



## Justice et injustices spatiales, Nanterre 2008

*Suburbs, sprawl, planning and spatial justice as viewed through developments  
in Gauteng, South Africa*

*Périphéries, étalement, aménagement et justice spatiale vus au travers des développements  
à Gauteng, Afrique du Sud*

**MABIN Alan**, Professor, Architecture And Planning, University Of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,  
South Africa

Urban planning has at times constituted one of the key means of attempting to attain diverse goals in the small but critical areas – the cities – in which an increasing proportion of populations live. Two of the major goals of urban planning are urban efficiency, in recent decades framed increasingly in terms of managing the footprint of cities on the broader environment; and the pursuit of spatial justice. It is increasingly argued that the efficiency and environmental performance which urban planning seeks to achieve, are not attainable under conditions of spatial injustice. Across the world, major urban areas nevertheless remain marked by high degrees of spatial injustice, with poorer populations – often marked by ethnic distinction from dominant groups – segregated into unfavourable environments, less well serviced and generally less desirable and adequate to social and individual needs. The idea that achievement of environmental goals depends on achieving greater spatial justice has held such sway that some have even argued that planning and the search for spatial justice are equivalent. Others argue that they are almost mutually exclusive, since the results of planning are frequently quite different from explicit goals and intentions.

In South Africa the legacy of apartheid makes the search for spatial justice the focus of any planning activity. Presently powerful patterns of suburbanisation and the location of new housing projects in peripheral urban situations has tended to deepen rather than alleviate the legacy of apartheid and there is a widespread search for ways of (1) achieving progress towards spatial justice and (2) reducing the negative environmental impacts associated with the sprawling forms of urban development in evidence. In Gauteng in particular these patterns are highly evident and public authorities are attempting to address them, but face considerable difficulties in translating broad policy into effective practice.

The proposed contribution will explore the questions of ‘suburbanisation’ and ‘sprawl’ in relation to the practice of planning and the goal of spatial justice using the Gauteng case for illustration.