metropolises and peripheries across the world. Her work supports the case study approach while acknowledging common issues across different contexts in relation to power hierarchies, poverty, inclusion, etc. Watson worked with her on a project called 'Global Arenas of Knowledge' which looks at how knowledge produced in the Global North maintains its dominant position. Collaboration with Morrell and Borland (Borland, Morrell and Watson, 2018) explored Northern dominance in the field of climate change research.

# Research contribution: Pioneering Southern thinking

Watson has always been interested in the normative and describes planning, which unlike other disciplines that understand and diagnose urban problems, is fundamentally about action, implementing strategies to work towards addressing various challenges. Analysis therefore is primarily a means to an end (i.e. action) and is therefore also crucial for normative understanding. Over the years, her work has encompassed “...critique, to theoretical analysis and to an alternative conceptual framework for thinking about how planning occurs in cities of the Global South and how normative thinking could be framed- the idea of conflicting rationalities...”.

Her career has been marked by certain key viewpoints. One is being critical of what one sees, experiences and consumes as theory; questioning the “best” in best practices and debating their applicability in other contexts. This asserted her view of the political nature of planning, beyond being a rational, technical and scientific discipline. ‘Being critical’ is one of Watson’s entry points leading us to her section of work which deliberates on theories generated and accepted in the Global North and contesting their applicability. Inappropriateness of communicative and collaborative planning theory, and consensus-based planning based on Habermasian principles, has been reiterated through various case studies and evidence as seen in the 2002 paper *The Usefulness of Normative Planning Theories in the Context of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Watson, 2002c). In addition to the critiques, Watson also unpacks the specificities of the African context, the heterogenous picture highlighting the seriousness of the issue and the stark reality of survival strategies as a crucial lens through which to view informalisation and patterns of development in the African context. Taking this critique further, she questions the idea of ‘public good’ offering an explanation of how there is no single public and nor is there always a better outcome of planning since there are winners and losers in/of every process (Watson, personal communication). She has presented planners with another important medium to intervene fittingly: to challenge/question the universality of planning theory, practice and ethics, referring to post-modern and cultural-turn thinkers. During various convening’s of the AAPS members, a common thread in all discussions was the “weak, disconnected and outdated” (Watson, personal communication) planning approach across Africa which has no connection to the on-the-ground reality of African cities, including informality and governance issues. Watson (2009b) expressed her disagreement with the universalization of the Global North’s approach, seeking a Southern perspective while continuing to be informed by critical discourse in fields such as urban studies, anthropology and sociology.

While each of these propositions began and continues to be shaped as personal viewpoints, they also offer planners and urban practitioners at large, modes, measures and mechanisms to negotiate

within diverse urban realities with prudence and sensitivity towards the place and its people. The following sections discuss some of Watson's propositions.

- **Transdisciplinary approaches as a tool for holistic understanding and offering the urban as a construct beyond just urban planning**

Building on the idea of 'conflicting rationalities', Watson (2009b) argues that planners need to look beyond the disciplinary lens to gather insights into the urban conditions which should then inform holistic planning action. Given the nature and pace of change in cities and city-living, the nature of conflict and interactions at the different 'interfaces', whether geographic, administrative, between stakeholders, ecological, socio-economic or any other, need to be studied. The current divides between planning and development theory, as well as urban studies and development studies, are a disservice to the efforts in understanding problems faced by the Southern cities. Instead, the new paradigm in Southern thinking and planning must take cues from the adaptive practices at the 'interface' between different systems, to develop approaches suited to the rapidly changing, urbanising and poor cities. Several other disciplinary and theoretical perspectives have unpacked these intricate relationships and interfaces including anthropology, critical development studies, urban studies, anthropology, cognitive psychology, cultural studies, geography, political studies and sociology. An anthropology and cultural studies lens help discern the everyday lived reality of people, acknowledging the power dynamics. Scholarship within critical development studies undertakes ethnographic work, providing detailed accounts of interactions between the poor and the state, and the dynamics of governance, thereby helping identify what constitutes differences. This brings to the fore 'different voices'. Development theory questions the value in 'participative processes' and hence the imposing nature of development processes. An integrated approach, learning from these different perspectives, will help urban practitioners develop in-depth, grounded and comprehensive planning thought and action. Incorporating values in planning and decision-making process (Watson, 2006), and acknowledging different value systems, not only transcends disciplinary boundaries but urges planners to recognise and accept other forms of knowledge and value systems.

Methodologically, the case study approach advocated by Watson (2002a, 2014c; 2014), strengthens understanding of context. Epistemologically, it is a shift in approach from deducing from the theories of the Global North, to an inductive approach that actively develops theoretical propositions based on the ground realities and regional specificities of the Southern context. It rejects universalisation and best practices, encouraging revisiting normative positions and adopting action-oriented thinking.

- **Mutually significant planning theory, education and practice**

Watson, through her writing and practice makes it clear how planning theory and planning practice are mutually significant and critically linked to planning education.

Watson (2002b) through the paper *Do We Learn from Planning Practice? The Contribution of the "Practice Movement" to Planning Theory*, explores the pedagogical value in writing about practice and therefore arrives at what types of critical accounts of practice would be most useful for learning. Propositions includes six modes, without simplifying the experience of planning practice: case study, history or process, thick description, narrative, portrayal of actors or practitioners and self-reflective writing bringing the author into the text. While this paper draws from disciplines of education and experiential learning, the book *The Planner in Dirty Shoes* (Duminy et al., 2014) is a compilation of outcomes from three PhD workshops (as part of AAPS) conducted to explore the case study method, as a method for a deeper and detailed understanding of the context, and serves as a repository for research on African cities as well invaluable teaching material. This workshop and others on similar lines were conducted with a premise that "*Shifting planning pedagogy in Africa is shifting planning it-self*" (Watson, personal communication). The aim was to equip students and academics to bridge the gap between the disconnected and outdated laws and policies and the grounded realities of African cities, alongside mismatched planning theory.

Using the case study method promoted in planning by Bent Flyvbjerg, Watson asserts the need for essential, appropriate and insightful links to theory and practice, through a nuanced understanding of the context and its practices. Citing Gautam Bhan, she considers 'experiential learning which is "speaking from a place rather than about it" (Bhan, 2019) as vital to building Southern thought and approaches. Association with SDI —whose principles of a collaborative approach and planning as co-production resonated with Watson— and AAPS workshops to disseminate the case study research method, demonstrate her continued efforts towards initiating and motivating an immersive and collaborative learning and working approach that explicitly renews the importance of place and context, which she has persistently advocated for and practised.

The tripartite of theory, praxis and education, is reiterated while Watson acknowledges the influence of Flyvbjerg: "*focus on planning theory linked to practice -placing power and conflict as inevitable and central to planning process -grounding planning ideas in an understanding of social diversity and difference*".<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Flyvbjerg, Bent & Richardson, Tim. (2002). Planning and Foucault: In Search of the Dark Side of Planning Theory.



- **Integrated view of the urban - Physical + political + socio-economic**

Asserting the highly political nature of planning, Watson urges planners to develop an integrated perspective on planning, taking into account the political, social and physical dimensions. *Conflicting Rationalities* (Watson, 2003) as a lens, illustrates how the social and political come together and impact the physical.

With profound understanding and knowledge of societal dynamics, capacity of civil society and the heterogenous realities of the African context, Watson enquires after the role of the State and debates the mainstream idea of rolling back the state as inappropriate (Watson, 2002c). Rather, she emphasises the need for “...a strong and committed state with resources and expertise to make South African cities just and equitable places” (Watson, personal communication). Watson has presented the layers of complexity in state-society relations, that cannot be simply subjected to and assumed to be acceptable through a consensus-based or communicative planning theory approach. The challenges and nuances of the social dynamics, identity struggles and survival strategies raise questions regarding the basis on which a cohesive civil society can be imagined or assumed, to negotiate with the State. The actual impacts of a globalised economy and the “development” that it has brought in the case of African cities, leaves us with larger questions of addressing preconditions such as debt relief mechanisms, poverty-relief strategies, conditionalities of funding etc. in the wider context of Southern cities, and developing economies.

In parallel, within the South African context, Watson’s critique of local government changes, reforms, restructuring and its impacts provides a blueprint not just to question applicability of mainstream planning theories but a method to systematically arrive at points of departure from the accepted ideas. It is by “*unpacking unexpressed contextual assumptions and challenging them and testing them...*” (Watson, personal communication), that one can substantiate and return to the idea and inductive approach of “thinking from place” which is imperative not just to Southern thinking but planning at large.

- **‘Oppositional’ – a standpoint**

While being ‘oppositional’ as a standpoint can be traced back to Watson’s choice of pursuing a master’s degree at UCT, her body of work offers multiple concepts to move from this entry point into analysis and frameworks to view Southern cities and the planning processes while being mindful of the specificities of the context.

'Conflicting rationalities over consensus-based planning' is one such concept which Watson has explained using the case of the Cape Town's Women's Power Group (Watson, 2003). The case study presents how and why much planning theory is to be questioned. It justifies all the pointers offered by Watson for Southern thinking – importance of place, context, material realities, an inductive rather than deductive approach, grounded theory and normative positions based on grounded reality and cultural determinants rather than a universal ethical position. Another case-study of an informal settlement upgrade (Watson, 2003), provides evidence for the clash between the vision of planners and the lived reality of the people. This idea has been explored further by Watson in her Doctoral Thesis (Watson, 2002a), using a case study in Cape Town. Here, the nature of state-society conflict (Watson, 2002c, 2003, 2009b) is explored further, contending the binary notion with a "mosaic of social encounters". But Watson clarifies that the conflict should not be perceived as an unsurmountable one, but rather an interface, to understand how the conflicting rationalities interact within different power constellations and how that can add to developing new vocabulary and frameworks to view Southern cities and their development trajectories.

Watson questions another assumption of the Northern planning theories i.e. the nature of social difference, its ethical implications and impact on planning process. In response, she offers the concept of "Deep difference" (Watson, 2006) over the homogenous view of society. Tying it back to the debates around the Habermasian approach of collaborative and participative planning, the key message delivered is suitability of a "*situated nature of knowledge*" (Watson, 2009b). Given the social differences, identity politics, and predominance of a market rational disconnected from the local dynamics, values located in situated knowledge would be more meaningful than planning ethics based on universalised ideals.

Drawing inspiration from Oren Yiftachel's work, Watson has elaborated on the idea of "Stubborn realities" of the Southern and South Eastern context (Watson, 2013). Through this piece of work, Watson elaborates on the stubborn realities of the context in its materialistic forms and discourses, that shape the urban environment. This paper positions the grounded realities in a larger geo-political context while offering a set of assumptions regarding systemic realities, structural challenges, non-linear processes, intricate networks and clashing rationalities and interests while planning and intervening in these contexts. Watson acknowledges recent works in this direction by scholars across the globe, as working towards the 'Southern planning theory building project'. In line with her position that the South is more than a geographical concept, that Southern thinking is a developing field and case study is a crucial tool, she proposes further collaborations and explorations to break the North-South divide, as the way forward.

Disputing the perception and imposition of what informalisation is, Watson highlights it as a coping mechanism, a survival strategy (Watson, 2002c, 2009b). This helps break the neoliberal view of informalisation as a sign of entrepreneurialism. This is particularly important as informality is the normative reality, rather than the exception, in most urban areas in the Global South. And as such rather than viewing them simply as informal, to recognise the agency of the urban poor and their significant share in the development and economy of cities. This not only changes one's perception about informality but informs urban practitioners about the severity of the problem and the inappropriateness of imposing an external logic. The tenacious yet fragile and unacknowledged interconnections between the informal city and informal economy calls for developing frameworks that address the interface between rationality of the government and rationality of survival. Watson argues that acknowledging, accommodating and addressing the differences and conflicts in processes and outcomes must be the tenets of planning and governance in Southern cities.

On the same lines of challenging accepted ideas, Watson unpacks Foucault's urban theory concepts highlighting its limited relevance in understanding the case of an informal settlement. Watson's oppositional standpoint not only feeds the normative thinking in the Southern context, but also provides a methodological input on systematically unpacking the accepted theories using case studies and subsequently offering propositions derived from place and context.

The African urban fantasy (Watson, 2014a) idea provides us with an alternate perspective of cities beyond the discipline of planning, as sites of investment, image-making and politics, including real estate development, architecture, development funding etc. It highlights how the current approaches are agnostic, and often overlook the stark realities of African cities that are experiencing extreme and rising poverty, poor infrastructure, a growing informal economy, and severe challenges in governance. Watson highlights deep contradictions between these realities of African cities and fictional ideas of "fantasy" promoted by property developers. Watson's framing of this idea received a lot of attention in the media and was picked up by several news networks across the globe. This is indeed an important milestone in Watson's work. It again highlights the direct imposition of Global North theory and praxis, and its deep-rooted impact on Southern cities.

- **Frameworks to view and enter Southern practice**

Watson emphasises the role and importance of 'place' and how it has epistemological and methodological implications. She positions herself with thinkers that subscribe to the idea of "local particularity over geographical universality", therefore emphasising the need to be judicious on matters

of “whether or not ideas can ‘travel’ and ‘land’” (Watson, personal communication). Watson offers some key concepts for scholars and practitioners working in the Southern context. One of them is the idea of “situated judgement” (Watson, personal communication) as fundamental to theorising and praxis as well as to inform normative position. This ties back to the importance of learning from place and context, the undeniable political nature of planning and the power hierarchies it operates within, advocating the need to take the route of co-production, with those who are affected by the planning decisions. Within the proposed framework for an alternative approach to planning, she discusses the need for a “street-wise planner” (Watson, 2002c) to negotiate these power terrains, under conditions unlike those in consensus-based planning or communicative planning theory. Normative repositioning in this context establishes conflict rather than consensus, central to the planning process. As a follow-up to this approach, the importance of outcomes as much as the process while planning in a context of difference is discussed in the paper *Deep Difference: Diversity, Planning and Ethics* (Watson, 2006), calling for the need to bring in questions of ‘value’ in decision making and the need to look for “new moral philosophical sources to inform our thinking on values and judgement”. While working in environments with deep differences and conflicting rationalities, Watson refers to two key aspects while understanding these contexts which is a ‘heterogenous picture’ and identity as ‘simultaneity of similarity and difference’ (Watson, 2002c) and therefore the need to understand ‘interfaces’ (Watson, 2009b) where these differences and conflicts interact.

In her own words: “*For me Southern thinking is about understanding context in all sorts of important ways and there are many ways to do that but experiential learning I think is an important part of that.*”

## James Duminy

Vanessa has been and is central to what is now recognized as the ‘Southern turn’ in planning. She articulated the arguments for such a shift more lucidly than any other scholar. She explored its various dimensions – conceptual, methodological, ethical, political, practical – in a more wide-ranging and comprehensive manner than any other. She examined the implications of a Southern perspective across sectors including not only planning but also food, health, and urban governance and development more broadly. In doing so, she provided the foundation for discussions in planning theory surrounding the need to confront Northern hegemony in knowledge production while developing modes of thinking and doing that are suited to the contexts of the Global South. One of her great contributions was to place emphasis on the geopolitical relations of knowledge production that shape the way that planning ideas and practices are formed, circulated, and taken up, often to the detriment of ordinary citizens of the South.

As noted, Vanessa’s research has extended beyond the specific domain of planning into related urban fields such as health, food security, and governance. Her work has also been influential and regularly cited in urban studies and has played an important role in debates around urban theory. Moreover, it has extended beyond the ‘Southern’ field of planning, and she has written some of the clearest analyses and summaries of ‘Northern’ planning scholarship to date.

Vanessa was at the forefront in making the argument for the need to recognize how urban dynamics and needs will transform African futures and hence the skills and knowledge demanded of planners. By taking a leading role in the Association of African Planning Schools, she has left a lasting mark on how planning researchers and practitioners in many parts of Africa are trained, and on how they work.

Some critical questions are raised by her notions of ‘deep difference’ and ‘conflicting rationalities’, which were an important setup to her arguments for a Southern perspective in planning. Depicting contemporary planning dynamics in the Global South as driven (or inhibited) by a disjuncture and conflict between two more or less neatly defined and opposing sets of ideas and practices could be seen as simplifying what are in reality highly complex and ‘messy’ situations. However, it should be recognized that these notions were less statements about how the world is, and more conceptual devices that were useful in pointing to the universalist pretensions of planning thought, even in the wake of multiculturalist influences in the field.



Another critical point – one that is not specific to her work – is that scholars have questioned what kind of entity the ‘Global South’ is, and what it represents within arguments for a Southern perspective. Is it a geographical region that is empirically distinct from the Global North? Is it an epistemological body; a collection of intellectual traditions, theories, and perspectives? Does naming the South amount to an argument for particularism and empiricism above synthesis and relationality? Does it reject the applicability of all Northern theory? Is it simply a strategic concept that is necessary to make a point in a wider argument about planning knowledge and practice? The body of Southern urban and planning literature does not provide neat answers because it itself is heterogenous and has changed over time in response to new work and critiques. Vanessa has been key in thinking through and clarifying some of these dilemmas; she has provided the basis for the entire field to move forward.

Finally, postcolonial and Southern scholarship now face the critical challenge of decoloniality. The latter perspective charges that working in Southern contexts and challenging dominant Northern theoretical precepts does not absolve the scholar of their rootedness in fundamentally colonial ways of being, seeing, analysing, and prescribing. The academy itself is simply an extension of colonial relations of power. The charge is difficult to counter in part because it reaches everywhere; coloniality is seen to stain every aspect of thought and practice. Quite how planning as a specific discipline, and scholarship more generally, will react to this critique remains to be seen. Perhaps it can’t, or it shouldn’t. Nonetheless, I do not feel that there would be any room for such a discussion had it not been for the critical and intellectual space that Vanessa was instrumental in carving out.

Vanessa’s prolific work and contributions are not accidental. Aside from an acute mind and an enviable clarity of expression, she possesses a remarkable work ethic. As my PhD supervisor, she read a draft of my thesis in two days, immediately after I had handed it over (unprecedented as far as supervisors go). I also recall one day when I had managed to arrive at work before her (at that time she would settle in her office at 07:00 to beat the Cape Town traffic) for three straight days. As she came down the staircase of Centlivres Building at UCT, walked around the corner, and peered through the window to see if I was there, I threw my fists up in victory. She smiled and immediately came across to my door to chat and laugh. This is what working with Vanessa was and is like: focused and diligent, but also jovial and fun. She represents the best of what academia and humanity should be: open, caring, generous, brave, industrious. Vanessa has influenced me greatly in many ways, and I am very thankful indeed to have had her as a role model.

# Adaptive practice- Planning and Activism

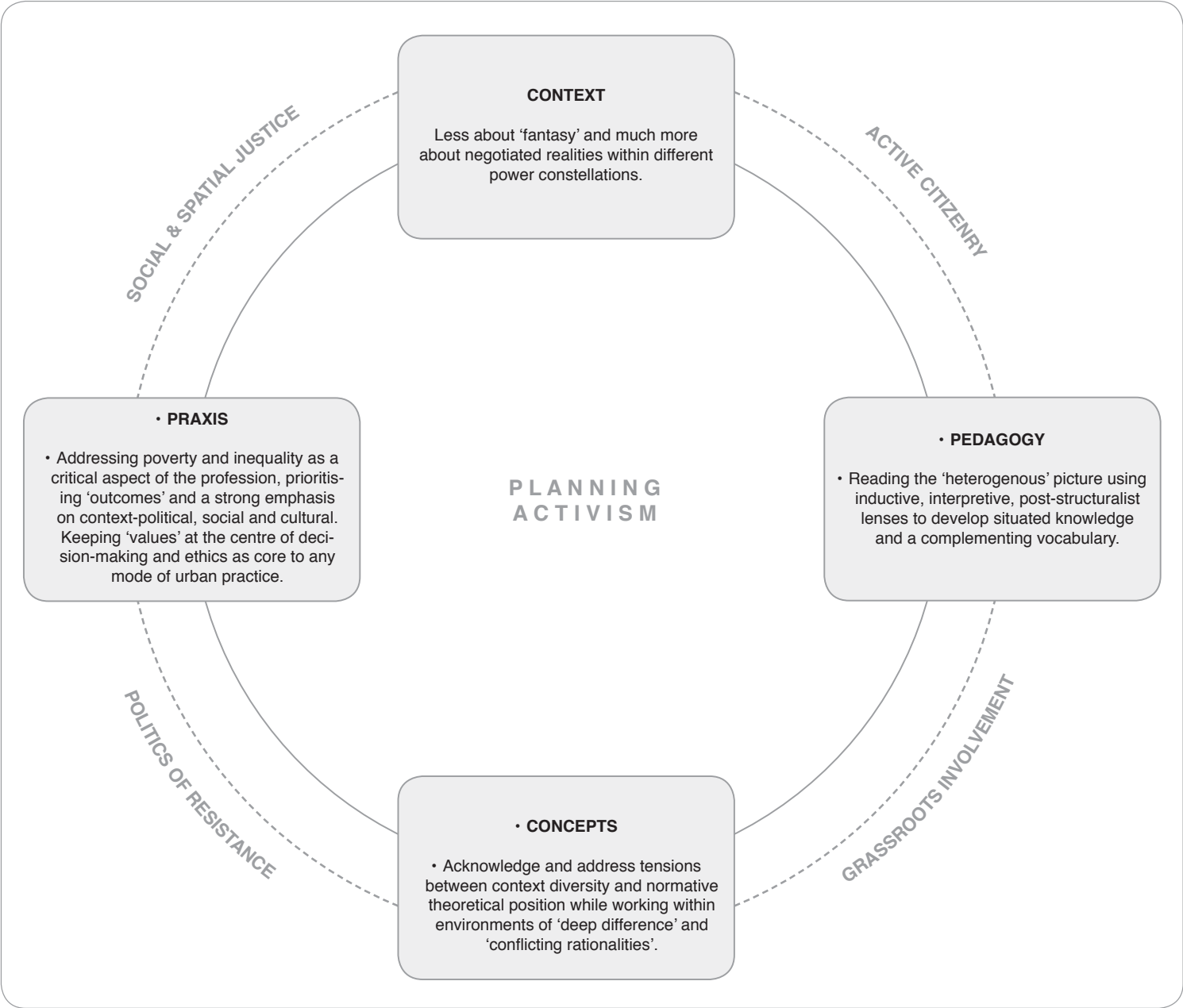


Figure 3: Synergistic discourse

Watson’s contribution has not just been limited to planning theory but goes above and beyond academia. On several occasions, Watson has demonstrated new ways of recasting the planning profession- from the lens of activism. This has reflected significantly both on public platforms as well as on the trajectory of her master’s and PHD students.

In the mid-eighties, Watson spearheaded critical meetings with activists and built environment professionals to resist evictions taking place in the Crossroads neighbourhood, Cape Town. As a convenor of the meeting, Watson highlighted the need for planners to go beyond the parameters of spatial planning and address issues of spatial justice, inequality and apartheid. This, and many other meet-

ings that followed, led to the formation of Development Action Group (DAG), a well-recognised land and housing non-profit organisation. She continues to advocate that evictions and/ or relocations are highly problematic and have significant impact on livelihood of the urban poor.

In the mid-nineties, Watson continued to advocate for the release of well-located state-land for social and affordable housing. Using the lens of spatial justice, she made strong arguments for such vacant land to be used for re-distribution and housing for communities discriminated against during apartheid. She continues to be a strong advocate for human rights and redress, not only in South Africa but across the continent.

As a founding member of the African Centre for Cities, Watson took further steps to bridge the gap between academia and applied practice. Over the years, ACC has grown as a world renowned centre for research on cities, poverty, inequality etc. Through the ACC, she continued to push her boundaries, and that of academia, through a new project that address issues of food and urban food security. As the principle investigator on Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa project (Battersby and Watson, 2019), and collaborating with Jane Battersby and others, the project developed new insights into causes of urban food insecurity and the role of planning in addressing the issue. A current ACC project, in collaboration with Dr Gilbert Siame and others, investigates the role of corruption in planning in African cities. Titled Cities of Integrity: Urban Planning and Corruption in Africa, it looks for ways to support effective integrity management in the planning profession.

### **Forging theory with bite. A short reflection on Vanessa Watson's contribution to the African Centre for Cities - Edgar Pieterse**

I met Vanessa Watson's ideas before I met her in person. She co-published an article in 1996 about the complexity and fluidity of household structures in township and informal neighbourhood contexts that disrupted the simplistic assumptions in public policy and planning about how to advance "development." I vividly remember how often I cited or referenced that article in my engagements with NGO networks and government policy circles whenever we were debating effective poverty reduction strategies. Development policy is often laced with paternalism and moralistic assumptions about the nuclear family and the availability of work if one displays the necessary fortitude. Such assumptions are of course extremely misleading and result in numerous negative unintended consequences. Vanessa's article in *Social Dynamics* provided a searing critique of this kind of moralism but rooted in careful research and thick evidence. This is indeed the hallmark of her scholarship: meticulous, evidence-based, ethically grounded

and always with an eye on how to support the state or society to make public policy and planning better and more just.

Fast forward to 2020, and Vanessa is indisputably one of the top planning and urban scholars in the world, and certainly in the top five most recognised Global South planning scholars. It is not an overstatement to suggest that there is unlikely to be a single academic planning programme in any world region where planning students will not be expected to read her voluminous output and wrestle with her incisive criticisms of Eurocentric, mainstream planning theory that has been near universal in its erasure of indigenous thought and political systems. Her co-editorship of two seminal edited volumes in 2018 attests to her international stature and impact.<sup>2</sup> However, in this short reflection I want to focus on her pivotal role in the establishment and growth of ACC.

In 2005, Vanessa was part of a small collective of urbanists at UCT that felt there was an urgent need to ramp up urban scholarship at South African universities. Through support from the National Research Foundation she convened a national conversation on the topic in 2005 and this fed into a UCT-specific exploration about how best to address the gap left with the demise of the Urban Problems Research Unit (UPRU), where Vanessa had cut her teeth. At the time I was engaged with UCT in a part-time capacity teaching occasionally with Sue Parnell in the geography department but was invited to participate in these processes. This afforded me a look-in on a series of conversations at UCT that led to the conceptualisation of a novel MPhil—the Urban Infrastructure Design and Management programme—supported by the Ove Arup Foundation. This initiative reinforced the need for an interdisciplinary research hub at UCT focused on the dynamics and challenges posed by rapid urbanisation in Africa. Vanessa, with support from the then Dean, Prof Cyril O'Connor, spearheaded a fundraising drive that created the platform for ACC to be formally founded in August 2007. I took up the role of founding director to figure out what exactly needed and could be done at an epistemic moment that surfaced it was not only African urbanisation that mattered, but alternatives rooted in practices across the Global South.

Vanessa formed part of the original Executive Committee of the ACC and has also served on the Advisory Board throughout the past thirteen years, in addition to acting as Principal Investigator on numerous large-scale research projects. It is in these capacities that I have come to appreciate her formidable skills, capacities and passion. For students of her work it may come as a surprise, but Vanessa is not only a great scholar but a formidable institutional builder.

In this role she can be counted upon to always be prepared, to read every line in a report or spreadsheet, to ask the tough questions, and to always be at the ready to support and cheerlead. She also understands the fine grain of the baroque sensibilities of the university with its obscure logics, enabling ACC to navigate numerous challenges. Importantly, Vanessa not only works incredibly hard to strengthen the ACC, she is equally committed to making an amalgamated planning, architecture and geomatics department figure out how to co-exist. Quixotic work to be sure, but not a challenge that she was prepared to elide. If these institutional furrows are not enough, she also availed herself to take on various leadership roles in the Engineering and Built Environment (EBE) faculty during trying times.

In some ways her greatest institutional legacy is as a leader in the African Association of Planning Schools (AAPS) network. In the first year of ACC's existence, Vanessa mobilised resources to convene the first AAPS conference. Due to severe resource constraints, up until 2008, AAPS had never been able to meet outside of global planning conferences, highlighting inequities between various member associations of the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN). Since its inaugural conference in 2008, AAPS has grown formidably as the standard setter for what a decolonial planning education could look like in the African context, as well as experimenting with novel epistemologies and case study methods to generate indigenous resources for teaching and advocacy. Unsurprisingly, Vanessa's generative theoretical oeuvre served as a vital inspiration for these conversations and the ongoing transformation of planning schools and their curriculum. This empowered African planning scholars and students to confront the troubled and entangled nature of planning amidst informality and fractured statecraft.

There is so much more to mention and reflect on to capture the enormous contribution Vanessa has made to her discipline, the global and African institutional scaffolding of planning, international policy thinking, and of course, urban studies and criticism at UCT. It is fair to say that ACC would have been less visible, less influential, less coherent, if it was not for the indomitable energy of Vanessa Watson. Most importantly, her understated way-of-being speaks to a unique grace and elegance with which she does her transformational work.



Realising that Global North pedagogy and theories cannot simply be translated for the African planning context; Watson also co-founded and initiated the Association for African Planning Schools (AAPS). The AAPS became a leading network bringing together over fifty planning schools to address issues of curriculum reform and applied research on poverty and inequality. Many successful outcomes emerged from this process- including the establishment of a new master planning programme at the University of Lusaka and significant partnerships with transnational networks like Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment, globalising and organizing). In these instances, Watson was critical in shaping debates and the notion of 'situated knowledge' of the context. For instance, through these partnerships, planning students broke the norm of working on greenfield projects in their studios, and instead worked on real informal settlement upgrading projects across five African cities. The process highlighted the importance of both exposing students to the reality of cities, but also making them appreciate the knowledge embedded in grassroots communities.

### **Encountering and working with Professor Vanessa Watson as supervisor and mentor - Dr. Gilbert Siame**

I grew up in a village and I never knew one can study city and regional planning. In my early years of life till up to high school, I knew nothing about city and regional planning. After graduating with a bachelor's degree majoring in geography, something miraculous happened that changed my life for ever. I was noticed by Professor Nancy Odenddaal and Dr. James Duminy from University of Cape Town as a potential good student in the Master of City and Regional Planning at the University of Cape Town's (UCT) School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics (APG). Whatever Nancy told Vanessa about me, I quickly realised that Vanessa developed interest in my interest to study planning under her mentorship. After a long search for funding opportunities to fund my graduate studies at either UCT or at any other university in Europe and USA for which I had admission offers, I received a game changing email from Professor Vanessa Watson. On a Wednesday, 18 January 2012, Vanessa impacted me in ways I could not comprehend at the time, she wrote the following to me, after a lengthy time of disillusioned search for funding to enable me take up the offer for the master's degree at UCT:

"We are offering to give you an AAPS bursary which will cover your tuition fees in 2012".

This email and offer changed me for ever. I first physically met with Vanessa on a Wednesday, 1st February 2012 when I arrived at the APG to do my registration. I was totally amazed and surprised at her humility when she introduced herself to me in a low voice and very low-key

manner with the following words - “high Gilbert, I am Vanessa Watson”. I could never imagine a professor of her repute could be that humble and that inviting. From that day onwards, Vanessa has been my great mentor and exceptional supervisor who has shaped my life in ways that were previously unimaginable to me and to all who know my early life difficulties and rural background.

Vanessa supervised my master’s dissertation in 2013 and again was my mentor and supervisor for my doctoral project from 2015 to 2017. I was the most lucky person to be supervised by her. I completed both of my research projects in record time. No one does a DPhil at a place like UCT for exactly 2 years while teaching 7 courses in year. I managed to do my research projects in record time because my supervisor and mentor was greatly efficient and committed. She read my work in record time, gave very comprehensive and adequate comments and provided links to relevant readings. Vanessa supervised me in ways that allowed me to grow, to think critically and to craft my own academic space and future. She gave very candid but encouraging comments on my work. Vanessa allowed the intellectual potential in me to germinate, grow and bear fruits.

Under Vanessa as a supervisor and mentor, one benefits from her astute leadership style, her far reaching academic networks and professional reputation in the field of city planning. Vanessa deploys her professional power, navigates bureaucracy and workplace politics in imaginable ways. She is a shaker and mover of things for the benefit of her students. Vanessa puts the interest of her students first and invests time to support their intellectual development, personality growth and avails her far reaching networks to enable the student to learn, grow, become and belong.

After my graduation with a PhD, Vanessa has continued to work with me on collaborative projects: Cities of Integrity: urban planning and corruption in Africa project and she supported one of my early research projects: Revitalisation of Planning Education in Africa, Up Scaling of Planning Studio Project. Vanessa did not leave me by the roadside after graduation, she held my hand and supported my post-qualification with research, mentoring and capacity development. In addition, she offered to be the external examiner for the master’s programme I had just led a Zambian team in launching at the University of Zambia- MSc in Spatial Planning. This master’s programme at the University of Zambia is linked to the AAPS bursary I had received in 2012. She persuaded the Dean of her School, AAPS team members to visit me and my colleagues and witness the growth of the master’s programme I was charged to lead in launching

and implementation.

Professor Vanessa is an all-round mentor, supervisor who has accomplished superior success in the field of urban planning. People like me owe it to her for the success and impact we continue to have in the field of urban planning and in broader society. Vanessa has basically raised me from nearly nothing in 2012 to a self-standing, intellectually commanding young scholar. With Vanessa's signature on my name, I have delivered high level key notes and speeches at numerous premium science events and conferences from Africa to Europe, from Americas to Asia, and I have earned the respect of gurus in the field of planning and cities. To complete the mentorship, I had the opportunity to co-author a book chapter. This was my first peer reviewed publication. From this writing experience, my publication journey has never been the same. This rich and rewarding experience with Vanessa is not limited to me, I know other former mentees of hers who have been impacted in unimaginable ways. If I had the means, and I do hope I will have or someone else will in the foreseeable future, I would set up a special fund in her honour- The Vanessa Watson Cities Fellowship or Award.

On one such instance, Watson was invited to speak at World Planning Schools Congress "Planning and conflict – moving on", in 2011 in Perth Australia. In true activist spirit, she challenged the World Bank on its neo-liberal programmes and the assumption that 'knowledge is objective and absolute'<sup>5</sup>. On the contrary, she challenged, any data and evidence relating to poverty and inequality emphasising the need to examine it from its motive, and as a consequence, is always relative. SDI members accompanied AAPS to this conference and they built a shack in the entrance to the Perth conference centre to draw attention to the issue of informality.

Watson is fearless in her beliefs and her ability to challenge the status quo. She fosters the belief that planning is neither apolitical nor neutral- rather a reality that needs to be negotiated and transacted- from the grassroots to the state.

---

<sup>5</sup> Watson speech at the World Planning Schools Congress (WPSC) organised by Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) in Perth, Australia 2011.

# Conclusion

Watson is an inspiration to many of us in the planning and civil society fraternity. Besides her academic accomplishments and everyday activism, she continues to be humble and modest. On several occasions, many of us have called upon her for advice, and she is always accessible and engaged. For one, Watson has the ability to recognise capability and support people in advancing both their personal ambitions, as well as ensuring that it's for the greater good. Watson is constantly reminding us that the lives of the poor and vulnerable have been excruciatingly slow. Evictions are rampant, particularly in African cities and the vision for the African City is stuck in the 'other', often European notions of city building. This in itself has challenged both academia and practice across the continent. For us there are three key aspects to that would be useful for the young and aspiration planners, albeit in an ageing planning profession.

Firstly, that context matters. Watson has repeatedly shown that planning is not deterministic and a simple relation of cause and effect, but a deliberate response to socio-political realities. Simply translating ideas and applying them in the Global South context is not only detrimental but deepens inequality and segregation. Reading the context and assimilating how to navigate both the politics of private land markets, public sector and contestation for power at grassroots, is at the heart of development.

Secondly, as the global balance shifts towards right-wing politics, it is increasingly important for us to prioritise the rising inequality and poverty in our society. Besides the massive costs borne by people living in poverty, the tremendous burden on our environment cannot be ignored. Watson's work and practice demonstrates models of both resistance and co-production to foster active citizenship and the right to the city. She has repeatedly emphasised the need for multiplicity of practices to create necessary pressure for change.

Thirdly and finally, for us, as the global economy recedes and COVID19 pandemic takes significant toll on lives, it tells us that business as usual is not a possibility. For too long, neoliberal practices and capital has determined the shape and form of our city. Watson work highlights the need for business unusual. Old planning systems and norms, outdated rules and power concentrated with government and private sector needs to be challenged at all levels. Watson's approaches teach us there is always an opportunity in this moment to rethink our cities and urban environments differently.

# Appendix

## Contributors' Introduction

### James Duminy

James Duminy is a lecturer in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol, and an honorary research associate at the African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town. A planner by training, for many years he worked alongside Vanessa Watson to implement the agenda of the Association of African Planning Schools. He works on urban planning, governance, food systems, and health in the Global South.

### Haim Yacobi

Haim Yacobi is a Professor of Development Planning at the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL and the Programme Leader of the MSc Health in Urban Development. The main issues that stand in the core of his research interest in relation to the urban space are social justice, the politics of identity, urban health, and colonial planning. In 1999 he formulated the idea of establishing “Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights” and NGO that deals with human rights and planning in Israel and was its co-founder. His latest books are “Rethinking Israeli Space: Periphery and Identity” (Routledge 2011 with Erez Tzfadia) and “Israel\Africa: a genealogy of moral geography” (Routledge 2016).

### Edgar Pieterse

Edgar Pieterse is founding director of the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town. His research and teaching gravitate around urban development politics, everyday culture, publics, radical social economies, responsive design and adaptive governance systems. He publishes different kinds of text, curates' exhibitions, as well as difficult conversations about pressing urban problems.

### Gilbert Siame

Gilbert Siame holds both a master's and PhD in city and regional planning from the University of Cape Town in South Africa. He is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Zambia where he also co-founded and directs the Centre for Urban Research and Planning. He is the convener of the MSc in Spatial Planning at the University of Zambia. Dr. Siame has done research and published widely on cities and climate change, urban informality, Climate Change and Urban Water Security, Urban Governance, Participatory Informal



Settlement Upgrading, Urban Infrastructure and services, Transdisciplinary Research Methodologies, Urban Political Economy, Integrity in Urban Planning and Development. Dr. Siame has over eight years of research and teaching experience and is currently co-leading two collaborative urban research projects.

### **Baraka Mwau**

Baraka Mwau is a researcher, a consultant urban planner, and a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town- School of Architecture, Planning & Geomatics. He holds a Bachelor in Urban & Regional Planning from the University of Nairobi (2009), and a master's in Urban Infrastructure: Design & Management from the University of Cape Town (2013). Mwau is a consultant to International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), SDI-Kenya, UN-Habitat, World Resources Institute, among other organizations. Previously, he worked as a community planner with Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) Affiliates in Kenya and South Africa. His experience of over 10 years constitute projects undertaken across Africa: Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa. He has authored several research publications.

### **Dr Cecil Madell**

Dr Cecil Madell is a senior Lecturer at the Department Construction Economics and Management at the University of Cape Town. He holds a PhD and Master of City and Regional Planning from UCT, a Master of Science in Local Economic Development from the University of Glasgow and a Bachelor of Arts. Hons from the University of the Western Cape. His professional experience stretches over a 30-year period as a private sector consultant, public official and academic within the fields of urban and regional planning, economic development and public policy. His research interests focus on urbanisation; social justice, right to the city, marginalisation and urban inequality; urban growth management, spatial transformation; urban regeneration and gentrification; inclusionary housing; local economic development and informality; property development; economic growth, development and inclusion. He currently serves on the City of Cape Town's Municipal Planning Tribunal and is past Vice President of the South African Planning Institute.

## Works cited

- Battersby, J. and Watson, V. (eds) (2019) *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities*. London: Routledge.
- Bhan, G. (2019) 'Notes on a Southern urban practice', *Environment and Urbanization*, 31(2), pp. 639–654.
- Bhan, G., Srinivas, S. and Watson, V. (eds) (2018) *The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Borland, R., Morrell, R. and Watson, V. (2018) 'Southern Agency: Navigating Local and Global Imperatives in Climate Research', *Global Environmental Politics*, 18(3), pp. 47–65.
- Duminy, J. et al. (eds) (2014) *Planning and the Case Study Method in Africa: The Planner in Dirty Shoes*. UK: Palgrave Mc Millan.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent & Richardson, Tim. (2002). Planning and Foucault: In Search of the Dark Side of Planning Theory.
- Gunder, M., Madanipour, A. and Watson, V. (eds) (2017) *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*.
- Spiegel, A., Watson, V. and Wilkinson, P. (1996) 'Domestic diversity and fluidity among some African households in Greater Cape Town', *Social Dynamics*, 21(2), pp. 7–30.
- UN Habitat (2009) *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009- Planning Sustainable Cities*. London, Sterling: Earthscan.
- Watson, V. (2002a) *Change and Continuity in Spatial Planning: metropolitan planning in Cape Town under political transformation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Watson, V. (2002b) 'Do We Learn from Planning Practice?: The Contribution of the Practice Movement to Planning Theory', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 22(2), pp. 178–187.
- Watson, V. (2002c) 'The Usefulness of Normative Planning Theories in the Context of Sub-Saharan Africa', *Planning Theory*, 1(1), pp. 27–52.

- Watson, V. (2003) 'Conflicting rationalities: implications for planning theory and ethics', *Planning Theory and Practice*, 4(4), pp. 395–408.
- Watson, V. (2006) 'Deep Difference: Diversity, Planning and Ethics', *Planning Theory*, 5(1), pp. 31–50.
- Watson, V. (2009a) "'The planned city sweeps the poor away . . .': Urban planning and 21st century urbanisation', *Progress in Planning*, 72(3), pp. 151–193.
- Watson, V. (2009b) 'Seeing from the South: Refocusing Urban Planning on the Globe's Central Urban Issues', *Urban Studies*, 46(11), pp. 2259–2275.
- Watson, V. (2013) 'Planning and the "stubborn realities" of Global South-east cities: Some emerging ideas', *Planning Theory*, 12(1), pp. 81–100.
- Watson, V. (2014a) 'African urban fantasies: Dreams or nightmares?', *Environment and Urbanization*, 26(1), pp. 213–229.
- Watson, V. (2014b) 'Co-production and collaboration in planning – The difference', *Planning Theory & Practice*. doi: 10.1080/14649357.2013.866266.
- Watson, V. (2014c) 'The Case for a Southern Perspective in Planning Theory', *International Journal of E-Planning Research*, 3(1).
- Watson, V. (2016) 'Locating planning in the New Urban Agenda of the urban sustainable development goal', *Planning Theory*, 15(4), pp. 435–448.
- Watson, V. (2019) 'The return of the city-region in the new urban agenda: is this relevant in the Global South?', *Regional Studies*, pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1664734>.
- Watson, V. and Odendaal, N. (2013) 'Changing Planning Education in Africa: The Role of the Association of African Planning Schools', *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 33(1), pp. 96–107.
- Yiftachel, O., and Yacobi, H. (2003) 'Control, resistance and informality: Urban ethnocracy in Beer-Sheva Israel', In N. Al-Sayyad & A. Roy (Eds.), *Urban informality: Transnational perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America and South Asia*. Boulder, CO: Lexington Books.

---

Yiftachel, O. (2006) 'Re-engaging planning theory? Towards 'south-eastern' perspectives', *Planning Theory*, 5(3), pp. 211–222.

An exhaustive list of publications by Prof. Vanessa Watson can be found [here](#).

## Watson

### Planning from the South: Learning from academia, praxis and activism

Vanessa Watson is Professor of City Planning in the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics and founder member of the African Centre for Cities, both at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She holds degrees from the Universities of Natal, Cape Town and the Architectural Association of London, and a PhD from the University of Witwatersrand, and is a Fellow of the University of Cape Town.

Her research and publications have been on planning theory from a Global South perspective, African cities and urbanisation, food security, informality and currently on planning and corruption in Africa. More recently she has followed the new economic forces re-shaping African cities, in particular the private-sector driven property development initiatives. Watson is Global South Editor of *Urban Studies* and an editor of *Planning Theory*.

She was the lead consultant for UN Habitat's 2009 Global Report on Planning Sustainable Cities, was chair and co-chair of the Global Planning Education Association Network, and a founder of the Association of African Planning Schools.

Recent books are: Battersby J and V Watson eds (2019): *Urban Food Systems Governance and Poverty in African Cities*. Routledge, London; De Satge R and V Watson (2018): *Urban Planning in the Global South: Conflicting rationalities in contested urban space*, Palgrave; G Bhan, S Srinivas and V Watson Eds (2018): *Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South*, Routledge; and Gunder, M., and A. Madanipour and V Watson (eds) (2018): *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*, Routledge.

#### Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief  
Chiara Belingardi

Editors: Giusy Pappardo, Mennatullah Hendawy, Sina Shahab, Lena Greinke

Senior Advisors: Chandrima Mukhopadhyay, Mona Abdelwahab

YA Coordinator: Pinar Doerder

Graphic Design (Cover and Layout):  
Shaimaa Refaat