

Book Review

Space and Planning in Secondary Cities

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Space and Planning in Secondary Cities. Reflections from South Africa

Lochner Marais & Verna Nel (Editors)

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The book ‘Space and Planning in Secondary Cities. Reflections from South Africa’ explores different modes of urban governance in what has been considered a new category of municipalities in South Africa, the ‘secondary cities’, a tier of urban settlements below the metro areas, and which have been somehow neglected by planning scholarship focused on South Africa’s urban development. The evidence provided in the book, on the urban dynamics prevailing in these areas and on policy responses as well, and the critical insights offered by the fourteen contributing authors, make the book relevant for readers of the International Journal of E-Planning Research interested on issues of urban planning in Africa. The book explores the changes occurring in the planning field in South Africa, part of a much wider global trend towards decentralized planning, which in South Africa, as the book suggests, have had limited results so far. In looking at this, the book seeks to answer the central research question that structures the different chapters that make up the book- ‘what is holding back spatial transformation in South Africa’s secondary cities?’.

The book is organized in 13 chapters and comprises ten case studies, secondary cities located in different regions of South Africa: Drakestein; Lephalale; Mahikeng; Matihabeng; Mbombela; Msunduzi; Polokwane; Rustenburg; Sol Plaatje; and Stellenbosch. The first two chapters introduce the research whose outcome is presented in the following ten chapters and the last chapter summarizes the findings from the perspective of complexity theory. Each chapter provides an introduction to the city profile, its history, geography, socio-economic characteristics, spatial development process, and spatial planning issues. Together these chapters seek to describe the nature of the spatial changes in these ten cities and to identify the factors responsible for these changes. In doing this, each of the following chapters also seek to assess some of the key policy programs being implemented in the country, and through that to understand the contradictions and unintended outcomes of spatial planning in these ten secondary cities.

The first two chapters provide an introduction to the remaining chapters. In chapter 1 - ‘Secondary cities and spatial transformation in South Africa’ - Lochner Marais, Danie du Plessis, Verna Nel and

Jan Cloete introduce the research done in this study, starting by setting up the context and background of the cases examined in the following chapters as well as the spatial planning legacy and how the planning system looked to this problem in South Africa over the years, during the apartheid period, as well as after the political transition to democracy. This chapter offers also an overview of the following chapters that make up this consistent and well-informed piece of planning scholarship. The second chapter ('Planning in Complex Spaces: An orderly and Predictable World?'), written by Vera Nel, offers a broad perspective of the complexity theory in planning and of some of the key themes it addresses in this particular field (certainty; experiences differs; vulnerability; context and time; change is often incremental and slow; citizen participation and leadership are essential; unintended consequences). Verna Nel provides in this chapter a theoretical overview of complexity and discusses the policy and the tools needed to promote change and transformation in a context marked often by complexity and wicked problems.

The following ten chapters present the case studies referred before. In chapter 3 ('Darkenstein: The shining pearl in the shadow of the Cape Town Metro') Ronnie Donaldson and Anele Horn put in evidence some of the challenges with which these cities are confronted in South Africa, namely the complexities of having to address in a satisfactory way conflicting policy demands in the field of social justice, economic growth and efficiency, and environmental protection. This is followed in chapter 4 - 'Lephalale: The energy hub of the Limpopo Province' - written by Kgosi Mocwagae and Jan Cloete by examples of the challenges faced by the local planning system in cities whose economic base is grounded on the mining industry complex, as is the case of this city, an activity that places pressures on land use in these smaller cities. The authors examine and discuss the difficulties experienced by this kind of city in circumstances such as those in which people do not intend to settle there permanently. This case is a good example of the impacts of a mining industry in a small secondary city and how difficult it is to plan due to that reason.

In chapter 5 - 'Mahikeng: A remote provincial capital with a turbulent history' - Verna Nel and James Drummond deal with the history and location of the city, important factors behind the current problems faced by these secondary cities as is the case of Mahikeng. Also important is the lack of due consideration by the planning function by the local authority as is the case here. Stuart Paul Denoon-Stevens in chapter 6 - 'Matjhabeng: Planning in the face of the free state goldfields decline' explores the constraints faced by planning in cities dependent on goldmines when this activity enters in decline. Matjhabeng illustrates to some extent the attempts to apply in Africa the planning principles prevailing in Europe and later also in North America. In this case the 'garden city' principles, among other models. The chapter also examines the difficulties of planning in face of powerful market forces.

Maléne Campbell in the following chapter - 'Mbombela: A growing provincial capital and tourism destination' - provides evidence that supports findings of other chapters that point to the need of flexible planning approaches. This idea of resilience, which requires flexible and adaptable planning approaches, emerges clearly from this chapter and from other chapters in the book as well. This means also the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches that could eventually reinforce each other. Chapter 8 - 'Msunduzi: Spatially integrating Kwazulu-Natal's diverse capital' - authored by Thulisile Mphambukeli brings to light other dimensions of the challenges confronting spatial planning and urban government in these secondary cities, such as corruption, together with the lack of local government capacity, an issue common to many other of these cities examined in the book.

Gemey Abrahams and Lochner Marais in chapter 9 - 'Polokwane: A secondary city with a 2020 vision' - provide evidence that highlight, besides other issues, the differences between municipal departments, namely between the planning department and the other municipal departments, which seem to ignore the plans and guidance from the planners. Nonetheless, despite of this, the authors argue that there is evidence of governance integration. In chapter 10 - 'Rustenburg: Boom and bust in a mining town' - John Ntema examines a case in which, despite all policy efforts, the city remains spatially disintegrated and with strong spatial disparities. It is also another example of the situation

identified in other cities examined in the book in which local government or the planning authority is caught between the powerful mining companies and the specific local conditions, in this case the special regimes applied in areas under tribal authority with specific land ownership regimes and with different set of values as well.

This is followed by the last two case studies. In 'Sol Plaatje: Planning on old mining site' - Thomas Stewart examines a city that experienced the decline of mining activities. It is a good illustration of how spatial rigidities continue to influence the spatial form of the city, and how the history of the mining industry is still present in the availability of land for urban development. Danie du Plessis, in 'Stellenbosch: Change comes to a historical university town', deals with the second oldest town of South Africa. The evidence provided suggests success in some strategic objectives while in others the system has been less successful. It also points to the need to rethink the way spatial planning is considered in these cities, a lesson that is of interest certainly for other cities in South Africa and elsewhere. The idea points to a shift from the rational planning paradigm to a planning mode that promotes learning and in which space and time are collectively interpreted and understood, contrary to the idea of an absolute space and time in the rational planning paradigm. This conceptual shift has methodological consequences and requires different planning tools. Some of these requirements are materialized with timescales different from that established in the formal planning and regulatory systems.

The book ends with chapter 13 - 'Complexity theory and spatial change in ten secondary cities' - written by editors Lochner Marais and Verna Nel. As the editors argue these chapters offer evidence that allow a good understanding of the spatial change that is taking place in these ten cities. The evidence provided allow the identification of the contradictions between policy intentions and the outcomes on the ground, due to conditions that are common in complex systems. There are important differences between what the national urban policy in South Africa seeks and the outcomes on the ground, in particular in what regards the overcoming of spatial injustice and socio-economic inequality, due largely to inefficient planning processes and also to the conflicting aims confronting planners in these cities.

Planners in these secondary cities in South Africa are confronted with conflicting policy aims and requirements, as the multiple examples provided around urban land policy, tax revenues and environmental protection show. There is in fact a divergence between the planners desire of a dense, compact, sustainable and equitable city and what have developed so far in these secondary cities in South Africa. Uncertainties due to the vulnerability of their economies, disruptions and slow change in the urban structure and dynamics in these cities and in the planning system, disjuncture between plans and practice, and the influence of interest groups, common characteristics of complex systems, may explain the differences found between intentions and outcomes in the planning field in these cities. Some of these cities illustrate well the fact that cities in South Africa still have to live with the consequences of the apartheid spatial planning, which is still present in the current structures and processes several decades after the transition to democracy.

These case studies clearly show that it is necessary a much broader perspective and comprehension of the complexity of the urban situation in each city. To have a clear view of the resources limitation experienced by these cities is also an important requirement if we intend to understand the workings of the planning system. In fact, another challenge that seems common to all these secondary cities is the lack or reduced planning capacity to confront the interest of large mining and energy companies. This research points to the need of innovative planning responses able to limit sprawl, save land, reduce costs, and increase efficiency in municipal services, preparing the municipality to deal more efficiently with the different cycles of the economy. This would include some form of public housing for rent considering the temporary character of part of this population boom. As is argued in the book, it seems necessary a temporary housing approach as part of spatial planning in mining areas as well as other innovative policy approaches. In conclusion, the way out of this situation starts, as

the editors and authors suggest, in the recognition of the complexity of the system. This requires a holistic perspective and an accurate identification of the drivers for change. Anyone or any local authority moving to forms of urban e-planning do need to be aware of this. Digital technologies may favour the practicalities of the process of change, but the essential change is one of a different order as this book competently points out with ample empirical evidence.

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