

**Philip Harrison**

South African Research Chair in Spatial Analysis and City, National Research Foundation  
University of the Witwatersrand.

[Philip.Harrison@wits.ac.za](mailto:Philip.Harrison@wits.ac.za)



He also served as a member of the National Planning Commission in the Office of the President in a non-executive and part-time role from 2010 to 2015. Previously, Prof. Harrison was Executive Director in Development Planning and Urban Management at the City of Johannesburg for 4 years from 2006 to 2010. Prior to that, he held a number of academic positions at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Natal, including Professor and Chair of Urban and Regional Planning at Wits from 2001 to 2006. He has published widely internationally in the field of urban planning and urban development with his most recent publication a jointly edited book entitled *Changing Space, Changing City: Johannesburg After Apartheid* (Wits Press)

**In the “belly of the beast”: An experiential reflection on urban governance in the City of Johannesburg**

Philip Harrison



*abstract*

I had the extraordinary experience of working as Executive Director: Development Planning and Urban Management in the metropolitan City of Johannesburg during the period 2006-2009. This was both preceded, and followed, by stints as an academic at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. In this presentation I will reflect on my “insider-outsider” relationship to urban governance in Johannesburg, commenting on both the opportunities and complexities of cross-overs between the university and city government. I will also provide a brief commentary on the city’s response to key governance issues during the time of my tenure within the administration. These include “inner city regeneration”, “informal settlement upgrading”, “the Alexandra Renewal Programme”, “the development of Soweto”, “urban growth management”, “preparations for the world cup” and “energy efficiency”. I will show a complex entanglement of intentions and outcomes as a competing set of imperatives shaped the programmes and actions of the administration. These included the need to: stabilize finances and promote ongoing economic development; the desire to “normalize” and order the city (responding in part to the interests of an emergent black middle class and of the still influential white rate-payers); and the desire to deliver to a mainly poor and black political constituency.