Mega-projects and sustainability in Durban, South Africa: Convergent or divergent agendas?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between urban regeneration and sustainability within the post-apartheid city of Durban, South Africa, using mega-projects as a lens. In the past 20 years Durban has been shaped by both globalisation and post-apartheid restructuring, through processes of pro-growth urban regeneration and social transformation. Simultaneously, sustainability has emerged as a critical concept in the development and management of the city. This paper examines the regeneration landscape of the city, focussing on the implementation of two "new" mega-projects, as a regeneration strategy. These are the Moses Mabhida Stadium and the Point Waterfront Development. Furthermore it reflects upon the inclusion of sustainable city principles within the development of these projects, in order to determine the extent to which this urban regeneration strategy considers sustainability. The paper concludes that the two agendas of urban regeneration and sustainability are currently divergent rather than convergent, and suggests that they require further integration to ensure a more sustainable urban future.

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Introduction

Due to the legacy of apartheid there is a stark juxtaposition of developed and developing world conditions in close spatial proximity in South African cities. This presents a unique range of environmental and developmental challenges as cities are required to compete in the global economy and pursue social redistribution, while at the same time address significant environmental challenges (Boraine et al., 2006; Freund, 2002; Patel, 2000; Todes, 2000). South African cities have increasingly been influenced by, and have responded to globalisation as a result of post-apartheid transformation and the re-integration of South Africa into the global economy. Durban[1] is no exception. The city is increasingly affected by and has modelled itself on processes occurring in cities around the globe, which has influenced current patterns of urban development (Scott, Oelofse, Scott, & Houghton, 2006; Sutherland & Scott, 2009; Sykora, 1994). The increase in competition between cities on a global scale places pressure on cities to re-image themselves through urban regeneration strategies, such as the development of mega-projects. Mega-projects are large scale projects "which transform landscapes rapidly, intentionally and profoundly in very visible ways" (Gellert & Lynch, 2003: 15). They aim to re-image the city, enhancing its attractiveness and competitiveness, whilst promoting development and economic growth. The development of mega-projects has however been controversial, raising questions about whether these projects provide the long lasting benefits they promise, and whether the city is acting in the best interests of all of its citizens in the long term (Hannan, 2012; Robbins, 2014; Scott et al., 2006). The wide scale adoption of pro-growth strategies therefore creates conflict, tension and inequality in cities as pro-poor and environmentally sustainable development strategies receive less attention within planning and development. Sustainability has emerged as an important concept over the past four decades as the need for sustainable economic growth, ecological conservation, social transformation and transformational governance in developing world cities has been recognised (Agyeman & Evans, 2003; Roberts, Ravetz, & George, 2009; Swilling & Annecke, 2012). Its incorporation is particularly significant given the pro-poor/pro-growth conflict that is evident in emerging economy cities in the south (Scott, Sutherland, Robbins, & Sim, in press).

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[1] Durban is the more popular name given to the city in terms of its identity and 'brand'. The administrative name of the entity that governs Durban, is eThekwini Municipality. Durban and eThekwini Municipality share the same boundary.

Durban is the second largest demographic and economic urban nexus in South Africa, with a population of 3.6 million people. It is defined by its large and busy port and its manufacturing and tourism industries (Freund, 2002; Lemanski, Landman, & Durington, 2008; Sutherland, Robbins, & Scott, 2011). The city faces a number of challenges, including a declining economic base, high levels of poverty (33.1%) and unemployment (20.6%) (South African Cities Network (SACN), 2006; eThekwini Municipality, 2009). In order to address these challenges, urban regeneration has emerged as a prominent agenda within development and planning in recent years, particularly in the form of mega-project development. This focus intensified with the awarding of the 2010 FIFA World Cup to South Africa, which initiated the development of a number of mega-projects around the country in preparation for this event. Two of the most visible and contested mega-projects within Durban are the Moses Mabhida Stadium, a soccer stadium built for the World Cup in 2010, and the Point Waterfront Development, a port re-development project proposed in 2003. Simultaneously, in the late 1990s, a sustainability agenda emerged in the city, led by Dr Debra Roberts of the Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department of the Municipality, which was taken up in the early 2000s by the then city manager Mike Sutcliffe. This agenda has been incorporated and re-shaped in the Municipality over the past 18 years and is evident in it's Integrated Development Plan (IDP). It has been adopted more strongly in certain Municipal departments (such as Engineering Services and the Environmental Planning and Climate Protection Department) than in others. This paper focuses on the extent to which these two agendas within Durban converge or diverge by exploring whether sustainability principles have been incorporated in to mega-project development, through the lens of two projects which characterise recent large scale development within the city.

Globalisation, neo-liberalism and urban regeneration in contemporary cities

The growth and development of many contemporary cities is dominated by globalisation and the interaction of global economic forces with national and local actors (Roberts et al., 2009). This has resulted in neo-liberal urbanism being favoured within the process of global urban restructuring. Neo-liberal urbanism is a model of urban development which responds to neo-liberal demands, with the state fulfilling a crucial role in creating the necessary legal, economic and political deployment conditions, and promoting new forms of local government (Diaz Orueta, 2007; Roberts et al., 2009). This has had a powerful restructuring effect on the urban environment (Roberts et al., 2009), as it encourages competition (Harvey, 2006); and has included the restructuring of economic power and competitiveness away from the level of nation-states towards cities and city-regions. The local state is thus increasingly responsible for the promotion of economic growth within cities (Houghton, 2010; Roberts et al., 2009; Sykora, 1994).

As a result, many cities have started to focus on their image and branding, restructuring their physical, social, and economic advantages in order to differentiate themselves from other cities and reposition themselves within the global competitive landscape (Diaz Orueta, 2007; Maennig & du Plessis, 2009; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002); while attempting to address their local urban problems and improve the lives of their citizens (Houghton, 2010; Jessop, 2002). This involves the process of reshaping, re-imagining and re-creating urban space in the eyes of both locals and outsiders (Roberts et al., 2009; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Urban policy in cities now concentrates on rebuilding the city through the process of urban regeneration, with mega-projects becoming one of the most visible and influential urban

regeneration strategies in contemporary cities (Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

The literature distinguishes 'old' and 'new' mega-projects, the latter differ from their predecessors in that they involve new forms of public–private collaboration, as they are often initiated and financed by the state and the private sector through public–private partnerships (Haila, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2011; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008; Salet, Bertolini, & Giezen, 2012). They are also focused on flexibility and diversity, as opposed to being unitary infrastructure; the ideology is based on becoming a 'competitive city' rather than just ensuring 'progress'; and they consist of complexes or districts, rather than singular structures. In addition, 'new mega-projects' have the potential to generate positive spin-offs, as they regularly exhibit greater environmental sensitivity and commitment to urbanity, as well as minimise displacement (Diaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008) thereby reflecting the influence of global environmental and social movements on their production.

Although these projects have the ability to produce regeneration effects for cities, they have encountered widespread criticism surrounding aspects of their implementation and impacts, including the high risks they involve; the long time scale and time delays which characterise them; a lack of accountability, transparency and participation; and negative environmental and social impacts. They are also criticised for their inaccurate forecasts of costs and benefits; poor integration into wider urban processes and planning systems; the lack of consideration of alternatives; as well as the diversion of money from other uses (Bruzelius et al., 2002; Diaz Orueta & Fainstein, 2008; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003; Gellert & Lynch, 2003; Lehrer & Laidley, 2008; Pillay & Bass, 2009; Priemus, 2010; Salet et al., 2012; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Mega-projects are characterised by exceptionality, as ordinary statutory planning measures are suspended and they are able to bypass official channels through the use of special agencies (Swyngedouw et al., 2002). Furthermore, they are considered elite playing fields, whereby an urban future is aligned with the aspirations of the most powerful segments of society, and participatory processes are limited or absent, resulting in the opinions of less powerful actors being excluded (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Swyngedouw et al., 2002).

It is therefore evident that mega-projects are able to provide a variety of benefits for cities; however they also generate a range of costs and impacts. There is consequently a need for the incorporation of sustainability principles into policy and planning in cities, to address the conflicts and trade-offs that emerge in urban regeneration and development.

Sustainability: an alternative agenda in cities

Sustainability, or sustainable development, has emerged as a normative concept to address the environmental crisis. Based on the principles of inter- and intra-generational equity, sustainable development promotes the integration of economic, social and environmental concerns within policies and strategies, and therefore urges the expansion of the economic calculus to include both development and sustainability considerations, requiring that particular attention be paid to the integrity of nature and the well-being of people and the environment (Gibbs, Longhurst, & Braithwaite, 1998; Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005).

A common definition of sustainability is difficult to construct, which poses a challenge when attempting to reach consensus on the best way in which it may be achieved (Mog, 2004). Sustainability is defined by Berkes, Colding, and Folke (2003) as the maintenance of the capacity of ecological systems to support social and economic systems. Focussing on sustainability implies avoiding practices which appear to be acceptable in the short term, but