

## **Living the urban periphery in Gauteng, South Africa**

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African cities are often claimed to be sprawling, with peripheral growth being seen in rather polemical terms: either involving the marginalization of the poor to the city edge or the construction of exclusive elite enclaves, disconnected from the rest of the city. This paper argues for considered research which is specifically focused on the peripheries of urban areas in Africa, and makes the case for a particular methodological approach to this exploration. It uses the case of the Gauteng City Region in South Africa to illuminate what these urban peripheries and this method brings into focus.

Whilst there are some studies that point to complex spatial change on the urban edges of cities in Africa (see for example Todes 2014; Doan and Oduro 2012), research has often tended to overlook peripheral areas or focus on a donor-driven conception of the 'peri-urban' concerned primarily with changes to land use and agriculture (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer 2002). Yet it is increasingly apparent that the edges of many large cities and city-regions in Africa are spaces of complex urban transformations encompassing multiple processes of spatial change. In some, large-scale formal investment in housing and economic activity is evident historically and currently. In others, the growth is mainly happening through informal land development or a complex mixing of formal and informal processes. But there are also places of decline in local economies and population, and so theoretical framings which focus only on growth are misleading. While "new centralities" which offer prospects for employment and livelihood are emerging in some localities, governance is often weaker and more fragmented on the edge than in the core, which can produce inequalities in capacity and strategic direction.

For their residents, fringe locations, often reinforced through state-housing provision or speculative land developments, can produce mobility challenges which impact on employment opportunities, as well as strain the viability of providing and maintaining infrastructure and services. Peripheries may also be characterised by environmental hazards, social exclusion, and low levels of spatial identity and cohesion, yet for other residents the benefits of smaller communities, in peaceful or privileged locations, and of well-serviced settlements outside of the bustling core may prove highly desirable.

This paper forms part of a larger research project which addresses a critical gap through its focus on understanding how transformation in the spatial peripheries of African cities is shaped, governed and, importantly, experienced by those who live and work in these spaces. The paper discusses a particular methodological approach to a newly initiated three-year study of the peripheries in three city regions: Ethekewini and Gauteng in South Africa, and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. All three cases display rapid but variable urbanisation, changing patterns of segregation and integration, and variant patterns of governance and investment, offering critical spaces for comparative analysis, theorisation, and policy influence.

Using the Gauteng city region the paper demonstrates why the spatial edges in large cities in Africa require new attention, makes a case for what is selected for scrutiny in the new study and discusses what the particular methodological approach offers. It draws on existing studies on peripheral sites in the Gauteng region, as well as recent government proposals for new megaprojects, to explore the diversity of current edge conditions, the forms of change underway (both growth and decline), and some concerns and potentials of the proposed new developments.

We focus on how changes in infrastructure and economies through the actions of state, private sector or informal interventions, play out in the lives of people in edge locations of large urban areas, and are in turn shaped by these. We use the lens of 'lived experiences' to understand the intersection of state, market and people's practices in producing "new urban spatialities" (Beall et al 2015; Mabin et al 2013; Todes 2014) and how these processes then impact on urban poverty. This idea of the lived experience of spatial change draws on significant intellectual threads in fields

including urban studies, geography and planning theory, urban anthropology and sociology, and is concerned with how people live in places, including how they work, eat, parent (Meth 2013), love and die. It uses a mix of qualitative methods (including interviewing diaries and auto-photography) to understand everyday life on the periphery. In addition the project uses key informant interviews, surveys, document analysis and mapping to understand the characteristics and drivers of changes, and also the governance and poverty implications of these urban changes.

The paper that will be presented draws on the first phase of the research and discusses some of the large scale trends seen in Gauteng's peripheries, drawn from existing research, demographic and census data and demonstrating the large differentiation between the various peripheral communities. Using the information base described, it will then discuss the value and usefulness of the focus on "everyday lived experiences".

## **References**

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