

Essay – Planning for Reconciliation and Equitable Development

Africa is booming, but legacies of violence, exploitation and institutional instability curtail sustainable, equitable development. In its purpose statement, the Planning Africa 2018 conference cites how “jobless economic growth, increasing inequality and deepening poverty” characterize the continent’s rapid urbanization and development. Planning initiatives, including many in Africa, often employ ‘top-down’, universal methods lacking contextual and systems-level awareness. Fortunately, the diversity of perspectives represented by young Commonwealth planners positions us as professional leaders attune to complex planning systems. This global network and shared histories empower us with connections that deliver lessons and best practices across contexts urban and rural, developed and developing. Towards this vision, this essay highlights several interventions, including community art projects and investment in recreation centres and public transportation, to illustrate how planning can encourage equitable growth by creating and utilizing space for the reclamation of place. As communities undergoing transitional justice vary across axes of available resources and institutional stability, I emphasize the scalability of planning projects relative to their political, social, and economic contexts. Conscientious planning which centers community agency prioritizes initiatives which undermine mechanisms of violence and positively (re)shape community relations. In turn, these processes facilitate the (re)building of social capital necessary to heal, grow, and prosper as safe, resilient, and sustainable communities.

First, an initiative with tremendous potential for transitional justice is utilizing the built environment as canvas for community art. Especially feasible in rural contexts lacking sizeable resources, projects like those of artist JR can challenge binary perceptions of victim-perpetrator and facilitate reconnection between locals and their locale. In 2007, JR completed *Face2Face* - a project encompassing eight Israeli and Palestinian cities sharing the security wall, and consisting of mural-sized, side-by-side photographs of Israelis and Palestinians who share the same occupation (taxi drivers, spiritual leaders etc.). JR asked these figures to express themselves for the camera; many people smiled; others made a silly face. Thereafter, he invited locals to paste the enlarged images throughout the built environment.

In *Face2Face*, the work’s procedure and content evoke, but ultimately subvert, binary perceptions of victim/perpetrator. Insofar as identities of victim/perpetrator exist on a spectrum, *Face2Face* mirrors this reality by creating slippage between creator and viewer. The project was highly collaborative; the photos of local people, posted by locals, were consumed by locals. The project parallels complex and shifting identities of victim, perpetrator, and bystander in conflict, as it complicates viewers differentiating themselves as objects vs. subjects of the work. The silly and smiling faces humanize and relate the preconceived ‘other’, undermining mechanisms of violence that rely on vilification and dehumanization. Paralleling Jane Jacobs’ theory of security through street-presence, community art projects like JR’s *Face2Face* literally put ‘eyes on the

street'. Locals become creators and curators of their own image, literally and figuratively.

This insight, its relevance and value to planning initiatives concerned with building safe, resilient, and sustainable communities, extends beyond JR's specific works. Art projects in the built environment that center collaboration and self-expression deliver opportunities to regain and exercise community agency. Relative to foreign, 'top-down', or 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to planning and transitional justice, art projects are inherently location and population-specific. The locale determines the size and scale of the work, and the content represents the community's unique narrative. Beyond its aesthetic, art activities encourage humanizing and empowering processes; they provide effective openings to repair and grow the social capital prerequisite for equitable and sustainable development.

Where art projects represent small scale initiatives, there are many mid-size planning interventions suitable for communities with moderate resources. For example, multipurpose health and recreation centres facilitate cost-effective service provision and invite community interactions which build civic trust. Such constructions were the mandate of NGO, Architecture for Humanity, but the organization dissolved due to lack of funding. However, its legacy includes exemplary interventions like the Health and Sport Centre in Siyathemba, South Africa. In Siyathemba, the organization engaged the community to build a dual health and youth recreation centre. Notable programming included girls' soccer, whose coaches were also doctors. By leveraging the organic, relationship-building capacity of sport, and complemented by its dedicated space, the centre inspired the girls' trust and confidence in accessing regular healthcare. Additionally, these athletic infrastructures offer alternative outlets for expressions of masculinity. In many contexts of transitional justice, the dominant expression of male-identity is as 'aggressor' or combatant. Facilities with programming like Siyathemba's provide alternative outlets of self and gender-expression, and activities build positive norms of reciprocity. Especially in communities where social or institutional distrust is high, such interventions have tremendous potential to cultivate better relationships between neighbours, service administrators and practitioners. These positive dynamics are foundational to safe and inclusive community-building, and are preconditions to equitable growth.

Finally, larger cities with more planning resources could invest in public transportation (or comparable modes of urban connectivity) to increase security and capital flows. In South American cities, Modernist planning principles were widely adopted (as functions of their political regimes) in the mid-20th century. The spatial segregation intrinsic to these planning principles precipitated intra-city inequalities and structures of violence. Spatial segregation begets social and economic segregation, and many communities

endured limited access to goods, services, and sustainable employment. In turn, cartels and guerilla groups increasingly filled these local power vacuums, providing employment and controlling available goods and services. However, subsequent planning initiatives which reconnected communities with wider capital flows successfully undermined local resource monopolies. In Lima, Peru, investment in public transit infrastructures provided residents greater mobility and circulation within the city, and subverted mechanisms of oppression and violence which relied on spatial isolation. Public and peer-based infrastructures (ride sharing platforms, UBER etc.) also increase residents' access to economic opportunities; these infrastructures extend opportunity networks within urban areas and engage a broader public in city development.

Planning has the potential to facilitate processes of reconciliation, growth, and equitable development. Scaling according to community needs and resources, the interventions explored in this paper reflect a deep appreciation for their context. They emphasize community agency: whether using the built environment as artistic canvas, constructing multipurpose community centres, or investing in transportation networks, these initiatives undermine mechanisms of violence and positively reshape conceptions of community. As space shapes experiences of social, political, and economic life, the built environment can serve as an empowering and tangible reflection of change. Winston Churchill once said, "we shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us". Young Commonwealth planners have the capacity to shape the globe in the image of our professional values; through our diversity, we can engage and amplify community voices towards healing, growth, and prosperity as inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable communities.



JR, *28 Millimeters: Face2Face*. Photo-copy and paste. Israel and Palestine (2007)