This report serves as a summary of the first in a series of knowledge sharing sessions jointly held by the Department of Economic Development (EDD): National Social Dialogue and Strategic Frameworks Programme; and the South African Cities Network (SACN). The sessions are intended to contribute to a knowledge network by inviting a diverse set of perspectives to advise policy making and business planning. The subject of this first Social Dialogue session was the notion of spatial transformation in South African cities. It stimulated debate by exploring contested, competing and often contradictory notions /imaginings of the spatial transformation of our cities.

**Background:**
“We must undo or address the spatial legacy of apartheid.” “The spatial restructuring of cities is imperative.” “It is necessary to transform our urban built environment.” These, among others, are the various expressions of a pronounced call that reflects a recognized need for South Africa’s urban spatiality to somehow change or function differently. However, the purpose, manifestation and implications of what exactly is meant by these remain unclear to many. At the very least, it is highly unlikely that there exists any shared understanding between key role-players or society at large about what is meant or required on a practical level: what, why, how and where?

The call for urban spatial transformation is “official”. South Africa’s National Development Plan 2030 makes a strong statement about the need to “address the challenge of apartheid geography” which is defined in terms of living, working, and environmental sustainability. This call is corroborated in various statements across a range of key strategic documents including the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission (PICC), the SACN’s 2011 State of the Cities Report, National Treasury’s City Support Programme, the Financial and Fiscal Commission’s city model, and so forth.

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2 The PICC’s Strategic Integrated Project No. 7 (“SIP 7”) deals with integrated urban space and the public transport programme, motivated towards the spatial transformation of cities. See www.infrastructuredialogues.co.za report on 22 March 2012 Dialogue.
3 www.sacities.net
Against this backdrop, the dialogue was prompted by a series of presentations and talks given by a panel of practitioners and actors in urban and development planning, each of whom approached the notion of city transformation from a slightly different perspective. Together, these perspectives, insights and proposals begin to paint a picture for a radically different practice in pursuit of spatial transformation of South African cities.

The panel was comprised of:

- Joanne Yawitch, National Business Initiative (NBI)
- Yusuf Patel and Nathan Iyer, South African Planning Institute (SAPI)
- Maria Coetzee, CSIR
- Prof. Mark Oranje, University of Pretoria
- Prof. Philip Harrison, University of Witwatersrand & National Planning Commission

Their brief biographies are included at the end of the report.

This report is a summarised thematic representation of the proposals and provocations of the panel and discussants. It is meant to provide a basis for further debate and transformed ways of practicing city transformation.

“Transformation”

While in the pursuit of long-awaited and often attempted “spatial transformation” in South African cities, one realisation has emerged: That in order to achieve spatial transformation in cities, we have to rein in the real changes not only in the physical realm but also in the way we approach both the problems and the solutions.

Real spatial transformation will require transformation and challenging of:

- Our Truths – what we think we know about our cities needs to change
- Our Normative ideals – what we think “should” happen, what we think is “good” for cities and their people needs to change
- Our Tools – the efficacy and appropriateness of city development tools, tools we use to both regulate, control and manage as well as the tools we depend on to facilitate development and the type of growth and change we think we want needs to change
- Our Starting points – where and how we begin in tackling the challenges of spatial transformation needs to change

Embedded in this call for change is a series of useful suggestions and provocations for new ways of tackling enduring challenges of delayed spatial transformation in South African cities. These span the continuum from tangible physical intervention to less tangible but no less effective behavioural, procedural and cognitive change.

What’s wrong with business as usual?

The dialogue presented from the range of speakers all call for a change in the way in which cities are planned and developed. There seems to be a consensus that if we continue to do
what we’ve always done, we will continue to get what we’ve always got by way of the spatial development and form of our cities.

The vexing problems that have stunted our ability to transform our cities come from both legacy and from the ways in which we currently practice.

Summarised, they broadly stem from:

**The way in which we envision the future city**
A few panellists lamented the fact that we have been talking about spatial transformation for too long and have not been able to spatially articulate or envision what the preferred future might look like. Yet, others expressed a concern with the use of spatial prototypes as macro-planning images of future city. Their reservations were that such images have all been proposed before, yet seem to preclude the possibility of people choosing their own aspirations for the ways in which their spaces must be arranged. Other concerns with these images are that they privilege physical built environment intervention over systemic, social and institutional reforms. If we have seen these images before and they have not changed our planning, that is indeed an indictment on us for not being able to realise the pictures in a meaningful way.

**Lack of a real and nuanced understanding of who we think we’re planning for**
Discussants repeatedly questioned our understanding of the current realities of the multiple public for which spatial transformation must work, especially in the context of rapid urbanisation, economic pressures on households, demographic shifts and the high rates of unemployment. Data collected and presented by the CSIR shows more than 28 types of households making a host of decisions daily that have bearing on the ways in which they need the city to work for them. This calls for a more fine-grained and nuanced investigation of who cities need to work for now and in the future. We can no longer plan for what we have thus far referred to as “the public interest”.

There was also a concern that we continue to underestimate the ability of people to plan and organise their own lifestyles in cities. We have not understood very well the human story in transforming cities.

**Reticent and piecemeal spatial intervention**
The call to be bold in action and in word was clear. Boldness was called for in the clear articulation and actioning of a path to a preferred spatial and social future. Politicians need to be bold about the expectations they set for the public and about committing to what really matters on the social agenda.

Urban development practitioners have had the right feelings about spatial transformation, about what the problems are and about what needs to be changed but have not yet started to collectively, boldly and actively begin to envision the spatial transformation goals. The view from the perspective of big business in the city decried the current approach of project-based intervention asking for a systems-based approach instead. This enables a holistic impact assessment of individual decisions and actions and a coherence of purpose in
our efforts. Individual projects implemented in the built environment will not lead to a meaningful transformation of cities at the scale of what is required.

**A set of blunt planning tools**

Resetting the socio-spatial course of our cities is severely hampered by the instruments of planning we have long been practicing with. Text predominates but there’s an absence of a sensory experience of space. We have not made the arrangements of space and of policy clear and, as one panellist contended, “When people can’t make sense of both spatial and policy arrangements, they have no way of making their way to their futures”.

Outdated modes of managing land uses or incentivising development in the context of growing informality, circular migration and urban transience is one clear example of this, but there are other tools that we have pinned our hopes and practices on that are no longer adequate to meet the needs of our rapidly morphing cities.

**Losing sight of the limitations of planning and state intervention**

We cannot depend on an omnipresent state and expect state expenditure to cover 90% of the cost of development while we aim to lever 10% from private capital. This is not a sustainable model. Panellists expressed the need to accept that not everything is possible all the time. It will not always be possible to create as many jobs as we need, provide enough housing for all, and guarantee that each locality will be able to offer maximum opportunity to its inhabitants. We do not plan in the context of abundant state resources and our plans must not try to communicate this. We need to help people understand the limitations instead of creating the impression that they will and must have it all.

**Transforming what we think we know**

Discussions from various participants echoed a repeated call to challenge the assumptions and set of “truths” that have guided city development and the planning profession for years. The message was clear. In order to transform cities spatially, there is a need to question what we think we know about what is good for cities and their people. The following ideas were cited as examples of what planners and urban developers need to re-think:

**Primacy of Structure over Flexibility**

Discussants at the session lamented the privileging of city planning’s focus on structure in city form at the expense of create a more functional flexibility in cities that will allow for inevitable informality. Our adherence to modernist principles of city form and design has contributed to the inertia in effecting change in our cities. New ways of practising need to embrace flexibility as a necessary part of planning.

**Micro and Macro Economies**

City Planners have not been able to really engage with the meaning of the significant global and local macro-economic shocks experienced of late.
We are very poorly informed about the role the economy plays in shaping space at different scales. We make a set of assumptions about job-creation, the needs of entrepreneurs and aspirant job-seekers but we rarely have the evidence to back it up or a full understanding of the impact of economic changes. Various calls were made by discussants to re-look at our fundamental assumptions about economic changes and their causal factors in relation to the way we plan cities.

**Multiple Publics**

Data collected by the CSIR shows what an extremely differentiated citizenry inhabit South African cities. No less than 28 types of households, each making decisions differently, cannot be thought of as an undifferentiated whole. Our categorisation of the ‘public’, for which we believe we plan, requires a more nuanced and finer-grained analysis that is up to date with realities of everyday life for millions of city-dwellers.

**Sprawl, cores and peripheries**

We have universally denounced sprawl as bad for cities and people and while this argument does have merit, the matter of tackling spatial change cannot be reduced to a set anti-sprawl tools. For example, evidence from the work of the CSIR has emerged that there are certain types of people who prefer to locate on the edges of the vast city because their peripherality confers upon them advantages and choices that they would lose if they were situated in what we believe to be the opportunity-rich and choice-rich nodes of the City.

**Rural realities**

What is it that we really understand about what is and what is not happening in rural and semi-rural areas of our country? The discussion highlighted the need to evaluate whether the governments firm commitments made recently to tackling rural poverty and underdevelopment mean cities will be competing for state funding with rural areas.

Moreover, the principle of locating job opportunities in rural areas was attempted during Apartheid with industrial decentralisation policies. These types of developments were not sustainable. We need to understand what it would take for decentralising of economic opportunities in these areas to work.

**The role of transportation**

Transportation has of late gained prime focus as a way of transforming cities. There is definite consensus that robust, reliable and accessible public transportation is sorely needed in our cities. Yet we cannot turn our focus too narrowly to transportation and expect it to act as a panacea for addressing the spatial transformation agenda. In fact, recent experience of the City of Johannesburg as well as some research done by the CSIR suggests that transportation does not always yield the material spatial transformation gains planners and policy-makers expect it to.

One panellist reiterated that big business is concerned with more than just reliable, cheap and convenient transportation for labour but that the greater environments in which labour must negotiate their daily needs are not to be neglected. For example, workers returning
home during late hours need to be able to walk home safely, access healthcare systems and childcare in order to be productive employees.

**What big business needs of the City and what the City needs of Big Business**

Big business has not engaged so much with the “spatial transformation agenda” because the focus of what it requires from cities is first and foremost functionality. Cities can attract and sustain business investment when they are not only spatially functional but also functional in terms of their municipal and provincial development processes, which businesses need to engage with in order to invest. There is a need to clearly articulate appropriate roles and responsibilities between the state and big business with regard to the creation of liveable, functional and sustainable urban environments. This has become increasingly urgent in light of recent unrest in mining-town environments.

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**Time to upgrade our tools!**

Transformation of spatial form necessitates a critical review of the efficacy of the tools that planners and city shapers have for a long time resorted to in the hope of creating desired planning outcomes. Discussions throughout this dialogue session were punctuated by examples and observations of the ways in which certain planning tools held in high regard have been proven to have failed in achieving desired outcomes, or at best proven to be blunt instruments with which to proceed to real spatial redress:

**Development Corridors**

Long held as favoured proposals in municipal and regional planning frameworks, development corridors have had limited impact in actually creating zones of accelerated investment and opportunities and job creation. In fact, in examples cited by both SAPI and CSIR, development has evidently been taking place outside of planned corridors. Another impact of these corridors is that they effectively displace the poor to the less accessible spaces of the city.

**Land Use Management**

Land use management tools thus far in the form of the town planning schemes and mostly outdated or unenforceable set of laws and regulations have proven to be a task that is neither an effective regulatory tool nor an effective incentive for the right types of development. Rethinking systems of land use management means institutional redesign of systems and processes that manage the use of space. Discussion from the floor raised the point that everyday in the offices of land use planners who assess development applications, our lofty goals are being thwarted by: a) a subliminal pressure to approve developments for political and other reasons; and b) a lack of understanding of cumulative impacts of these decisions.

Implicit in this argument is the need to devise appropriately flexible tools and appropriate capacity within planning departments to better respond to fluctuating global and local economic and political forces of change, and tools that can accommodate realistic levels of informality in our cities.
Modernist planning principles that underpin our current repertoire of land use management instruments were cited in this session as one of the main reasons why spatial restructuring and transformation has been slow. The primacy of structure over flexible functionality has cost cities dearly.

The lingering influence of Grand Modernist spatial visions of the city
The limitations of grand visionary plans for the future were raised by more than one speaker. The dilemma raised between speakers seems to have been the tension between the need to take a bold leap into visually representing a preferred spatially transformed future (in the form of a prototype), and the need to incrementally envision and shape spatial futures through a range of engagements that put people’s opinions and the broader social contract first. Certainly the limitations of privileging the kind of visioning of grand modernism using place-based master-plans above other tools will not stand us in good stead for achieving spatial restructuring.

Built environment upgrading projects
Enhancements to the bricks and mortar of the city in a piecemeal and small way cannot make an impact on urban morphology if it is not clearly tied to a long-term, clear, committed effort to effect major spatial transformation. Small piecemeal efforts in small precincts help locally, but won’t turn the tide for systematic spatial transformation.

Where do we begin?
There were a range of proposals made for where we could begin the process of achieving real spatial transformation. These are ways of approaching the problem of sluggish spatial redress in cities that provide a starting block for a set of propositions made by key speakers:

Understanding needs
One approach that received numerous mentions is to begin by really engaging with people’s needs of their spaces and places.

Strengthening Civil Relations
Another approach posited was the need to address “the social contract”, the way in which people relate to each other and share their environments.

Building the evidence base
The case for evidence-based planning called for planners to start the tasks of real spatial transformation by carefully mining data that tells us who and what we are actually planning for and that could even help us test, at the beginning of the process, the outcomes we are likely to achieve through our decision making.

Articulating the desired spatial outcomes
Another approach is to express a clear position on how spatial transformation needs to look and manifest physically in order to realise both the tangible and intangible outcomes we desire. Starting here requires boldness and a first step toward purposeful action given that we have all reached the consensus about the need to redress.
What do we do now?

This social dialogue brought together a range of perspectives on what could be done to effect real change in city form and function. Proposals for a course of action derive from the panellists’ perceptions of what is wrong with the status quo. Together the range of proposals made during the course of this session may appear to be conflicting or contradictory. There is great benefit in this:

Firstly, in spite of our frequent and casual reference to the context, it highlights how many interpretations of spatial transformation actually exist in our field. Secondly, it forces us to relook at meta-narratives of planning from various angles and thus stimulates the debate that is needed in order to proceed to action.

The idea for the Dialogue was not to arrive at a neat set of tasks, but to begin a difficult conversation about the future spatially transformed city we each hold in our minds eye. We thus derive from this session a useful initial set of proposals that may begin to realise the changes envisaged for our cities.

The following key proposals emerge from the layering and confluence of ideas presented in this session:

**Who we plan for: People-first**

The dialogue included repeated calls to re-centre spatial transformation efforts around the complex, competing needs and interactions of multiple urban publics. The key proposals that emerged in relation to this were:

- Renew and build sufficient consensus around a new social contract which acts as the fundamental code of relations in cities and renew these.

- Re-focus the urban agenda on poverty alleviation, the reduction of inequality and the maximisation of human freedoms.

- Understand, allow for and enable everyday people’s choices for their lifestyles spaces to drive the spatial transformation agenda.

- Don’t forget the human emotive and tactile sensory experience of the city and create possibility for hope belief and acceptance.

- Plan ‘with’ multiple disaggregated publics and not ‘for’ “the public”.

• Cities that work for people are places that give choice to people and make the arrangements of both space and policy clear, to allow them to choose their realities and navigate their way to their future.

**How we plan? Data, Institutions and Systems**

Various proposals made in this session addressed changes to the tools and systemic processes of planning practice. Calls were made to:

• Engage deeply with a range of data to understand the impact of planning decisions and to confirm what we think we know about cities and what’s good for them.

• Get to grips with the nuanced realities of society and place and plan from here.

• Know and accept the limitations and work within them.

• Be bold! Take a position on the preferred future and commit to an action and capacitation plan to realise it.

• Embrace a systems-approach not a projects-approach to really engage with the cumulative impact of hundreds of everyday planning decisions.

• Re-organise and capacitate the back-end systems, processes and regulatory frameworks in planning institutions in order to re-align them to spatial transformation goals.

• Enhance capacity and capability for better responsiveness to external shocks in the context of great local and global uncertainty.

**A spatial framework**

The need for a single coherent publicly accessible spatial organising framework and urban policy for the country was expressed in the following proposals:

• Conclude an urban policy for the country, a national spatial framework.

• Harness the virtues of polycentricism ensuring effective connectivity and flows between multiple hubs of opportunity.

• Internationalise and Localise by providing the local with opportunities to link with the global. This contributes to liveability and choice for city inhabitants.

• Understand and operationalize the advantages of urban agglomeration.
- Plan cities within the framework of the wider space-economy.
- Be ecologically responsible in practice.

Together, these proposals offer choices of modes of practicing and ways of thinking in working toward spatial transformation of our cities.

### Visions of the spatially transformed city

Panellists were invited to offer a visionary perspective on what the spatial transformation of South Africa’s cities could mean in practical terms. SAPI boldly ventured a visual representation of what a transformed spatial structure could look like. In the pictures below, they set out the key features of a what a spatially transformed South African city could be:

### Recommendations - The Future City

**Key Strategies**

There are many dimensions to spatial restructuring, but from a practical implementation viewpoint, to bring tangible restructuring, requires the following:

- A CONNECTED PUBLIC TRANSPORT CITY
- A CITY THAT IS GREEN
- A CITY OF QUALITY LIVING ENVIRONMENTS
- A COMPACT AND WALKABLE CITY
- A CITY WITH A POLYCENTRIC STRUCTURE
- A CITY WITH A DIVERSE ECONOMY

We need decisive action!
THE FUTURE CITY:
A PROTOTYPE FOR SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Securing the Natural Resource Base
Building Stable Local Neighbourhood
Expansion and Growth
Public Transport Spine
Thresholds for Markets
Regional Economic Activity
Intensive Agriculture
Sustainable Urbanism

Reflections on the “Spatial Transformation of the City”
Prof. Philip Harrison ventured this positive visionary journey of urban transformation towards 2030:

As a first step...“The current crisis provokes an urgent response and the “social contract” is renewed
South African cities commit themselves to strong, consensus-based, and periodically renewed, long term development plans
Within the next five years serious attention is given to building capabilities for spatial governance and the gaps in the current spatial planning system are addressed
Bottlenecks in the economy are systematically resolved through strong leadership with serious attention given to education and youth employment
South African cities are able to grow towards an 8 percent target but, more importantly, produce jobs and provide for livelihoods
The cost of living in cities drops through massive investment in integrated and affordable transport, measures to strengthen food security, new approaches to housing etc.
Urbanisation continues but city governments are better resourced to handle the pressures
New governance arrangements are introduced for the Gauteng City Region(GCR), and possibly, for other urban regions (and strong regional and global alliances established).
A further 30 percent densification of large cities but growth is better structured spatially along mobility routes and within functional and vibrant hubs
South African cities embrace and extend their role within the global economy and society;
Durban becomes a global port logistics hub, The GCR consolidates its position in terms of global finances and high end services, Cape Town integrates into the African economy and extends its global position in terms of tourism
Productive linkages (institutional, social, and economic) are established with stabilised hinterlands
Innovation becomes part of the culture of urban living
Technology is used more effectively for urban governance and contributes to greater resource efficiency
Resource efficiency is mainstreamed into urban life and national goals for carbon emissions are achieved in a way that is managed to support continued sustained growth.
The GCR gradually increases its share of the urban economy and population, but the system stabilises around 2030 as productive potentials in other centres are released.”

Closure

The session was concluded by facilitator Geci Karuri-Sebina (SACN) and Leslie Nyagah (EDD), and serves as one of a series of future engagements of this kind.

Possible topics for future dialogue sessions, as raised in discussions from the floor, include:

- **Making cities work for business and government:**
  There is a need to more carefully engage with the functionality that businesses need in cities and also the types of reciprocity that government expects from big business in the city.
• **Navigating the relationships between the space-economy and spatial transformation:**
  Discussants raised the following questions worth exploring in future dialogue sessions:
  o What are the key drivers of economic activity and how do these influence the incentive mechanisms and regulatory tools needed to effect spatial transformation?
  o What are the levers that will effectively get commercial development into spatially and economically peripheral areas such as townships?
  o How and when should government be incentivising or controlling the actions of the property and land sectors?

We look forward to unpacking these and other related topics in future dialogue sessions and thank all participants for their contributions.
**Speaker Biographies**

**Joanne Yawitch** has been the Chief Executive of the National Business Initiative (NBI) since March 2011. Prior to this she was a Deputy Director General at the Department of Environmental Affairs with responsibility for Environmental Quality and Protection as well as for the Department’s Climate Change work. Joanne was involved in the land sector for many years and was a Director of the National Land Committee in the late 80’s and early 90’s as well as a fieldworker for the Transvaal Rural Action Committee before that.

**Yusuf Patel** is a Development Planner and Future Maker with a mission to promote and create functional and inspirational neighbourhoods, towns and cities. He has specialist knowledge and experience in integrated and spatial development cutting across economic and infrastructure investment, housing, governance and finance. He is currently president of the South African Planning Institute (SAPI) which is a voluntary professional body with a vision for sustainable spatial development, and executive director at the JSE-listed construction group, Basil Read, focussing on affordable housing and mixed-use developments.

**Prof. Mark Oranje** is the head of Department: Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Pretoria. He holds degrees in Planning and has been working in the sector for 24 years. His research interests include planning policy, planning history and integrated development planning.

**Maria Coetzee** is currently Research Group Leader: Urban and Regional Planning in the Built Environment Unit of the CSIR and also leads multi-disciplinary project teams on a number of multi-disciplinary projects such as the Integrated Development Management and Modelling Project, the StepSA National Initiative for DST as well as the CSIR’s Water Flagship Project.

**Prof. Philip Harrison** is the South African Research Chair in Development Planning and Modelling hosted by the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. He is a member of the National Planning Commission and other advisory bodies. He has authored and co-authored books in the fields of urban planning, development and tourism. Currently his research relates to changing city form in the Global South.