



# KUVEZA NEKUUMBA

THE ZIMBABWE EZEKIEL GUTI UNIVERSITY  
JOURNAL OF DESIGN, INNOVATIVE THINKING AND PRACTICE

ISSN 2957-8426 (Print)

**Vol 1 Issues (1&2), 2022**

## ©ZEGU Press 2023

Published by the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Press  
Stand No. 1901 Barrassie Rd,  
Off Shamva Road  
P.O. Box 350  
Bindura, Zimbabwe

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The *Kuweza neKuumba - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Design, Innovative Thinking and Practice* provides a forum for design and innovative solutions to daily challenges in communities.

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*Kuweza neKuumba - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Design, Innovative Thinking and Practice*

ISSN 2957-8426 (Print)

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# Politics and Ethics in Professional Planning in Zimbabwe

VALERIA C. MUVAVARIRWA<sup>1</sup>, ANDREW CHIGUDU<sup>2</sup> AND RUMBIDZAI MPAHLO<sup>3</sup>

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## Abstract

*Politics can either be democratic, monarchical, oligarchic or authoritarian. This depends on the rule of the country and its acceptance of the rule. How then do politics and ethics relate? The leaders' role is to attain and maintain high standards in their private and work lives. This article explores and discusses the argument that politics in Zimbabwe has not only negatively affected planning, but has also had detrimental effects on professional planning ethics. The professional planner's virtues have been compromised in certain situations. It is against the background that politics and planning are interlinked; planning caters for the good of citizens and politics aims at delivering to the people. The article plugs the gap in the literature that professional planning ethics can be eroded or built upon by politics. Evidence points to a few issues: politics can be a hindrance to planning activities because of the differences between politicians and planners; professional planning ethics can be eroded by politics; and planners face a variety of ethical issues due to difference in cultures and values.*

**Keywords:** virtue, policy, management, sustainability, institutions, credibility

## INTRODUCTION

In his book, *The Prince* (1533), Machiavelli made a distinction between politics and ethics. Ethical principles accommodate honesty, loyalty, trustworthiness, respect and adherence to the law. Aristotle stated that the two, politics and ethics, are related

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but are two different fields (Giorgini, 2019; Moussaly, 2022). Ethics focuses on the good of the individual and politics focuses on the good of the city. What option does one choose; a way that benefits the individual or a way that benefits the whole city?

Politics can either be democratic, monarchical, oligarchic or authoritarian. This depends on the rule of the country and its acceptance of the rule. How then do politics and ethics relate? The leaders' role is to attain and maintain high standards in their private and work lives. Only in this way can political morality and public ethics be fulfilled (Chipkin, 2022).

The ethical decision-making framework for professional ethics is utilitarian which is outcome-based, deontological, based on duty, virtue-based and communitarian which is community-based (Bowen, 2018; Reamer, 2019). Almost all ethical bodies are governed by the same principles of trustworthiness, transparency, accountability, confidentiality, objectivity, respect, obedience to the law and loyalty. These principles encompass what people expect from others when being dealt with, being courteous to other people in a professional and personal capacity.

## **BACKGROUND**

Planning came into play as a way of creating order in the city and its people. It ensured a variety of aspects of people's lives such as health, economy and general social well-being, are protected. This brought with it issues such as the demarcation of land and its uses and prohibiting certain activities in certain areas. It brought some people who were willing to accept the knowledge provided by planners and engineers and also other people who could incite the public and did not agree with the given choices (Green, 2019).

The game of politics has a variety of players that compound its complexity, the more actors, the more complex. In times of trouble, citizens turn to look to their elected members, who may be councillors, MPs and any influential person they know (Hutter and Weisskircher, 2022). These people usually do things to further their own agenda in a way that may not be in line with what the people need at that particular time.

Ethics have always been there, manifesting through the values of the people. To govern, professional practice or those people who were doing tasks for the public good, five principles of ethics were brought forward and they are autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence and fidelity (Davidson and Hughes, 2020). With ethics, professionalism can be observed in a different light, one that has high regard for the benefits to the citizens (Kenter *et al.*, 2019). The main ethical principle guiding planners is to serve the public interest by allowing them to participate in issues determining their happiness and continued livelihoods and society, provision of clear and unadulterated information and assistance in decision-making, goals and objectives through their clarification to the citizens.

Politics and planning have almost always butted heads because of the differences in outcomes expected from the two groups (Friendly, 2019). However, planning is considered a political process, hence there is need for complementarity between the two (Joelsson and Scholten, 2019). The rulers of a nation have mostly diluted the importance of planning because they expect that their plan is the most valid and viable, neglecting that some other professionals took time and patience to gather the knowledge necessary to provide valuable information that they ended up ignoring. This is mostly because of the conflict between the ruling and opposition parties where one or the other party may try to undermine the efforts of the other by impeding certain plans and goals.

Planners usually capitulate to politics of patronage, blinded by the benefits that they may get due to propelling one goal versus another (Lebakeng, 2021). This undermines the public interest goal because they will be acting on selfish interests and by so doing, erode the values of planning principles. The integrity and credibility of planning are being undermined by political actors (Nochta, Badstuber and Wahby, 2019). This has arisen as a way for political actors to gain favour in the eyes of the citizens by discontinuing a national goal in favour of goals that endear them to the citizens. This is most prominent in areas known to have residents who are vocal and critical of politicians.

There are complexities surrounding the ethics of a profession and how they are applied. This is due to the intricate



relationships between planners and citizens and other stakeholders (Hoch, 2019). This also governs the conduct of the planning profession since it is guided by the legislative, institutional and regulatory frameworks of a nation. The ideology followed by a nation determines the planning arena and, in turn, the ethics and values that they put forward. In Zimbabwe, from the 1980s to the 1990s, the goal of the country was to propel mainly economic growth and vitality and in so doing, promote the beautification of the country and improve its efficiency (Nyandoro and Hatti, 2019). In the coming years, issues, such as environmentalism, began to emerge and have also had an impact on the planning profession. This is where most contestations between political actors and planners begin. The planners determine that an area is not suitable for a certain use but political actors come in and override that decision because there is 'someone' they want to make happy and give them the green light to further their development.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this article, political planning is viewed as a crucial component because one cannot separate planning from politics because of their natures. Planning requires politics for the objectives to be met and adopted. Therein lies the importance of professionalism, where one ought to work in a manner that upholds the office they hold and also to perform the duties they are expected to do. For professionalism to be adopted in the planning field, there is need for the maintenance and encouragement of following set ethics to ensure there are accountability, transparency and fairness in all planning decisions.

### **POLITICAL PLANNING**

Political planning refers to activities of planners that have a political awareness of policy-making. It is political intervention in the management and administration of a system. Political planning intimates that political actors and planners should work together because the work that they do involves every aspect of the city, be it good or bad. This includes the economic standpoint of a city, quality of life, urban renewal or gentrification and urban preservation (Gualini, 2018). Planners perform their duties for the betterment of the lives of the people

and the politicians perform their duties by advocating for certain developments and also putting forward information to guide legislation and frameworks that work in a nation. For planning to function well, there is need for political awareness (WHO, 2018).

### **PROFESSIONALISM**

Professionalism refers to when one holds and conducts themselves in such a manner that is formal, fair, legal and in accordance with profession guidelines, values and principles (Carr, 2014). This demands some form of language and communication and respect from all involved. In professionalism, certain people are expected to hold a high standard in the implementation of tasks for the attainment of different goals (Signitzer and Prexl, 2007).

### **ETHICS**

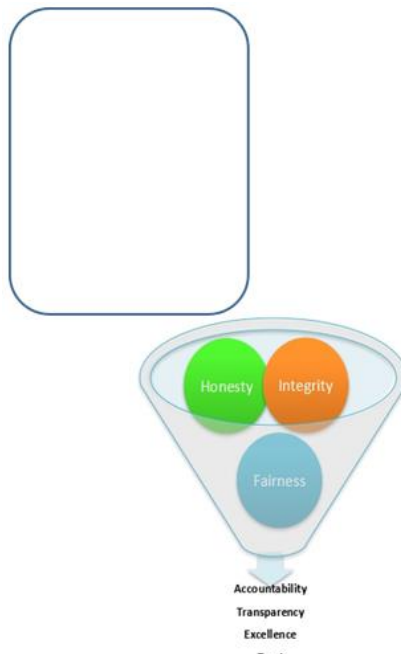
These refer to the norms by which behaviour is deemed to be acceptable or unacceptable, determined by society or national leaders (Wagner, 2018). This can also be taken to mean the various values and customs that a certain community or society have concerning their conduct and performance of tasks (Saha *et al.*, 2020). Ethics can be based on the outcome, duty, virtue or community (Carpenter, 2018). A certain outcome demanded by a policy can guide the ethics that will be employed in different settings. In another scenario, the community can determine the ethical bounds in that area depending on their societal upbringing and what they value most.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section looks at the importance of ethics in the planning field. This is vital since planning decisions have a common effect on the decision-makers and other citizens and so there is need to be considerate of those without planning powers. All people require fairness and so ethics try to balance out the unfairness that may arise in individuals. The section also looks at the concept of planning and politics being complementary, that they ought to be for the benefit of the city and the country at large.

## WHY ARE ETHICS SO IMPORTANT TO PLANNING PRACTICE?

Ethics are vital in all organisations as they provide guidance, help the relevant authorities to keep promises and encourage people to help each other (Sarwar *et al.*, 2020). In an organisation, ethics are important and cannot be ignored, especially if one wants to be an upstanding citizen who provides standard service to the people. In the planning profession, ethics are vital as they guide the planners and all those working in the planning field to be honest and therefore ensuring accountability and transparency in dealing with the people (Barrett, 2018). They provide frameworks that guide daily decision-making for everyone and the planning professionals, providing a basis for positive outcomes. Ethics encourage integrity in planning authority and development control (Pels *et al.*, 2018). This also makes citizens gain trust in their planning authorities, making them more participatory in issues to do with their community, the community's development and the budget to do with their development.



**Figure 1:** Importance of ethics in planning

Ethics are important in planning practice because of the benefits that are gained from encouraging virtue, such as accountability, transparency, excellence and trust (Weber-Lewerenz, 2021). With ethics, people in power get to use their powers for the good of the community and the country. They provide an opportunity for people to be treated fairly or equally and, therefore, awarding equal opportunities empowers previously ignored or vulnerable groups.

### **CAN POLITICS AND PLANNING BE COMPLEMENTARY?**

Politics and planning are supposed to be complementary in day-to-day business (Huq, 2020). This is because planning encompasses almost all the aspects that affect a city or a country. Therefore, it is vital for planning and politics to be in harmony since they all have an impact on the quality of life of the citizens (Dela Santa, 2018).

However, they may also be contradictory in cases where politics and planning are in contestation; for instance, in cases to do with urban renewal (Hestad *et al.*, 2020). This is a scenario where the urban area that was once flourishing goes through a period of difficulty that may be financial or human capacity challenges and development stops and the area deteriorates. With time, the government, through the local authority may embark on a mission of urban renewal. This may be frowned upon by politicians or the current occupants of that area because it means an increase in the land price of that area once development has been done and improvements have been made. An improvement of the area usually directly translates to an increase in the land price, accompanied by pushing out the urban poor in the revamped area.

When politics and politicians come in, there may be challenges in the implementation and success of the project because some politicians will need the people in that area to vote for them and so will not be willing to go against them. This has, therefore, compromised the ethics of the planner and derailed the progress of the national initiative of the betterment of the city or area, putting paid to ideals like Harare Vision 2025 of making Harare a world-class city (Magidimisha-Chipungu and Chipungu, 2021). This does not stop there since it is part of

Vision 2030 and Vision 2063 (Jumanne and Keong, 2018). Hence, without cohesion, politics can be detrimental to planning and the success of planning initiatives.

Regional planning is another sector that faces challenges, especially when politics and planning are at loggerheads (Molebatsi and Morobolo, 2021). Regional planning is determined mostly by political will and political support given to it (Chimhowu, Hulme and Munro, 2019). In the case of Zimbabwe, it was initiated as a way of reducing the urban population by developing the regional or marginal areas that were previously ignored. It is a good initiative but it can be seen that Zimbabwe is facing challenges of proper implementation and success because of political interference. Some people in rural areas are using that opportunity to put forward and 'encourage' people to vote or lean towards a certain political party, threatening that if they do not, there will be no development in their area for a long time.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study used mainly secondary data sources, such as published analysis and research documents. The focus was on Zimbabwe and how planning has been an instrument for successful planning or an instrument against successful planning initiatives. It is, therefore, a qualitative study that hinges upon quantitative aspects to gain the full picture of the politics-planning nexus. Published articles provided most of the information for the study to reveal the trend established in Zimbabwe.

## **RESULTS**

The planning arena in Zimbabwe has been shrouded mainly by political divisions. The political parties have been in some sort of tug-of-war in regard to power and planning decisions. This has been seen in land reform programmes in the country. The planning field has also seen a lot of arrests regarding abuse of power. This shows a lack of professionalism where the standards of the offices that they hold are not being upheld. The state of the economy has led a large number of corrupt individuals taking advantage of the prevailing situation and trying to benefit from those seeking services. However, some

have indulged in unprofessional practices because of intimidation from powerful people in other areas. The rapid urbanisation occurring in Zimbabwe and other developing states has led to a large rural-urban migration pattern, resulting in land scarcity. Since planners deal with spatial issues, they hold the keys to most spatial decisions, hence the need for the consciousness of professional ethics and values.

Muchadenyika and Williams (2016) believe that the planning arena is unsettled due to the political standing of the country with ZANU-PF being in control of the national policies and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) having controlling power over local authorities. This creates challenges because they are not from the same political party and there may be cases of sabotage in executing some policies or the local authorities may have challenges in performing to the best of their abilities because not enough resources may have been allocated for certain projects. Hence, politics has a major role in the planning arena.

Planning focuses on the allocation of land uses in preparation for what is to come. There is the use of master plans and layout plans that show proposed areas for different uses, be it residential, commercial or industrial. In Zimbabwe, according to Muchadenyika (2015), the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) acted as an obstacle to planning procedures ensuring that there was fairness and transparency in allocating land and for the uses it was meant for. This has, therefore, made it difficult to execute the planning procedures required for the proper sustenance of the land.

Planning requires power and that power is to decide who gets what, where and why (Bush and Doyon, 2019). It is aimed at improving the development of a city or country to achieve set national policies and agendas. Since planning is a powerful field, those who hold that power need to be accountable to the people. There have been many instances where planning office-holders have been arrested because of abuse of power (*The Herald*, 2020).

In June 2020, a town planner in Chiredzi was reportedly arrested for corruption as there were allegations of abuse of power in the allocation of residential stands (Dziva and Kabonga, 2021). In April of the same year, 26 councillors and officials were arrested for corruption (Winstone, 2020). Some were arrested on alleged crimes they committed whilst holding offices of the mayor, own clerks and housing department officers. Also, another arrest was made on 20 October 2020 on allegations of abuse of power for change of use of open spaces and being given to 'friends' of the accused (*ibid.*).

This shows that planning professional ethics are being eroded. This may be due to personal gains outlook or may be due to intimidation. The profession has been clouded in secrecy and corruption, making it difficult to be transparent and therefore making it difficult for people to have their trust in planning professionals and believe that they are working for the benefit of society.

Kampala politics interfered in planning procedures as evidenced by the land grabs that occurred (Bidandi and Williams, 2020). Coercion was a tool used by the elite in this city as a way of obtaining land that they would then sell. This could have been of great benefit to the people if planning procedures were correctly followed, with every stakeholder benefiting from the development. Some of the land that was grabbed was land designated for agricultural use and even industries and this, therefore, skews land use zones because most land was used for residential purposes. Land issues are too fragmented such that without proper ethical rule, many people suffer whilst the elite few continue to benefit.

Several ethical issues have arisen due to rapid urbanisation in most African countries. Urbanisation is accompanied by a large number of people and by infrastructure development. The masses need housing and other infrastructure services that need spatial establishment and utilisation. Professional planning ethics need to be adhered to, to function and benefit society.

## **DISCUSSION**

Planners work in the public domain and so do political actors and they provide material or information for the creation of legislation and constitutional development. The key principles that govern both planning and political ethics include integrity, responsibility, respect, fairness and honesty (Sharma, Agrawal and Khandelwal, 2019). These principles are deeply rooted in ethical considerations that need to be present in public decision-making.

In this case, integrity is seen as having the moral strength and courage to act or otherwise, depending on certain information and a person's consideration and not just knowing what the right thing to do is (Peng and Wei, 2020). This is because most times some professionals know the right thing to do. After all, the laws have been drilled into them but they would not have considered the reasoning behind those decisions. Hence, behaving correctly is important but also knowing why a certain decision is right is important

Responsibility is taking ownership of the decisions one would have made or not made, the responsibility for ones actions or inaction and the plans that they have made or plans that one failed to make (Carter *et al.*, 2020). This is a basic acceptance that every action or inaction has consequences and owning up to that is vital, especially in the public domain, because whatever action is made or not made needs someone responsible, one who has the power, to speak up and give reasons why a certain route was taken.

Respect is hinged upon treating other people with kindness, or in a courteous manner (Dument, 2019). Planners and politicians must be wary not to use derogatory language in communicating with various stakeholders be it citizens or those performing different duties. There is need to show high regard for others and by so doing, the planner will have a plan or design presented that emulates the people and empowers them and the politicians will lobby for more empowering designs and policies to reach the national goals.



Fairness is another valuable principle, where people are called upon to make decisions impartially (Kirkpatrick, 2020). There is a need for objectivity in decision-making, especially on issues to do with public interests. This calls to order those who are corrupt as fairness calls upon people to not just do what they want or make a decision that only benefit will them as it is part of human nature to be selfish. Planners and political actors are meant to be fair in decision-making, to be done on merit and not because it makes this or that person happy, disregarding the feelings and needs of others. The decisions made should be free of favouritism and prejudice and must also be free from conflicting self-interests.

Honesty is also vital as it refers to the understanding of the truth and acting truthfully, be it in communication or conduct. Being true to oneself and others is a vital trait because, with that truth, one obeys the law and follows the policies and procedures set up for them (Lindstrom, 2022).

It is vital to note that if there is need to change operations, many other things change, things such as ideology with regards to service provision and development strategies. Holding onto the negative aspects of history does not help in the improvement of how business is done, rather it makes people bitter and also chips off some of the ethical values that people may have.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Planning holds the power to control development. This can only be the case when planners are given proper power and authority to do so. Since it is a sector that holds power over other aspects of development, there is need for the establishment of professional ethics. Without ethics that govern how to do work and why, it becomes difficult to execute plans and justify them.

Politics has been seen as a major challenge to planning ethics. This is because of the high rate of planner arrests that are recorded all over the world, such as in Zimbabwe and India. This has seen people lose faith in their planning authorities because of some people who wish to gain at the expense of the

city or those who bend the rules to accommodate their friends, family and other people in return for favours.

The interruption in ethical consideration in planning has been due to a variety of issues. It has been claimed that poverty is one of the major determinants of professionals ignoring their ethical duties. This is because one entity may bribe the planning office to award a certain bid in their favour. This eliminates fairness.

A break in the ethical professional conduct of planners is also attributed to political 'interference'. This usually stems from issues of planners having agendas do not fit in with what the politicians want or deem necessary and so politicians override those agendas. Like the situation with the fast-track land reform, political interference prevented proper planning procedures from being followed.

Growing economic hardships have been a challenge to following these rules and guidelines that ensure transparency and accountability for all projects and planning decisions made. The article, therefore, concludes that one must not focus on themselves in decision-making, especially if one holds a public planning office because the fate of the community and society is in their hands. Hence, the need for a sectoral ethical guideline development to cater for the specific setting and allow transparency accountability and fairness to be present in all planning decisions made.

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