

## SAPER briefing note

### Matching needs: planners in local government.

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#### **1. Introduction**

The South African Planning Education Research<sup>1</sup> project (SAPER) is a collaborative research initiative, aimed at investigating the value of the curriculum and the social and economic value of planning education in South Africa (including the employability of urban and regional planners in South Africa). The project strengths include one of the most extensive sets of research surveys and interviews conducted between May 2017 and June 2018 among people in urban and regional planning and related occupations in South Africa which includes a survey conducted with 219 respondents along with in-depth interviews with over 100 respondents. The project also enables collaboration of a number of researcher-practitioners across South Africa<sup>2</sup>, as well as collaboration with international partners (including the University of Birmingham and the SAPER principal investigator, Lauren Andres, the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Commonwealth Association of Planners). In addition to contributing towards the ongoing endeavour to enhance local planning capacity, the project has also been designed to identify the context-specific realities of planners in South Africa and the wider Global South and as such inform the need to enhance the quality of international planning education.<sup>3</sup>

The research is especially relevant to municipal planning capacity given that:

- 41% of respondents were either currently within, or had experience with the municipal sphere;
- Respondents include planners from all nine provinces; and
- A substantial number of young planners (60% had graduated within the past 10 years) were included.

The purpose of the briefing note is twofold. Firstly, it seeks to shed light on the interplay of capacity challenges faced by planners and those faced by local government so as to contribute

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<sup>1</sup> This project has been conducted jointly by the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences of the University of Birmingham and the Urban and Regional Planning Department of the University of the Free State and is funded by the ESRC and the NRF. <http://www.saperproject.com>

<sup>2</sup> Including Prof Verna Nel and Mr Stuart Denoon-Stevens, University of Free State, Mr Martin Lewis SACPLAN, Dr Elsona van Huyssteen (CSIR) and a number of other well established and junior professionals.

<sup>3</sup> Kunzman, 2015

towards much needed development impact in South Africa, based on outputs of the research findings of the SAPER project. Secondly, drawing from insights gained through the study, as well as from the team's practice and research experience in education for planners and related disciplines, municipal planning, local government and professional development, a number of specific proposals are put forward to inform ongoing initiatives by key role players and address some of these challenges in an effective and sustainable manner. Emphasis is placed on proposals that can contribute towards professional development of young planners, the improvement of municipal planning capacity and youth job creation.

## 2. Context

### ***The need for spatial transformation and development impact***

The spatial fragmentation of South Africa's social and economic environment exacts a vast toll daily on workers, residents and commuters, with the poor bearing the brunt of the burden. The National Development Plan (2011) noted the importance of urban and regional planning in transforming the spatial landscape to one that is more just and sustainable. The contribution of registered planners is critical across the three spheres of government.

In national government planning capacity is crucial within a number of sector departments and particularly in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) as current custodians of the spatial planning mandate and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (2013), the Department of Co-Operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCOGTA) as custodians of integrated development planning, municipal governance and the Municipal Systems Act (2000) and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation as custodians of the National Development Plan and the development of an Integrated Planning Framework for South Africa (Integrated Planning Framework Bill, 2018).

Within the provincial sphere, planning capacity is key to those departments and units driving the longer term provincial growth and development strategies. This includes provincial spatial development frameworks, associated functions and importantly, support for municipalities.

However, most significant is the role of planners within the municipal sphere. Firstly, given the significant emphasis on the role of municipalities to enable development impact within the context of their developmental role in the planning system<sup>4</sup>, as well as within spatial

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4 Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), 2017; Pieterse et al, 2016; SACN, 2016; IUDF, 2015; Parnell, et al. 2017; National Planning Commission, 2011; South Africa, 2000

planning and land development<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, given the significant and context-specific service delivery, transformation and resource use challenges (including water availability, land reform, land administration and management), exacerbated by institutional challenges in the planning system, immense capacity, financial viability and resource constraints exist in many municipalities across both urban and rural landscapes.<sup>6</sup>

The ability of planning professionals, who often play key roles in municipal integrated development planning, spatial planning, land use and environmental management, land and settlement development and the alignment of intergovernmental and multi-role player investment, to effectively lead and co-produce such change, is however, highly dependent on their professional and personal practice development and consequently, the conditions enabling such impact.

### ***Planners in South Africa***

Urban and regional planning is a relatively young profession and one of the smallest in South Africa, with just on 4000 registered planners.<sup>7</sup> It has also been identified as a scarce skill in South Africa since 2002. This was confirmed in a report in 2007<sup>8</sup> and again in 2012<sup>9</sup> and has featured in the Department of Higher Education and Training's scarce skills lists since 2014. On average, there are only about 10% to 15% of the planners in South Africa compared to the UK or Australia<sup>10</sup>, while the demands on individual planners – due to the scarcity of planners as well as the demanding circumstances<sup>11</sup> - are high. Smaller and rural municipalities are less likely to have planners than those in metropolitan regions.<sup>2,3</sup> These smaller municipalities are also less likely to afford to employ many planners, let alone experienced planners, yet the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, 2013<sup>12</sup> (SPLUMA) implicitly requires municipalities to employ planners to oversee the preparation of spatial development frameworks and evaluate land use management applications. SPLUMA also places a huge burden on municipal planning capacity as it requires municipalities across the urban and rural landscape to develop spatial development frameworks and land use management schemes for their areas of jurisdiction (such schemes were not required under previous legislation). Only in the Western Cape Province have all municipalities prepared a land use scheme<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Schoonraad, & Oranje., 2018. SPLUMA, 2013; DRDLR, 2018 t

<sup>6</sup> National Planning Commission, 2015. National Treasury. 2018 Powell, et al. 2018; IUDF, 2015; van Huyssteen, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> South African Council for Planners, June 2018. Database of registered planners

<sup>8</sup> Todes, A. and Mngadi, N. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Commission, 2010

<sup>10</sup> UN Habitat. 2013

<sup>11</sup> South African Planning Education Research Project data.

<sup>12</sup> South Africa 2013 (SPLUMA)

<sup>13</sup> Draft National Spatial Development Plan Work Session, Western Cape 24 July 2018

Furthermore, planners are trained in synthesising information as part of spatial planning and can thus play a key role in integrating plans and projects towards focussed development, and specifically within municipal integrated development plans. In this regard, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has also identified and confirmed the gap and the urgency to address planning capacity within municipalities<sup>14</sup>.

However, while a demand exists in local municipalities, there are also a growing cadre of unemployed planning graduates who are unable to find employment due to their lack of experience. Thus, there is a mismatch between the demand and supply of graduate planners.

### **3. Findings: Challenges facing planners, especially young planners in local government**

#### ***Uncovering the gaps***

The SAPER research has revealed several deep concerns.

Firstly, one of the issues that emerged is that the two-year in-service learning (candidacy phase or internship) is a concern to many. The dilemma of finding employment yet lacking adequate experience to be employable was raised by many respondents.

Secondly, planners employed in local government noted a range of critical aspects regarding gaps in skills and appropriate knowledge to address context-specific challenges. While some of these gaps could point to issues regarding the content or focus of formal planning education, a significant number thereof also relate to the wide range of roles that planners need to fulfil (ranging from GIS, to facilitation) and specifically relevant context-specific skills and knowledge of i.e. land use management, settlement design and other practices.

A third serious concern relating to the internship period was the availability of supervisors along with the nature and quality of such supervision. The shortage of experienced and registered planners in many local municipalities means that there is no-one able to advise and supervise planning interns. In many cases, young planners' superiors are not qualified planners and lack the skills to assist the interns. Many respondents in the SAPER project commented on the difficulties of in-service learning without daily support and advice from experienced planning colleagues.

DCOGTA has instituted the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency (MISA) programme to support municipalities. However, according to respondents, this support does not meet their

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<sup>14</sup> Schoonraad, M. and Oranje, M. 2018. George, X. 2018

everyday needs. Consequently, there is a need for additional support mechanisms such as those recommended in the following paragraphs.

### ***Highlights of findings relevant to municipal planning capacity***

In summary, the findings of the SAPER project point to the critical realities and consequent impact on municipal planning capacity due to:

- A cadre of young planners who are not able to find employment without relevant experience;
- The challenges young planners face in applying their education in vastly diverse and challenging local contexts, where municipalities are often under resourced, and in regions where senior planning capacity is limited;
- The difficulty of getting the the right experience and supervision during in-service training to enable registration, even in better capacitated municipalities, given the huge pressures that municipalities are facing; and
- The lack of appropriate continued professional development support and practice-orientated mechanisms within the profession and especially within many municipal contexts, together with an apparant lack of appropriate and context-specific training opportunities to support the above.

## **4. Recommendations: Supporting planners and local municipalities**

To address the issues identified, two support programmes are proposed, one to match graduates to municipalities without planners and the other to support interns.

### ***Matchmaking.***

Given that many local municipalities do not have urban and regional planners, while there are also planners who are unemployed and lacking experience, matching the latter with municipalities that require their knowledge and skills, will benefit all parties. This could be partially achieved through extending the existing internship programmes in various departments and the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA)/ Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA).

Additionally, a voluntary community service programme could be instituted and managed through the departments responsible for spatial planning and local government, namely the DRDLR and DCOGTA respectively. Through this programme, municipalities that have a shortage of planners could apply for placement of a planning graduate while unemployed graduates could apply for placement as a planner. The period of placement would be for a specified period (such as twelve months), while the salary cost would be carried by the National Department placing the graduate for the placement period.

Although a mandatory community service year exists for health professionals, doubt does exist regarding the feasibility of community service for all graduates.<sup>15</sup> However, given the need for planners, particularly in smaller municipalities, there is merit in testing the concept of a voluntary service year as a pilot project. After a trial period it should be reviewed to determine in what form it should continue.

### ***Supporting interns***

In order to support interns – planners who are doing in-service learning to enable them to register with the South African Council for Planners (SACPLAN) – the following are recommended.

Firstly, the Planning Profession Act, 2002 (PPA) should include a requirement that **funding must be provided to extend and support the existing in-service learning programmes** to enable recent graduates to obtain the required experience to register with SACPLAN.

Secondly, a **structured intern supervision and support process** should be developed to ensure that interns are able to gain the appropriate experience in their in-service training and furthermore, that such training imparts the practical skills needed as a professional or technical planner. This could be facilitated with additional mentoring support to enable regional and context-specific in-service professional development.

Thirdly, **additional bursaries** through the Department of Higher Education /National Student Academic Financial Aid Scheme (NSAFS), SALGA and LGSETA/CETA and the relevant National and Provincial Departments should be made available for accredited undergraduate and postgraduate planning programmes. Recipients of these bursaries could then be placed in low capacity municipalities during their internship, subject to an intern support, mentoring and supervision programme.

Fourthly, SACPLAN will play a key role. This includes as **on-line community of practice and support network** which is currently being developed. The intention is that this network will be open to young planners (including interns/ candidate planners) where they can offer mutual support and answer each other's queries. The network should include experienced professionals (possibly retired planners), who will be available to respond to candidate planner's queries and concerns.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training. 2016. f

## **5. Putting the programmes into place**

Several actions will be necessary to put the recommended programmes into place that include legislative changes and financial commitments.

### ***Specifying the programmes***

It will be necessary for SACPLAN, SALGA and the relevant national government departments to develop the mechanisms of the voluntary service programme along with the processes for the matching of unemployed graduates with municipalities with low planning capacity. This will also entail sourcing funding for the placement of the interns/candidate planners and determining the responsibilities of the respective departments or institutions.

The extended supervision and support programme could be an expansion of the existing MISA programme but with additional support through LGSETA/CETA. More details regarding the skill-sets graduates need to acquire for registration with SACPLAN and how these should be acquired, should be included in comprehensive guidelines for the supervision and support of candidates. These guidelines should form part of the information provided through the MISA and LGSETA/CETA programmes.

### ***Legislative changes***

It is recommended that the Planning Profession Act, 2002 be amended to (a) accommodate the voluntary service year and (b) to make funding for mentoring and supervision support mandatory. This will be the responsibility of the DRDLR<sup>16</sup> in conjunction with SACPLAN.

DCOGTA may have to review the legislation pertaining to MISA and the support of interns.

### ***Financial implications***

The financial implications of the Voluntary Service year will include the stipends paid to the graduate planners/interns as well as the costs of administering the programme.

There may be additional costs related to the extension of the mentoring and supervision of interns which could be covered by the allocations to the LGSETA/CETA.

## **6. Conclusion**

The SAPER project has revealed concerns among recent graduates that are also opportunities to improve municipal service delivery by placing planners in municipalities with low planning capacity and supporting graduates (interns) to obtain the required skills and experience to

<sup>16</sup> Or the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

register with SACPLAN. These are relatively small steps, but they will have positive implications on integrated planning and delivery of municipal functions.

### **For information**

More information on the SAPER project can also be obtained from <http://saperproject.weebly.com>

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