

Summary of Interviewee Transcript

PhD Researcher embedded in City of Cape Town

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1. Role of the Interviewee

The Interviewee discusses their involvement in a PhD program embedded within the Cape Town city government, starting in 2017. This program aimed at integrating academic research with real-world municipal planning to address urban issues effectively. Initially, this integration seemed promising but ended up being chaotic and unstructured, leading to confusion about roles, objectives, and research boundaries.

The Interviewee mentions starting in the second cohort of the program, focusing on improving Cape Town's BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) program, encouraged by then-Mayor Patricia de Lille and other officials to innovate freely. However, political shifts dramatically affected the program. The ousting of key political figures and subsequent legal challenges halted many projects, including the Interviewee's original PhD project on Transit-Oriented Development (TOD).

After these setbacks, the Interviewee had to redefine their PhD topic amidst political accusations and restart their academic journey. The advent of COVID-19 further complicated their studies, freezing ongoing work and drying up funding sources.

Parallel to their PhD struggles, the Interviewee continued consulting work, notably contributing to the IPCC's 6th assessment report. This work led them to explore new methodologies in transport planning, emphasizing adaptability and resilience, reflecting on deep uncertainty in climate science and urban planning. They have adopted innovative planning approaches, such as the "Triple Access" planning methodology, becoming a pioneer in this area.

2. Implementation of research

The Interviewee describes the challenges and changes involved in implementing new methodologies in transport planning within the Cape Town city government. Initially facing resistance due to established practices among senior planners, they introduced innovative planning approaches that emphasize handling deep uncertainty rather than traditional optimization models. This shift met skepticism, particularly from experienced personnel who were comfortable with existing methods.

The introduction of the "Triple Access" planning and deep uncertainty approaches aimed to revamp how future transportation needs were predicted and managed.

These methods questioned the reliability of the longstanding four-step model in transport planning, which relies on predicting trip generation and matching it to destinations far in advance. The Interviewee, advocating for more adaptive planning techniques, faced initial resistance but gradually gained support from key figures within the city government and external advisors.

The new mayor, Geordin, was supportive, allowing the Interviewee and their team to implement these new methods in projects like the IPTN. They even brought in futurists to assist, emphasizing the need for fresh perspectives in transport planning. Despite the tough transition for consultants who had expected a typical update to existing plans, the Interviewee's team managed to begin shifting the paradigm towards a more flexible and future-responsive planning process.

3. Challenges and processes involved in incorporating a wide range of perspectives

The Interviewee discusses the challenges and processes involved in incorporating a wide range of perspectives from across the entire city government into their planning process. This diverse inclusion was a first for them and was particularly useful in identifying critical uncertainties in urban planning scenarios. However, the participant demographic skewed older, which influenced concerns primarily towards economic downturns and informality, areas the Interviewee was less worried about.

They highlighted that the economy's downturns and informal sectors aren't inherently negative and can self-correct over time. The perception of these issues as predominantly negative seemed to stem more from the participants' biases rather than objective assessments. To address this, the Interviewee had to enforce a more neutral, open-minded approach to scenario planning, emphasizing that no future scenario is inherently bad or good, but just different contexts in which the city must operate.

In terms of methodology, they discussed the challenges of working with consultants to model these diverse future scenarios within the Integrated Public Transport Network (IPTN). Despite the difficulty in predicting the future, which was a key argument against traditional optimization models, they needed to develop a model to meet IPTN requirements. This involved adapting the modelling approach to align with the realities of unpredictable future scenarios while adhering to certain non-negotiable principles, much to the consultants' dismay.

4. Assessing critical uncertainties and major variables affecting transport demand.

The Interviewee discusses an innovative approach to urban network planning which they were involved in before leaving their position. This approach, devised for the Integrated Public Transport Network (IPTN), involved assessing critical uncertainties and major variables affecting transport demand. They shifted from focusing solely on critical uncertainties, which could cancel each other out, to a more holistic consideration of all variables influencing network planning.

The process began with assessing trip generation, which involves the geographic distribution of trip origins and destinations, to forecast transportation needs. This information was then evaluated through a Delphi survey involving experts from various fields to predict extreme but plausible future scenarios for transportation demand. Examples provided include scenarios where technological advancements or changes in urban design lead to drastically lower transport demands.

These assessments helped inform the creation of adaptable, resilient network models that could accommodate a wide range of future scenarios without requiring complete optimization. Instead of aiming for a perfect model, the strategy focused on creating a "minimum viable network" that could evolve over time to meet various potential futures identified in the scenarios. This method emphasized flexibility, allowing for adjustments as new information became available or as circumstances changed, thus providing a practical framework for long-term urban planning.

This new methodology stood in contrast to traditional optimization strategies by prioritizing adaptability and resilience over efficiency. The Interviewee elaborates that this approach requires some redundancy and multifunctionality in network elements to ensure they can serve multiple potential futures, a stark departure from the efficiency-driven models typically used in the past.

Overall, the Interviewee describes a shift from a rigid, predictive model of urban planning to a more dynamic, adaptable method that prepares the transport network to handle various future scenarios effectively.

The Interviewee describes how a proposed citizen's assembly model intended to integrate public input directly into transportation planning was altered due to political and personal risks identified by the city government. Instead of an open

public forum, the process was internalized within the city government. This internal citizens' assembly included representatives from social services and the gender mainstreaming unit, among others, who were tasked with speaking on behalf of various community groups.

To compensate for the lack of direct public engagement, the team utilised design thinking to create user personas that represented a broad spectrum of societal views and needs. These personas helped in developing scenarios for the transportation planning process, although the approach was acknowledged by the Interviewee as a crude workaround.

The initial ambition for broader civic engagement was scaled back, resulting in a compromise necessary to move forward with the planning process. Despite these challenges, the Interviewee notes that they attempted to gather broader public input by adding relevant questions to a survey aiming to capture public preferences regarding future transportation needs. This method was seen as a supplementary way to feed public opinion into the planning process, although it was not the original, more inclusive approach envisioned.