The Dube TradePort-King Shaka International Airport mega-project: Exploring impacts in the context of multi-scalar governance processes

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Mega-projects aimed at enhancing urban economic infrastructure have been widely recognised as a feature of cities in which influential actors are eager to encourage economic growth. They have also been described as being central in influencing physical patterns of city growth through their direct and indirect impacts on land-uses. Whilst such initiatives are not necessarily new, it has been noted in more recent urban development experiences that these projects tend to involve crafting highly complex, mixed-use environments through a variety of forms of public-private collaboration. Furthermore, they are promoted not only in instrumental terms as facilities or infrastructure to serve a need of a particular economic process, but are also often packaged and motivated as comprehensive urban developments that can reposition the image of cities in a highly competitive global investment environment. Such processes are both influenced by and, in turn, influence multi-scalar governance processes and practices, both in the planning and motivating projects, as well as in their operations. The new King Shaka International Airport (KSIA) and Dube TradePort (DTP), located some 35 km north from the City of Durban in South Africa, were projects developed with the intention of replacing an apparently obsolete facility so as to enable the region to attract more international aviation links that could, in turn, support tourism and exports. Based on analysis of documents and a range of stakeholder interviews, the paper shows how the development of the facilities and the associated impacts, from the shaping of space to meeting of operational targets, have been influenced by and also influenced the character of governance arrangements.

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\section*{Introduction}

In 2009 the eThekwini Municipality of the Durban Metropolitan Area released its annual report for the 2007/2008 financial year (eThekwini Municipality, 2009a). In this report it was stated, in reference to plans influencing municipal investments, that “The introduction of the Dube TradePort and King Shaka International passenger Airport, the 2010 World Cup Soccer Competition and the major expansion plans around the Port of Durban are the 3 main projects that will act as a major catalyst to the City’s economy over the next 10 years.” (eThekwini Municipality, 2009a: 9). This confirmation of local municipal backing for three major economic infrastructure projects not only expressed further commitment to a capital-investment driven growth strategy for the City – one that had been a feature of Durban local government’s programme since the mid 1990s (Robbins, 2010) – but also revealed a series of complex multi-scalar economic and infrastructure governance interactions between the local sphere and governance structures at the Provincial and National scale. The King Shaka International Airport (KSIA) the associated mixed-use Dube TradePort (DTP) were state driven projects aimed specifically at increasing business and tourist visitors to KwaZulu-Natal Province (KZN) and stimulating growing high-value exports. This paper analyses the complex interactions between various levels of government leading to the realisation of the project and explores the project impacts, both intended and unintended, and draws on this to reflect on governance experiences associated with mega-project development in South Africa.

The paper is based on fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014, including interviews with project officials, local government
staff as well as private sector and civil society organisations. Fieldwork also involved extensive gathering of relevant documentation available in the public domain and numerous field visits both to the project site and the areas around it.1

Mega-projects as a lens

Mega-projects are worthy of investigation not only because their exceptional physical scale, cost, impact and the specific institutional arrangements evolved to develop them, but also because their comparisons with the more regular practices of local actors often provide revealing insights into the wielding of power and influence (Altshuler, Luberoff 2003; Kennedy, Robbins, Scott, Sutherland, Denis, Andrade, et al., 2011). This is not merely an issue of abstract power and influence over ideas and the organisation of societal processes that then impact on how space is crafted in a city. Mega-projects also reveal how power and influence are cast in concrete, fabricated in steel and transmitted over fibre optics, all of which have very direct impacts on people and how they live in affected spaces (Moulaert, Swyngedouw, & Rodriguez, 2001). For this reason, the paper pays considerable attention to practices of governmentality, as elaborated with respect to the local sphere by authors such as Li (2007) and MacKinnon (2000). These process are relevant in that they provide a context for, and character to, highly globalized flows of capital, ideas and expertise that mega-projects are specifically geared to engage with. In such processes local actors, even powerful ones, often appear to be little more than pawns in the accumulative hands of global capital. However, it has also been argued that these influences, whilst often highly significant and at times deterministic, also weave into local narratives and real processes in unexpected or even locally specific ways that suggest caution is needed to avoid over-simplification (McCann & Ward, 2011). Furthermore, although mega-projects are often associated with a common list of impacts such as displacement or exclusion for poor urban residents, appreciating the specificities can also reveal not only intended and unintended impacts, as highlighted by Hirschman (1967), but also identify spaces where less influential, and at times marginalized, actors have influenced project trajectories.

Project overview and context

The eThekwini Municipality is South Africa’s third largest metropolitan municipality, after Johannesburg and Cape Town. The eThekwini Municipality area was created, in 2000, out of the merging of the administrative areas and structures of 56 local government structures in the greater Durban area of South Africa’s east coast in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The area of the Municipality — 2297 km2 — includes substantial peri-urban and rural areas, including a number of traditional authority districts. The population of the Municipality was estimated at 3.44 million people in 2011 with 66 percent of the population below the age of 35 and 31 percent of people living in poverty (eThekwini Municipality, 2013: 20). The city’s economy contributes nine percent to the country’s Gross Value Added (GVA) with the city being home to around 6 percent of the country’s population (South African Cities Network, 2011: 20).

The King Shaka International Airport (KSIA) is today South Africa’s third largest airport in terms of passenger volumes, after the airports of Cape Town and Johannesburg, with around five million passengers per year. In 2012/13 these passengers constituted around thirteen percent of the total for South Africa’s ten airports (Airports Company of South Africa, 2014a). The airport serves primarily a domestic market; in the 2012/13 financial year, just under five percent of the airport’s total passenger numbers were being generated by international flights. ACSA, a government owned parastatal entity, controls almost all the major airports handling commercial passenger aviation in the country, and is the owner and operator of KSIA. The airport was developed to accommodate seven-and-a-half million passengers, and could expand in future to more than double this number with a possible second runway. The airport was relocated from a site to the south of Durban city centre and began its operations at the new site, some 35 km from the city centre, on 1 May 2010.

Adjacent to KSIA, and sharing some common land holdings, is the Dube TradePort development land. The total site, including the KSIA, extends over 2040 ha. The Dube TradePort Corporation, a KwaZulu-Natal Provincional Government public entity, is the primary developer of a number of projects within the Dube TradePort envelope including the Dube TradePort Cargo Terminal, Dube Trade Zone, Dube Agrizone and Dube City (Dube TradePort Corporation, undated: 1). According to the DTP master plan, these components are intended to form part of a future “aerotropolis”2 — including an airport city —, as described by Kasarda (2000).

The projects associated with KSIA and DTP have been developed on what was formerly agricultural land under sugar cane cultivation. The surrounding area includes further large tracts of sugar

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1 The author has also drawn on experience gained whilst working on these issues as a senior official for the eThekwini Municipality, and its predecessor institutions, between 1995 and 2003.

2 “As our world is becoming more globalised, the role of airports as attractors for investment and growth is increasing. This concept, known as the aerotropolis [sic], airport region, or airport city, essentially recognises the role of airports as drivers for growth.” (Dube TradePort, 2011; accessed from http://www.dubetradeport.co.za/Aerotropolis on 28 June 2011).

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Fig. 1. Map showing project site within eThekwini Municipality area. (Source: Map generated by F Socolic and reproduced from Robbins & Vella, 2013: 171)
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