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Partie II Villes secondaires, confins et métropoles : l'innovation au cœur ou à la périphérie ?

Benoit ALLANIC (Universités de Pretoria et de Paris I):

Living in the country - from dumping grounds

to attractive residential settlements

Living in the country – from dumping grounds to attractive residential settlements

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This presentation is based on recent fieldwork research and development work conducted in peri-urban and rural areas of North-West, Eastern Cape and Northern Province. It focuses on socioeconomic realities, tenure security, livelihoods and local economic development (LED) and argues that delivery will be problematical if planning and policies are structured around interpretations of reality which remain oblivious to social change.

Persistent paradigms

Since 1995, there has been some real improvement in these rural and peri-urban areas mainly through infrastructure development. However we still have to remove the greatest (single) barrier to further development and especially to efficient and effective local economic development that will begin to address poverty, job creation and sustainable redistribution. This barrier appears to be in the mind and based on stereotypes which are often off target. Existing accepted socioeconomic and development paradigms derive mainly from the South African 1996 census definitions and findings. It divides the population into “urban” and “non-urban”:

- “urban” applies to towns, cities and metropolitan areas legally defined as urban;
- “non-urban” includes semi-urban areas adjoining but not part of legally proclaimed urban areas, commercial farms, small settlements, rural villages and areas further away from towns and cities. Non-urban areas are said to be reservoirs of large-scale unemployment containing the poorest of the poor whose survival rests on subsistence agriculture, pensions and migrant remittances.

For example, the Northern Province’s population¹ distribution between urban / non-urban is given as

Urban:	11,60%
Non-urban:	88,40%

These parameters encapsulate the bulk of the population in a static uni-dimensional non-urban / rural universe. So called non-urban inhabitants – the majority of the Northern Province, Eastern Cape and North-West – are perceived as frozen in time, helpless and hopeless ... They are never seen as active role-players manipulating existing realities to maximize any and all opportunities and benefits available. These opportunities may include best-value optimization of residential locality as well as whatever government and donor aid can be accessed.

With respect to livelihoods, lifestyles and aspirations, the majority of the so-called rural inhabitants are in fact functionally urban, living largely in settlements of the same kind.

¹ Total population of Northern Province is 5 310 000

Therefore policy errs when it views these communities as rural. Land redistribution, one of the three legs of land reform, is tied to some productivity (read agriculture) on the land. Assumptions that new livelihood opportunities can be created for essentially urbanized and increasingly well-educated populations through subsistence and small-scale commercial / co-operative farming ventures appear unrealistic ... and are attracting very little grassroots interest.

It is also inappropriate to see these rural / peri-urban settlements as displaced urban areas. In the Odi-Moretele region for example people do not perceive their own families as displaced or as discarded urbanites. Respondents reported that almost all family members (79%) like living “in the country” and do not want to move to towns or cities. While a total of 27% had rural roots, a total of 34% had migrated in from urban habitats including Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Brick-and-mortar investment and housing renaissance

The residential quality of life is also far better than usually portrayed. People are investing in housing and property improvement before *de jure* formalisation of their land rights. The substantial bricks and mortar investments being made indicate a commitment to permanent residence in such settlements. This housing renaissance is a countrywide phenomenon. It arises from a *de facto* sense of land ownership. It reveals a significant transfer of house construction technology. The great architectural variety of these owner-built / owner-developed homes shown on the pictures is a striking feature. This diversity breaks the original Soweto mould. It is also a statement that loudly and unambiguously proclaims individual identity. It is a positive contribution to residential quality of life. People have been able to self-source this residential upgrading and beautification.

The heart of the matter is that people themselves appear to be making sound economic “value for money” choices to live in the country rather than migrating closer to their mainly urban workplaces. This proactive self-determination and its relationship to meaningful upward mobility appear to have been overlooked in the extensive problematising of rural realities and potentials. People are not waiting and dependent on government leadership, intervention or legal edict to further their interests. They go for the gaps which have become available specifically in such “rural” areas, offering opportunities for dramatic, affordable improvements to their residential quality of life in advance of the expected formalisation of tenure rights.

This impressive bricks-and-mortar investment has major implications on regional development and planning².

Upward mobility, achievement and success are common values to all South Africans. The two main criteria for measuring individual status are the work you do and the house you live in.

Local economic development

Something, which is also undervalued, is the steady increase of self-initiated SMME activities with and around such settlements as well as in urban street trading. There is an obvious correlation between levels of formal employment and the extent of SMMEs in any particular settlement. SMMEs grow largely via redistribution of disposable incomes and cannot substitute for formal employment. To lay

² Let us remember that this self-funded house construction and property improvement is happening in a period of massive retrenchments in the formal sector and low incomes. It shows extraordinary, unrecognized and untapped capacities within the ranks of those generally perceived as helpless, hopeless, poorest of the poor.

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responsibility on the SMME sector to substitute for formal employment overlooks this essential connection. Rather than stimulating further self-employment, job shrinkages in formal employment tend to diminish local economic activities.

The sum total of SMME activities goes beyond so-called “survivalist agriculture”. It includes registered, licensed supermarkets, general dealers, liquor outlets, petrol stations, tombstone and burial establishments, transport enterprises, taverns, hairdressing and beauty salons, neighbourhood spazas and tuckshops, car and other repair outfits, photographers,

There are numerous impressive entrepreneurial success stories. There are also visible and easily verifiable signs of a much more robust and encouraging grassroots socioeconomic reality than usually portrayed. They confirm the existence of a pervasive grassroots momentum towards upward mobility.

Properly recognized, respected and nurtured, this self-motivated local level impetus towards betterment and upliftment could profitably be harnessed to LED initiatives. Unfortunately LED planning in the Northern Province excludes at the moment this economically active grassroots majority as meaningful role-players in this process. Without appropriate corrections, community buy-in is likely to remain at its present minimal levels or even reinforce diminishing “beneficiary” participation in ongoing state-driven projects.

The understanding of LED differs between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of Provincial and Local Government. The approach of poverty alleviation promoted by the DPLG and the Social Welfare department clearly dominates. Poverty alleviation projects lead to Local Economic Dependency. They are characterized by the replication of a narrow range of poverty alleviation generics, e.g. brick-making, sewing groups, food gardens, poultry, ...

They are mainly unsustainable; they are funded and seek refunding from what seems to be interpreted as a bottomless donor-fund purse; they don’t have the capacity to generate real grassroots income opportunities; they result in general community disinterest.

Socioeconomic development and social change should be brought into light. Their continued invisibility can only hamper sustainable solutions to poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth, assets, resources and opportunities. LED has so far tended to produce poverty alleviation scenarios in which actual income-generating job creation, sustainability and meaningful grassroots buy-in have not been prioritized. Sensitivity and readiness to act in accordance with social change provides avenues for economic innovation.

Local economic development is by definition innovation oriented. But even within resource and capacity privileged circles, innovation is a scarce commodity. An obvious barrier is lack of innovation resources and capacity within bureaucracies as well as within disadvantaged circles.

To start they should adopt more realistic criteria to achieve LED:

- Market-driven sustainability structured around products which meet existing and evolving consumer preferences and expectations, i.e. customers for products offered or planned;
- Use of local economic potentials or resources;
- Local/provincial/national/international buy-in providing synergies and support. It occurs only after innovators or risk takers have driven the initiative to the point where its economic status can no longer be overlooked and its potential for success is apparent to the wider potential

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stakeholder arena. Sharper understanding of this dynamic and of the economic value of innovation would appear to be priority provincial and local government capacity-building components;

- Knowledge of and access to developmental and institutional frameworks e.g. marketing, legalities, funding, etc.

Conclusion

There is a widely expressed interest in formalizing tenure rights to occupied land via *de jure* individual title deeds. People see title deeds as a way to protect property and for some as a way to access funds with property as collateral.

Pull of place and *de facto* tenure security have also clearly been influenced by improvements to infrastructures and the expectation that this process will continue, to eventually include indoor flush toilets, tarred roads, and other amenities further enhancing quality of life.

Successful, sustainable LED planning and policies require an integrated economic development framework. Top-down separation of the population into two nations with the LED focus on one only, assuming it will be ready to put aside its upwardly mobile first-world aspirations and accept third-world LED, does not appear to be a recipe for sustainable success.