

THE HISTORY OF PLANNING SOUTH AFRICAN NEW TOWNS: POLITICAL INFLUENCES AND SOCIAL PRINCIPLES ADOPTED

Linda Brockett

(Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Witwatersrand)

OPSOMMING

Suid-Afrika het baie nuwe dorpe waarvan die meeste as gevolg van die mynbedryf en groot semi-staat ondernemings soos YSKOR ontwikkel is. Hierdie nuwe dorpe is beïnvloed deur die internasionale nuwedorp-beweging. Hierdie referaat poog om die invloede te analiseer en om die verskille tussen fisiese uitleg en ideologiese werklikhede uit te wys. 'n Groot gedeelte van Suid-Afrika se geskiedenis is beïnvloed deur die ontdekking van minerale, wat grotendeels verantwoordelik was vir die ontwikkeling van nedersettings. Die ontdekking van diamante in Kimberley in 1869 het bv. 'n massiewe instroming van mense tot gevolg gehad na die voorheen onontwikkelde binneland. Vroeë ontdekkings van die mineraalrykdom van Suid-Afrika het ook voorgekom in Pelgrimsrus, Baberton en Johannesburg, wat almal tot permanente nedersettings gelei het.

Vandag, as gevolg van die tipe mineraalafsettings, is individuele prospekteurs skaars. Suid-Afrikaanse minerale word deur net 'n paar mynbedrywe, wat die benodigde finansies en tegnologie besit, ontgin. Die opening van 'n nuwe myn benodig 'n groot aantal werkers, wat die voorsiening van behuising noodsaaklik maak, dikwels in verafgeleë areas. Die konstruksie van myndorpe en die ontwikkeling van groot semi-staat ondernemings beteken dat die meeste nuwe dorpe in Suid-Afrika terselfdertyd ondernemingsdorpe is en hul plasing tot 'n groot mate voorgeskryf is deur die voorkoms van minerale of grondstowwe. Selfs dorpe soos Sasolburg en Vanderbijlpark is ondernemingsdorpe wat naby groot kole-afsettings geplaas is. Die nuwedorpbeweging in Brittanje en sy voorlopers - byvoorbeeld die dorpe gestig deur die "Enlightened Industrialists", die tuinstede, en die Amerikaanse groengordelstede - het almal sterk sosiale beginsels onderliggend.

In hierdie referaat word beweer dat in Suid-Afrika - ten spyte van

die feit dat die fisiese form van nuwe stede 'n groot invloed op Suid-Afrikaanse dorpsuitlegte gehad het - baie min van die sosiale beginsels toegepas is. Die referaat bevraagteken die geldigheid van die vervreemding van die fisiese uitleg van die sosiale beginsels wat dit onderlê. Hierdie referaat bevraagteken ook die doeltreffendheid om buitelandse uitlegte na te boots by die uitleg van dorpe.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa has many new towns, most of which were developed as a result of the mining industry and large para-statal companies, such as ISCOR. These new towns have been influenced by the international New Town movement; this paper seeks to analyse the influences and to highlight the differences in both physical layout and ideology.

South Africa owes a large part of its history to the discovery of minerals; which to a significant extent have been responsible for the location of settlements in the hinterland. Today, due to the nature of the mineral deposits, individual prospectors are rare; South African minerals are mined by a few mining houses, which have the finance and technology necessary to mine the deep reefs. The opening of a new mine requires a large work force, which in turn requires housing at often remote locations. The construction of mining towns and the development of large para-statal companies has meant that most new towns in South Africa have also been company towns. Even towns such as Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark, which were developed by South African Oil and Petroleum (SASOL) and South African Iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR) respectively, are company towns, which have been located near large coal deposits.

The New Town movement in Britain and its predecessors, such as the towns established by the "Enlightened Industrialists", the Garden Cities, as well as the American Green Belt towns, all had very strong social principles underpinning them. It is the contention of this paper that although South African designs have been greatly influenced by the physical form of the New Towns, very few of the social principles were adopted. The paper questions the validity of separating the physical design from the social principles which informed it, and the appropriateness of copying foreign designs when laying out towns.

THE NEW TOWN MOVEMENT

The New Town movement, and its predecessors the Utopian Socialists, the Enlightened Industrialists and the Garden City movement, were based on very strong social principles. These towns were a reaction to the conditions caused by the Industrial Revolution and all were designed to improve the quality of life of the working class. The trend indicates a practical belief in environmental determinism, that is, the social upliftment of people through improved living and working environments.

The Industrialists' wish to improve living and working conditions for their workers was largely based upon self interest; namely the belief that a healthier workforce would be more productive. Owen was amongst the first to become involved in urban improvement and is best known for his attempts to redesign the areas inhabited by the working classes. Ebenezer Howard relied strongly on Owen and Buckingham's social beliefs when he planned his Garden Cities. In turn Radburn and the Greenbelt towns relied on Howard's principles, and they furthered the idea of community living and of vehicle and pedestrian separation by means of road hierarchies and internal park networks. The ideas from America were later used in the British New Town movement. A number of elements have therefore, been carried through from these early experiments to the New Towns, such as, the need to improve housing and social facilities (notably health and education), public ownership of land, often some form of co-operative in the form of neighbourhood units and the connection between open space provision and residential areas. These early experiments all saw the introduction of land use zoning and the use of public open space as a functional and structuring element of the towns.

The original experimental New Towns, it is argued, achieved their objectives. The comparative statistics of standards of health and education between cities and New Towns suggests that people's quality of life does improve in better surroundings. The improvements made to the privately owned homes in "new towns" also suggests that people recognize and appreciate their improved status.

Perhaps the most important experiments in the evolution of New Town planning were the Garden Cities; not necessarily because Howard's ideas were new or unique (they were not, because there were strong similarities between Howard's work and the work of

the earlier reformers) but because he gained support for the movement and developed two working models (Letchworth and Welwyn). The Garden Cities have three major elements which single them out as models worth copying:

- * Howard had no financial backing of his own (all the Industrialists before had built villages out of personal wealth).
- * Howard had no industry to provide employment, he had to rely on the promise that he could attract employment to his model towns (the towns of the Industrialists had all been built around the developer's factory).
- * Howard had no potential citizens, he had to attract residents to his towns. (The villages of the Industrialists were built to house the employees of the factory).

Howard, therefore, demonstrated that the principals of these towns could be copied even under difficult circumstances. He generalized the elements (housing, employment and financing) of the specific experiments of the Industrialists' towns (Bournville, New Earswick, Saltaire and Port Sunlight). By so doing he made it possible for governments to copy the principles, without owning any specific industry to use as a relocation tool. It was shown that it is possible to attract employment and people to pleasant surroundings.

The adoption of the Garden City idea first by the American government (1935) and later by the British government (1945) were both for social reasons. In America the government felt the need to house and employ those left unemployed by the depression. The building of New Towns (Greenbelt Towns) was seen as a way of gainfully employing people, whilst at the same time improving housing conditions and future job opportunities. In England New Towns were constructed to relieve the pressure of overpopulation in London and other major centres, and to house and employ soldiers returning from the war. British New Towns were, therefore, concerned with providing better living conditions in the new towns as well as relieving the pressure of over crowding in the urban centres.

On a smaller scale, New Towns aimed at emulating the following Garden City principles: " (to make) possible a full measure of social life, but not larger, surrounded by a permanent rural belt, the whole of the

land being in public ownership, or held in trust for the community".¹ Although the individual designs vary, the basic principals have always remained more or less the same. In time the New Town policy evolved from a ridged structure with neighbourhood units and a definite limit, to a more flexible structure which moved away from the strict definition of a neighbourhood and concentrated more on individuality and choice. The designs, however, only represent a physical manifestation of the social principles: all of the elements of New Town layout can be traced back to the fundamental desire to produce a better living environment for the workers.

The towns were held in public trust to prevent the adverse effects of capitalism. The process of capital accumulation by the few (by means of ownership of land) to the detriment of the majority was seen as a fundamental cause of poverty. By holding the town in public trust any benefit derived from the land could be shared by the community.

New Town communities are also aimed at the working classes - those most in need of help. They represent a socialist method of redistribution of wealth since money from central government is used to improve the physical conditions of the working classes.

SOUTH AFRICAN NEW TOWNS

A number of South African New Towns have been developed. This paper will, however, restrict itself to four examples: Vanderbijlpark, Welkom, Stilfontein and Sasolburg. Vanderbijlpark is the earliest example of the case studies selected and was developed in 1943 to house the workers of ISCOR (The South African Iron and Steel Corporation), thus, chronologically it was developed after the American Greenbelt Towns (1935-1936) and shortly before Harlow new town (1947). The remanding case studies were all developed between the establishment of Harlow and Cumbernauld new towns (1955). In terms of planning influences from Britain and America, South African New Towns were developed at largely the same time as the British new towns and were consequently based more strongly on the Garden City movement than the Later New Town movement.

VANDEBIJLPARK (1943)

Vanderbijlpark was the first industrial town in South Africa to be planned to the last detail before the first sod of earth was turned. The estimated population was 90,000 whites and 120,000 blacks, which were to be housed in two separate areas with a total extent of 10,900 acres.

The main aims of the design of Vanderbijlpark were put forward by Dr. van der Bijl in 1948 when he said:

I visualize a town with people living in surroundings and under conditions which would be conducive to a healthy, happy and productive life. For this reason I was determined to make ample provision for parks, playing grounds, health clinics, hospitals and schools. A town, like a flower or a tree, should at each stage of its growth possess symmetry and completeness and the effect of growth should never be to destroy that unity but to give it greater purpose, not to mar that symmetry, which at all stages makes it a comprehensive whole."²

Vanderbijlpark was aimed at achieving Garden City principles, that is:

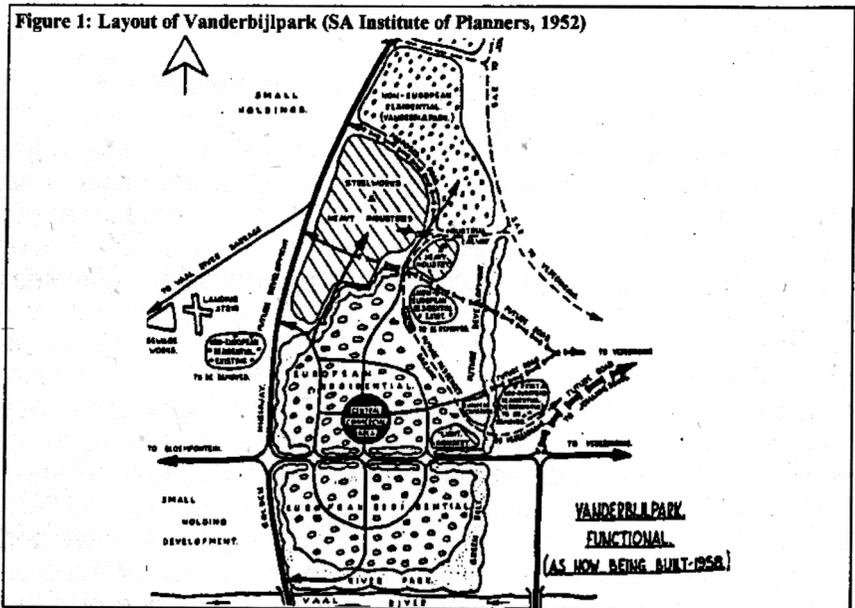
- * To have a limited population,
- * To have public ownership of land,
- * A park-like setting,
- * To be confined by a green belt,
- * To improve living conditions.

However, Vanderbijlpark displays a limited application of the Garden City principles. Vanderbijlpark was more concerned with the physical layout than the social principles, such as improved housing and public ownership of land.

Unfortunately ISCOR did not own the surrounding country side, so it was unable to control development — a fundamental error as considerable development has occurred beyond the greenbelt. The greenbelt consequently failed to control expansion and limit urban sprawl.

In an attempt to meet the primary aim of the design, which was to create a town which fostered ideal living and working conditions, two major objectives were developed:

- * Roads were designed in a hierarchical manner in order to direct traffic along major through routes, thereby reducing traffic in the residential areas, and
- * The town was also designed in the form of self contained units or neighbourhoods, the size of which were determined by the number of homes necessary to service one primary school.³



The design is characterized by broad roads with wide road reserves and discreet residential units (neighbourhood units).

STILFONTEIN (1954)

By the time a formal decision had been taken to establish a town at Stilfontein, township establishment had proceeded to the extent

that the site of the town had been fixed. It is unfortunately true of South African New Towns that the most important part of the planning, that is the site selection, is invariably carried out by laymen or is due to certain circumstances and the town planner is only called in later to prepare the layout.

Fortunately initial township planning had not reached a very advanced stage before the decision to plan a town was made. It had, however, reached the stage where further development was committed to the site.

In the case of Stilfontein the site was chosen in the south west corner of the mining lease area, adjacent to the Stilfontein mine. The site is approximately a mile wide by four miles long and is confined by the National Road on its northern boundary, the main Cape Town railway line on the southern boundary, the Klerksdorp town lands to the west and Stilfontein mine to the east.

Although the site has very strong links with the initial mine in the area; its location with respect to the Buffelsfontein and Hartebeestfontein mines is weak. It has been suggested that the site might have been placed nearer the Vaal river to offer better access to all employment areas and to enhance the recreation potential of the town. The plan shows many similarities with the Garden Cities. It has wide verged, tree-lined, curvilinear roads and there are numerous parks and recreation areas. The most note worthy park is the Stilfontein Club — provided by the mines — to which membership is automatic to the residents of the town. Schools, and local shopping facilities are dotted about the area. The main commercial centre houses predominately shops and flats, since there is very little demand for offices; a few attorneys and doctors are situated in town otherwise the offices are situated on the mines. The civic centre was jointly financed by the mines and the local authorities and is laid out in the form of a triangle with an internal pedestrian system. All central facilities are located in this area.

The central area is surrounded by a major ring road, this limits the possibility of expansion. The inflexibility of the design of the central area could become a major problem in the future, should the town grow.

Being laid out during the apartheid era, racial segregation existed;

the white residential area housed approximately 15,500 people, whilst the black township, Khuma, housed 12,700, the remainder of the black residents (single men) were housed in the compounds on the mines. The main black compound is located on the southern side of the railway beyond an industrial area, which is adjacent to the Stilfontein mine.

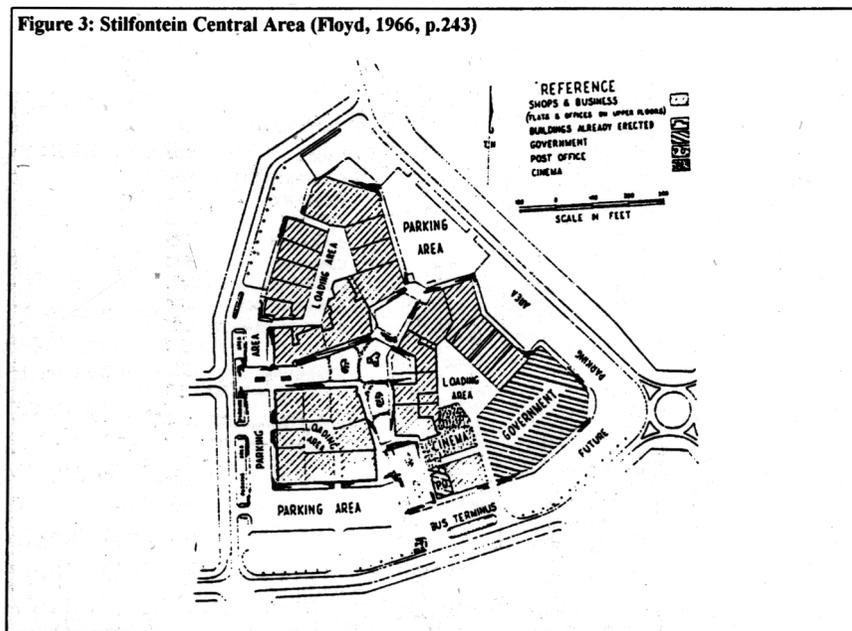
The 52 hectare industrial site was fully serviced and sold at a subsidized price in order to attract industry allied to mining; as yet it is not fully developed. In allocating industrial sites preference was given to those industries which employed mainly Europeans, this questions the logic of locating the industrial area adjacent to the black residential area and suggests that the industrial area was used as a buffer between the black and white areas. Stilfontein had one Afrikaans medium high school, three Afrikaans and one English primary school and two nursery schools. English speaking pupils are transported by bus to Milner High School in Klerksdorp.

Stilfontein is a very pleasantly planned town. It boasts all basic facilities with specialized facilities available in Klerksdorp about 25 kilometers to the west. The tree lined roads and well maintained municipal parks and flower-beds make the town very picturesque and suggest a close relationship to the park-like setting of the Garden Cities. However, notwithstanding the parks, the town does not appear to follow any of the foreign precedents. Yet at the same time Stilfontein does not make any major contribution to South African New Towns.

Unfortunately the town was completely dependent on mining, there was no attempt to diversify the economy. All industry was related to mining and all services were geared towards the needs of the local population. The close proximity of Stilfontein to Klerksdorp also prevented it from becoming a self-sufficient town in its own right as many industries and specialized services preferred to locate in Klerksdorp.

Stilfontein mine has since dramatically curtailed operations and Buffelsfontein mine has closed altogether, leaving Harties as the only fully operational mine in the area. The town offered no alternative employment and the houses were owned by the mine, forcing many retrenched workers to leave in search of work and a place to stay. Many former miners' houses have since been sold to old age pensioners.

Figure 3: Stilfontein Central Area (Floyd, 1966, p.243)



WELKOM (1947)

A fabulous gold strike was made on the farm Welkom on the sixteenth of April 1946. Similar strikes were made on the surrounding

farms Uitzig and St. Helena resulting in feverish activity on the Johannesburg stock exchange and soaring land prices. In a short space of time six mines were established in the Welkom region, five of which were owned by Anglo American and the last by the Union Corporation. These mines encircled a large central area on which Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the then chairman of Anglo American, decided to plan the town of Welkom.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer stressed at the outset that Welkom should answer the problems of cities around the world. The problems were listed as being:

- * Congestion in the town centre caused by dense urban development.
- * High rise buildings were seen as a problem since the road network was unable to cope with the number of people housed in the buildings.
- * Loading and off-loading of goods to shops and warehouses occurred on the streets and, thus, caused congestion.
- * There was no differentiation between roads connecting the town centre and the suburbs, allowing motorists to use any road thereby decreasing safety in the suburbs.
- * Parks and schools were badly located in relation to the population, forcing school children to cross busy streets.

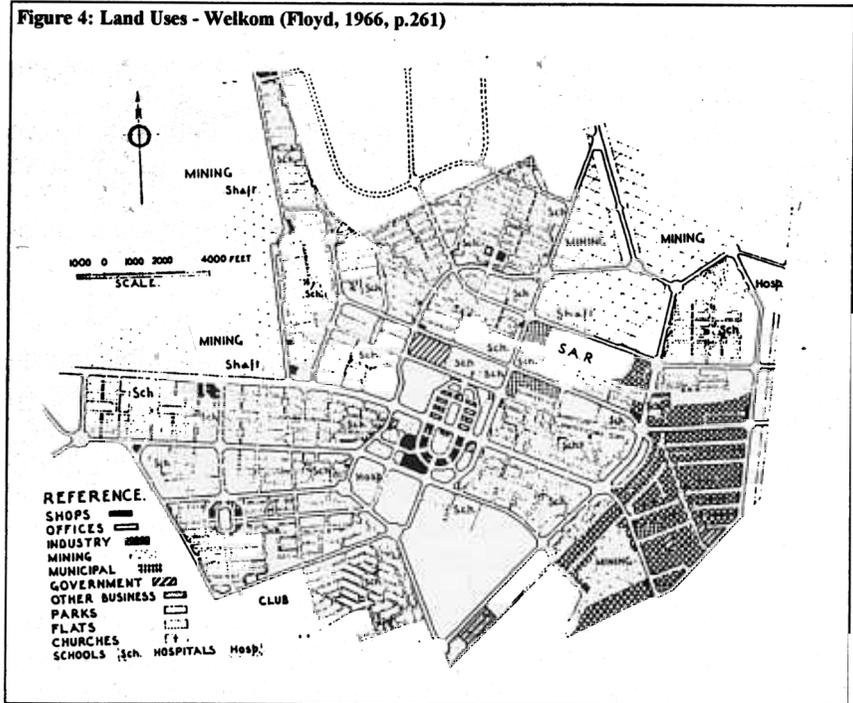
With these problems in mind the plan for Welkom attempts to create a functional, economical and attractive Garden City. However, the design of Welkom suggests a local interpretation of the Garden City principles. Improved living conditions were seen in terms of physical elements such as broad tree-lined streets and open space networks. Welkom probably has more in common with the towns of the Enlightened Industrialists than the Garden Cities.

Welkom was designed as a number of neighbourhood units separated out by a hierarchical road network and defined by the number of children necessary to support a primary school. Park networks were provided to ensure that children could walk to school in pleasant surroundings and to connect the town centre to the suburbs.

Most of the garden city principles have been ignored in Welkom; the layout concentrates on the physical park-like setting rather than some of the principles adopted by Howard:

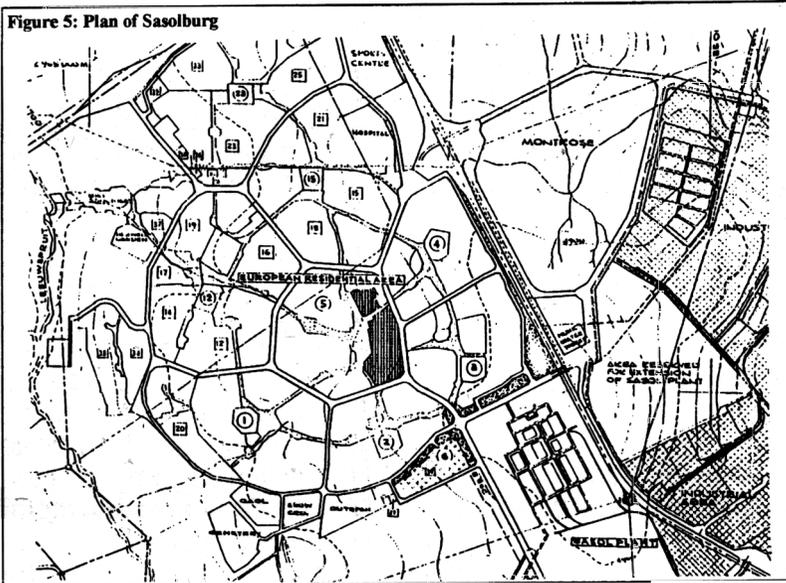
- * Welkom does not have a limited population and is still growing rapidly.
- * The greenbelt around the town has been reduced to a row of trees separating the town from the surrounding mines.
- * There is no public ownership of land; instead the town was developed for capitalist reasons. In order for the mines to operate they had to supply housing and services for the employees.
- * Welkom is not aimed at improving the conditions of the working classes, it is merely an elaborate housing scheme for employees of the mines. South Africa's working class are predominately black and yet the blacks were excluded from the town of Welkom, due to the racial zoning practiced during the apartheid era.

Figure 4: Land Uses - Welkom (Floyd, 1966, p.261)



SASOLBURG (1954)

Sasolburg was planned in 1951 to serve the world's first oil from coal complex (SASOL). It aimed to serve as the residential and social centre for those who administered and operated the SASOL plant and its subsidiary companies.



The early development of the town dates back to 1952 when a full subsidiary company of SASOL, SASOL Townships limited, was established for the purposes of township establishment (town design and layout) and the provision of housing to the SASOL employees. The first twenty five houses were completed and occupied during 1952. Sasolburg was officially proclaimed a town on the twenty seventh of August 1954 and the SASOL plant started production in 1955. Apart from the primary product, petrol, SASOL produces many chemical products. These bi-products have stimulated the establishment of a vast chemical industry in Sasolburg. As a result of this industrial expansion Sasolburg has grown into the centre of the chemical industry in South Africa.

A private Town Planning firm headed by Max Kirchofer was commissioned by SASOL in 1951 to plan Sasolburg. The aims identi

fied by Mr. Kirchhofer were:

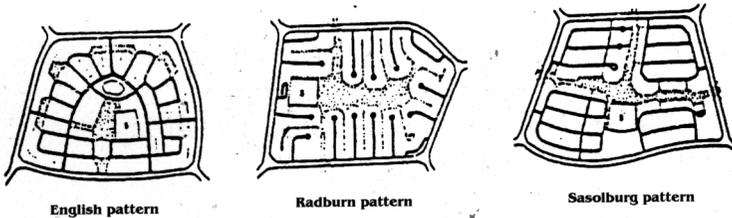
- * The establishment of a system of main roads which permitted the free movement of traffic without interfering with beneficial occupation of the land.
- * The layout of the residential areas in self-contained units which comprise all that was necessary for daily living and would be protected from disturbing influences throughout their life time.
- * The creation of a coherent urban scene, wherever possible in the residential areas, and certainly in the town centre.

There is a very definite road hierarchy in Sasolburg. Streets have been planned in such a way so as to differentiate between through traffic, service traffic and stationary cars. There are no driveway access points to residential areas along the main roads which are kept free from all service traffic and parking. Access to the main roads is limited to the street intersections and these are spaced as far apart as considerations of convenience permits. All adjoining building land is separated from the main roads by fences or hedges; not even a pedestrian gate is permitted. Access to the adjoining stands is provided from the local streets within the developed areas. This means that the infrastructure is costly as many plots have double frontage. By separating the roads in this way the mixing of vehicular and pedestrian traffic is largely eliminated and motor vehicles have a free flow in smooth conduits unimpeded by standing vehicles. Floyd argues that this encourages speeding on the main roads, however, this has not been proved. Provision has been made for cycle lanes on the hard shoulder should the need arise, however these have not yet been constructed. When designing Sasolburg Kirchhofer aimed to design European and non-European areas in the same manner, this was however, blocked by the National Party government. Kirchhofer's principles were thus only applied to the white residential areas.

The plan for the European Residential area is, according to Kirchhofer, an adaptation of the Radburn idea and the concept of the English village green. In the English pattern: "a feeder street traverses the residential unit to give access to development street which in the shape of loops, cul-de-sacs and courts form the setting for the spatial grouping of buildings in a restful atmosphere." ⁴

However, Sasolburg appears to use a sinew-like park network rather than grouping houses around more discrete central parks. This suggests that Sasolburg's layout has a stronger relationship to the Greenbelt towns than the Radburn system. In the Radburn and Greenbelt pattern all through traffic is excluded and the houses are serviced from the back by cul-de-sacs, and face onto an internal park network.

Figure 6: Layout of Superblocks: English, Radburn and Sasolburg Patterns respectively.



The design of the town centre aims to achieve two main objectives:

- * To separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic.
- * To site buildings in such a way so that they define the open space between them into squares and courtyards.

The town centre is fringed by the principal roads but separated from them by narrow green strips. Four streets lead from the main roads into the major spine road of the oblong layout. Walkways were created with shops and business facing onto them, which were in turn serviced from the outside with large parking lots and service entrances.

CONCLUSION

The paper has shown that South African New Towns have been influenced by their foreign counterparts, most notably the towns of the Enlightened Industrialists, the Garden Cities and Radburn. The influences have however, been predominantly in the physical layout. The social principles which formed the basis of the British New Town Movement and the idea of optimum city size are absent in the South African examples. The South African way of life is very different from both England and America, yet planners glibly ap-

plied the neighbourhood concept and other physical elements of the foreign designs.

In Britain and America the New Town idea evolved from social principles. The planners were concerned with improving the living conditions of the working classes. In South Africa the black population formed the working classes, yet they were excluded from the New Town designs. The black townships were bleak replicas of the European residential areas.

The foreign examples used public ownership of land as a means to redistribute wealth and were socialist projects. The South Africa New Towns were developed by mining houses or large para-statal industrial undertakings to house employees. Consequently they were capitalist concerns, which placed greater emphasis on the needs of the upper and middle classes.

The South African New Town is in effect a company town. In this respect the towns are very similar to those built by the Enlightened Industrialists. The Company has a great deal of control over the town since the majority of the housing is rented from the parent company. The fear of losing both a job and a house makes the employees dependent on the company. The town also gains little individuality or character since people tend to put less effort into a rented house than one privately owned. Since the towns are controlled by companies there is a great deal of paternalism in much the same way as occurred in the towns of the Enlightened Industrialists.

The employees rank is reflected in the housing rented to him by the company — social stratification is, thus, very marked. One of the earliest aims of the British New Town movements was to try to break down this social differentiation. The South African New Towns have, therefore, been built for very different reasons to their British counterparts.

It is the contention of this paper that the South African planners relied too heavily on foreign designs, without understanding the social principles behind the layouts. They imposed foreign lifestyles on South African towns.

The most notable element of the South African New Towns is the neighbourhood unit. This idea is derived from the Mark I New Towns

and the Radburn superblock. The idea of a neighbourhood is to unite residents into common physical and social units. These neighbourhood units were defined as the number of residents needed to fill one primary school. In England and America this was not a problem since all the residents shared a common language, however, South Africa has an extremely cosmopolitan population, with many artisans having come from abroad. The residents of a town, therefore, tend to polarize into groups of people who share common interests, language, religion and background. These groups are not congruent with the residential groups.

Another problem is the question of language of instruction at a school, since there were two (and are now eleven) official languages, English and Afrikaans. In both Sasolburg and Vanderbijlpark the planners attempted to address this problem by creating dual-medium schools (that is two languages of instruction). However, this soon broke down and one of the two languages, usually Afrikaans, dominated. Children wishing to be educated in the other language, were obligated to travel to a school in another neighbourhood. The concepts of safety and walking distances broke down, since children then had to cross major roads and walk further than the desirable five minutes walking radius. By attending school in another neighbourhood their social links are external to their neighbourhood unit, not internal as intended.

The education boards in England and America had, at the time of developing the neighbourhood concept, fixed the number of children needed to fill a primary school. It was easy to allocate the number of houses and people associated with a school. The services area for a school, therefore, formed a natural definition for a neighbourhood.

In South Africa the country was controlled by a number of different education boards, each with their own limits. The number of school children needed to fill a school also changed as the Education Boards' policies changed. Using a primary school's catchment area as a defining limit was thus inappropriate.

The next concept of a neighbourhood which is derived from the Mark I New Towns is that the neighbourhood centre and school should be within easy walking distance of the outer limit of the neighbourhood. In South Africa the characteristic dwelling unit in a white area was a single detached dwelling on approximately a

quarter acre of land. There is ample land in South Africa and hence, no pressure for high density living. The low densities make it very difficult to plan a neighbourhood large enough to serve a primary school in which everyone is within walking distance of the centre. The very nature of South African development has made South Africa a country of high car ownership.

The next problem arises from emulating the Radburn and Greenbelt system of internal park networks. The aim of the Radburn idea was to make the houses overlook the park. The park would then form the backbone of the development, and would be a pleasant, functional internal linkage system. In South Africa, however, high priority is given to security and privacy. An internal park network is a danger in that people can easily gain access to the back of your house, without being seen. The desire for privacy stems from the fact that in the South African climate the garden is often used as an extension of the house and forms an integral part of the living and entertaining area. This desire for security and privacy has meant that people have erected high security walls along the back of their property. This was most noticeable in Sasolburg. The houses around the park do not gain from its location since they can not overlook it, nor can they gain access to it. The only access to parks is gained from the roads, yet the whole idea of the internal park system was to separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic. In South Africa people want defensible space more than open space.

All of these problems are caused by the imposition of a spatial structure which is not related to the social structure of the community. Town Planning evolved from the desire to improve the conditions caused by the Industrial Revolution. Most noticeably it aimed to improve the conditions of the working class and reformers looked at ways to narrow the distinction between the housing standards of the rich and the poor. Planning by nature is, thus, a form of redistribution of privileges or wealth; the government gains taxes from the rich and uses these finances to improve the living conditions of the poor. Improvement takes the form of improved housing, health facilities and education. Planning is, therefore, a social practice and planning layouts should aim at addressing social problems.

In South Africa, at the time when these towns were planned, the apartheid policy was in full force. The poor were thus excluded and racial zoning and class stratification made a mockery of the key social principles enshrined in the New Town Movement.

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