

## Preface

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The dramatic political changes occurring in South Africa during the 1990s not only ushered in a new chapter in the country's history but also generated much academic interest in the problems and challenges of the transformation. This interest has been evidenced in prolific scholarship, with all aspects of societal transformation becoming the subject of investigation. South Africa's urban areas in particular have been the focal point of extensive research, with recent reviews in *The South African Geographical Journal* (2002) and *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* (2000), along with a host of books and edited collections, sketching the contours of the diverse social, economic, political and environmental dynamics in operation. An important shift in the focus of South African geographical research has been an overwhelming interest in post-apartheid urban change. This is not surprising in that the past decade has seen a dramatic demographic shift towards urban centres, stimulated by a host of social, economic and environmental processes, one of the foremost being the abrogation of legislation curbing people's movement to the cities. Since the abolition of apartheid legislation, South Africa has witnessed extraordinary urban change, with urban planners and managers being faced with the task of reconstructing its uneven and unequal spatialities.

This *Acta Academica Supplementum* offers a number of perspectives on the problems and challenges currently posed by the multifarious processes of transformation taking place in post-apartheid urban areas. As such this volume follows on from a number of descriptions, analyses and commentaries published in recent special issues of national and international journals. In this context, then, we should perhaps explain the rationale behind offering yet another "special issue", when so many others are vying for attention. In fact, a colleague remarked at the recently concluded International Geographical Union conference in Durban that post-apartheid urban society must be among the most diligently researched subjects in the world. Indeed,

relative to other regions of the developing world, South Africa is fortunate that many in the academy find its urban problems and challenges worthy of study.

Our response is that there is some truth in this remark, in that certain urban centres in post-apartheid South Africa have received disproportionate academic attention over the past decade. Cape Town and Durban, and Johannesburg in particular, have been the sites of countless waves of research with all manner of urban phenomena admirably relayed through their rapidly changing spatialities. As the key economic metropolitan regions of southern Africa, and in view of the ease with which discussions thereof interlink with the perennial geographical and planning debates concerning the uneven development and distribution of natural and human resources, this is both predictable and necessary. However, as a consequence of this dominance, our understanding of South Africa's urban challenges and problems has become somewhat skewed towards those of particular metropolitan regions, thus denying the diversity of issues prevailing in other post-apartheid urban areas. The papers in the present collection focus on urban centres which feature less frequently in the academic press. Although the research reported here also highlights many of the "classic" post-apartheid challenges and problems, the exploration of these issues is on a different scale and in different locational contexts, which in our view presents fundamentally new and unexpected perspectives on South Africa's changing urban society and its many problems and challenges.

The general narrative concerning urban change in South Africa, not least in academic debates on inner-city urban change in late- and post-apartheid South Africa, has to a large degree been framed by developments in Johannesburg. Economic decentralisation dominated the dynamics of urban development in Johannesburg during the 1980s and 1990s. This was primarily attributed to changes in the nature of demand for office space and retail commodities in the Central Business District (CBD), which contributed towards the physical decay that has supposedly come to define all South Africa's CBDs and surrounding inner-city areas. Yet, a theme that has emerged in the geographical discourse of the past two decades is that processes of urban change and transformation are differentiated over space, with

the particularities of place central to its explanation. Indeed, as Robinson challenges urban theorists' obsession with presenting the cities of "the North" as somehow emblematic of a trajectory of urban change predestined for "the South", a similar argument holds for our interpretation of transformation in South African urban areas. Whereas the problems and challenges of South Africa's CBDs and inner-city areas undoubtedly have many commonalities, they are nevertheless not reducible to the fortunes of one city — Johannesburg — alone, for they are adapting differentially to post-apartheid urban transformation processes, posing different problems and challenges for urban managers and planners.

In this context, Donaldson *et al's* analysis of inner-city change in Johannesburg's neighbouring metropolitan region of Pretoria comes into sharp focus. Whereas a large literature has been developed on Johannesburg's high-density residential areas of Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville, Pretoria's equivalent, Sunnyside, has rarely made an appearance in the academic press. It has experienced major social and spatial changes since the mid-1990s. Like other metropolitan areas, this city's spatial structure has been shaped by urban developmental processes such as decentralisation, desegregation and deconcentration. In assessing these changes in the context of the ways in which the inner city is transforming and positioning itself, these authors provide insights into what they consider to be an inner-city success story in terms of adaptation to the radical urban changes of the past decade.

The demise of apartheid and its impact on urban spaces has opened up exciting challenges for reshaping formerly monocentric and racially based land-use structures. Such spaces, created by apartheid planning, are now being reworked by means of different types of engagement with the South African urban fabric. Although they are in continuous flux, an emerging trend of post-apartheid cities relates to increasing resegregation along socio-economic lines. Jürgens *et al's* paper on socio-demographic transformation in the Bloemfontein inner-city area since the abolition of apartheid regulations provides new insights into the urban desegregation process which may be interpreted as betraying post-apartheid urban policy ambitions for a more racially and economically integrated city. This article examines the residential desegregation of Bloemfontein's CBD against a theo-

retical framework and in comparison to desegregation patterns in the CBDs of other major cities in South Africa. It is argued that although desegregation in the Bloemfontein CBD started later, is less extensive and on a smaller scale than in other urban areas, it has increased rapidly since 1991 and had reached levels of around 50% by 2001. The impact of the specificity of place is clearly reflected in the suggestion that these low levels of desegregation can be attributed to the historically conservative character of Bloemfontein, but also to the compactness of the city, where desegregation is not necessarily required as a mechanism to save on transport costs (in opposition to cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, for example). It is also argued that the repeal of the Group Areas Act and the subsequent desegregation of the inner city have not inevitably resulted in an integrated area with a new South African urban culture. On the contrary, this research suggests that very much the opposite has occurred in the CBD, with a new level of segregation emerging. The causal link is found elsewhere in the city, as the degree of desegregation in the northern parts of the CBD is limited, with a relatively high level of segregation, which is concomitant with the outflow of white people from the southern parts.

Whereas these processes in Bloemfontein's CBD have to a large extent been involuntary outcomes, the continued segregation of residential areas in South Africa's urban areas can perhaps also be related to insufficiently conceptualised policies, those relating to housing probably being the most striking examples. A key policy concern of the post-apartheid government has been the provision of formal housing to low-income earners so as to clear the large informal settlements that have come to define many South African urban areas. Although this policy was initially beset by problems related to implementation, it has become a key achievement in terms of the number of housing units delivered since 1994. Yet, seen in a different light, the selfsame housing policy has been instrumental in the maintenance of the divided residential and economic functions of South African urban areas. Failure to stimulate the economic and social integration of the city, both internal to particular urban settlements and across the urban hierarchy, has come to bedevil official housing policy. Whereas the post-apartheid government has admittedly provided very many

people with permanent shelter, they force the urban poor to live in economically and environmentally unsustainable areas.

These experiences have prompted policy developers and a range of civic organisations to rethink post-apartheid strategies in terms of housing delivery. Maishoane *et al*, in their article “Upgrading informal housing units: preliminary evidence from Sejake Square”, provide insights into one of these alternative housing strategies in the context of the Mangaung Municipality in the Free State Province. These authors argue that despite the fact that South African housing policy is based on the premise of incremental housing, a fierce debate has prevailed in terms of what role low-income households can play in their own housing environment. Drawing on empirical evidence from Sejake Square, it is argued that, given the right environment, low-income households are actively involved in the upgrading of their informal housing units to more formal units. The main finding of this research is that in contrast to currently housing policies, which see lower-income earners as passive recipients of housing, government could consider an additional (and/or) alternative method and provide only urban infrastructure, leaving the construction of the housing units to low-income households.

In response to the changing structural dynamics of South African cities, but in particular the inner-city areas around the CBDs, numerous urban renewal programmes, many central to the reversal of the process of deterioration, have been introduced. Internationally, perhaps the most controversial form of urban renewal to emerge over the past 30 years has been the process of gentrification, a complex and varied form of urban regeneration. Given the changing nature of many inner-city areas since the advent of the post-apartheid dispensation, gentrification processes have been largely absent. In his paper, “Gentrification: prospects for urban South African society?”, Visser argues that recent developments in the management of South African city-centres, most notably Cape Town and Johannesburg, in addition to significant rent-gaps between CBDs and decentralised nodes, present classic opportunities for gentrification processes to emerge as a part of urban regeneration. Seen against this backdrop, the objective of Visser’s paper is to highlight some of the current trends in the study of gentrification and assess its potential as a site for research into the

South African urban system, not only in the metropolitan regions but across the urban hierarchy.

Migration as a key contributor to urbanisation in South Africa is underpinned by structural changes in society consequent upon the development of industrial capitalism. Cities are the foci of production, distribution and exchange processes that lie at the heart of this mode of production, because of the economies of scale and the benefits of concentration and centralisation of ownership. Hence urbanisation is seen as a necessary component of industrialisation and urbanisation. A rich vein of research has developed around the issue of migration, both internationally and regionally. In this respect a number of geographers' contributions have been central to understanding migrancy in post-apartheid South Africa. These wide-ranging studies have focused in particular on the backward and forward linkages between the industrial heartland of South Africa — Gauteng — and a number of other regions in South Africa and abroad. What is clear from this body of research is that migration within South Africa is highly complex. However, much of this research takes the metropolitan regions as its main focal point, in large part because of their dominance in the regional economy. The article by Bekker & Cramer, "Coloured migration in the Cape region at the beginning of the twenty-first century", focuses on the migration trends of the Coloured ethnic community, which seem to be out of kilter with those of other South African population groups. It argues that the nature of the urbanisation process for members of the Coloured ethnic group in the Western and Northern Cape Provinces is changing. It is suggested that urbanisation in this region could previously be described as a process of step-wise gravity flow migration from Cape Town's hinterland to the metropolitan area. Bekker & Cramer's research suggests that although the rural-urban process of migration continues, the destination areas are now regional towns in the Western Cape rather than Cape Town itself.

Many people migrate to urban areas with the objective of escaping rural poverty and of participating in urban processes of production. However, more often than not, these migrants do not find employment in the urban areas. In this context, new urban migrants are vulnerable not only in terms of their need for shelter but also in terms of

food security. In this respect Rogerson's article on urban agriculture aims to provide insight into a survival strategy often overlooked in urban policy development. Poverty is one of the central defining features of life in post-apartheid cities. The extent, extremity and growth of urban poverty highlight the imperative of developing strategies for economic development which specifically address the needs of South Africa's poor. At the core of what is termed "pro-poor" urban interventions are national government-led strategies which enhance the asset base of urban dwellers in terms of their access to essential infrastructure, services, shelter or job opportunities. Nevertheless, a range of other critical interventions might also assist in the promotion of sustainable livelihoods for poor urban dwellers and in the making of more inclusive cities. Many of these alternative interventions for pro-poor urban development can be undertaken by municipal or local government and represent local initiatives for poverty alleviation. In some cases such initiatives are incorporated into broader and more co-ordinated local strategies for urban economic development. The objective of Rogerson's paper is to consider one significant local-level intervention for poverty alleviation in South African cities. The focus falls on analysing the role of urban agriculture as an element in pro-poor urban development planning.

To alleviate the need for such strategies, most local authorities have aimed to generate income and employment through changes in their production functions. Locally and internationally the changing nature of the economic base of towns and cities has been fundamental to a range of spatial reconfigurations like the decentralisation and (re)segregation highlighted elsewhere in this collection. Yet, not all urban areas have undergone these changes and not all development responses have been the same. Kotze provides an analysis of a town that has been undergoing a number of economic changes, but has responded in a rather unusual manner. Drawing on an example of an urban area, in a part of South Africa generally not remarked upon in the academic press, "Changing economic bases: Orania as a case study of small-town development in South Africa" tracks the shifting economic base of Orania in the recent past. Whereas local economic development strategies elsewhere in post-apartheid South Africa have tended to shift towards higher economic functions and away from

agricultural production, Orania presents an interesting case study of a town where a local authority has opted for the development and extension of an agricultural economic base in pursuit of urban (re)development and expansion.

In accordance with global trends, South African legislation is moving towards spatial planning and land development which integrates environmental concerns within a holistic environmental management system. In this context environmental management has come to frame all aspects of South African urban development presented with the challenging task of negotiating a minefield of conflicting social, cultural, political and environmental concerns. In her paper "Environmental management in the city: electricity supply in Hillsboro, Bloemfontein", Kruger demonstrates the practical implications of environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the expansion of the electricity grid in the city of Bloemfontein. This paper suggests that while EIA may be desirable, it can create many challenges and problems for urban planners, local political representatives and civic society. Whereas EIA aims to pre-empt the many potential and actual negative externalities of human development upon both the natural and the human environment, many urban developments are not scrutinised in this manner.

One of the most problematic and challenging issues for post-apartheid cities relates to the preservation of scarce resources — such as water — that fulfil basic human needs in the context of rapid urbanisation and in the absence of planning frameworks such as EIA. In this respect the study by Pretorius & De Villiers aims to assess the impact of developing urban communities on the quality of urban water. The authors suggest that the rapid urbanisation typical of the post-apartheid era, coupled with the backlog in services in many of the poorer urban communities, has led to an increase in the quantity of polluted urban runoff to which the water resources of South Africa are subjected. This article identifies and discusses the degradation of the water quality and the impact of this on human health, particularly on those most vulnerable in areas where safe piped water is not readily available.

Finally, this special issue concludes with a polemical contribution by Visser which we believe is relevant both to the problems and chal-



lenges discussed in this collection of papers and to the general reflections of geographers and social scientists on post-apartheid transition. In his paper, "Unvoiced and invisible: on the transparency of white South Africans in post-apartheid geographical discourse", it is argued that in mapping post-apartheid urban change, "white" geographies of the apartheid era have merely been replaced by "black" geographies. This position, in Visser's view, is impeding the development of truly representative post-apartheid geographies. Consequently, the many-sided dialectic relationships that constitute South African spatialities are being overlooked. Drawing on poverty research as an example, the paper considers ways in which "white South African lives" might be reintroduced to the research practices of South African geographers.

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