

10 Economic Restructuring and Local Economic Development in South Africa

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Introduction

South Africa's return to the global economy in the 1990s has exposed our society and space economy to the twin forces of globalism and localism. The simultaneous democratization of our society has sanctioned previously unknown levels of public participation in planning and development. One of the most obvious manifestations of these changes is the rise in prominence of the concept known as 'local economic development' or LED. Although LED is difficult concept to define, LED-type ideas are now enshrined in the national constitution and various important policy documents in South Africa, including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Local Government White Paper. Hence LED is progressively featuring in the actions of community and non-governmental organizations and in the sanctioning and support of LED by provincial and national government. This chapter commences with an examination of the significance of globalism and, more especially, the parallel process of localism as it manifests in the South African space economy and through the rise of LED. Attention then turns to a tentative definition of LED in the South African context, before proceeding to an examination of its manifestation within local job creation projects through to local infrastructural provision.

Globalism and Localism

Globalism has been relentlessly on the march, particularly after the 'historical divide' of the 1970s (Martin, 1988). Together with the associated ever expanding hold of multi-national corporations, Americanization and gradual cultural homogenization, globalism has come to affect all nations on earth to a greater or lesser degree. However, whilst the nation of national borders has become more fluid, in many instances the nation of the 'localness' of social, class and employment issues and conflicts has drawn increased support (Massey, 1991). Massey's 1984/1994 identification of the social and economic uniqueness of places in the 'spatial division of labour' is a useful means to understanding the increase in locally distinct, independent action by towns and cities as they compete for investment and a place in the globalizing economy. This reality has provoked what Urry (1990, p. 187) terms a 'resurgence of interest in the study of developments that appear to have heightened local differences and the symbolization of such differences'. However, Clarke (1993, p. 1), in her terse summary of the situation, also stresses the similarities:

Global economic change processes generally transcend spatial scale, yet in some instances are very sensitive to local contextual factors, including state actions. Recent evidence of intensified economic and political demands on localities and increased local development initiatives hints at a new local terrain with unexpected commonalities.

The identification of new 'industrial space' and the aggressive competition for multi-national investment between localities run parallel with the rise of 'high-tech' corridors and the notion of urban entrepreneurialism in the North (Healey and Ilbery, 1990). In the South, which is suffering under the yoke of debts and related structural adjustment crises, the quest for greater self-reliance and 'bottom-up' development has become obvious (Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Taylor and Mackenzie, 1992).

In response to these tendencies an impressive literature on 'localities' and LED, as it manifests in such localities, is emerging. For instance, Castell has investigated urban social movements (Syrett, 1995) and Cooke (1989), Feiock (1991) and Massey (1994) have explored the importance of local development activity.

Localities, and the social relations within them are unique. So are their responses to crises and opportunities and their human and physical resources. Acknowledging this uniqueness and using it to good effect is a recipe for attracting economic activity. The success of global cities such as Tokyo, London and New York is a case in point. In South Africa, the recent transition to democracy has encouraged local autonomy and independence. Although few local areas have taken advantage of the new approach, the stage appears to be set for South African 'localities' to become more assertive both nationally and locally.

It is within the 'locality' that new forms of economic development and job creation are being experimented with. Such action is naturally mediated by the local skills, resources, vision and opportunities unique to each area. The next section examines what LED is and what some of its key features are.

Local Economic Development

The economic crises of the 1970s and the move to a post-industrial society in many countries in the North overlapped with the rationalization of the state's role and its partial withdrawal from direct economic intervention. As a direct result, local development strategies, including the marketing of the locality and the enhancement of industrial attraction, became vital for coping with de-industrialization and other forms of economic hardship. However, these strategies were also employed to further promote already prosperous localities, such as Silicon Valley. In the countries of the South, economic crises coupled with the effects of structural adjustment obliged communities to look inward at their own unique resources and skills in a quest to ensure 'self-reliance'. Collectively, these approaches are known as 'local economic development' or LED (Nel, 1994, 1998).

Although there is no universally accepted definition of LED, international experience and literature provide a range of guidelines as to its key components. According to Bennett (1990, p. 222) LED refers to 'subnational action, usually substate and subregional, taking place within the context of the local labour market'. Nel (1995, p. 2) builds on that definition in his description of LED as 'an applied economic development strategy which seeks to address site-specific needs through locally appropriate solutions'. Such action is not the preserve of a single agency. Rather, successful LED depends on the formation of partnerships between key local stakeholders, preferably comprising local authorities, local business, community leaders and non-governmental organizations. External agencies such as higher tiers of government and external organizations also have a role to play, on condition that they do not suppress local initiative and resourcefulness. In numerous countries and in the case of the European Union's LEDA programme, LED facilitators assist and advise local communities, amongst others to access state funds and obtain tax relief (Ferguson, 1992),

LED reveals significant international variations, ranging from aggressive 'urban entrepreneurialism' which characterizes the cities of North America in their quest for investment, to the local coping strategies of impoverished communities across the world. LED strategies range from job creation and public works programmes to municipal enterprise, small business support, infrastructural provision, and training and support for small-scale farming (Stöhr, 1990; Gooneratne and Mbilinyi, 1992; Clarke, 1993).

LED is mediated in South Africa and elsewhere by local crises and opportunities. In cities, according to Rogerson (1997), LED can develop along four distinctive lines:

- cities as centres of production, i.e. the promotion of business and manufacturing,
- cities as centres of consumption, i.e. the promotion of leisure, tourism and recreation activities,
- cities as centres of information processing and decision making, i.e. corporate headquarters, high-technology and information industry, and
- cities as centres for government surplus, i.e. centres which seek government investment and functions to drive their local economies.

In order to attract these types of investment and development, cities offer what they perceive to be the unique advantages of their locality, usually backed up by illustrations of their infrastructural and service development. This approach is particularly noteworthy in European cities (Stöhr, 1990).

In smaller towns and rural communities, but also within cities, LED is often undertaken as a broad-based community initiative led by a local NGO or a key local leader such as the local priest or mayor (Stöhr, 1990; Ferguson, 1992). Activities tend to focus on developing local potential with the aid of local resources and skills, and promoting activity such as small-scale farming, micro businesses and tourism.

Local Economic Development in South Africa

LED was already practised to a degree by the larger South African cities in the early 1900s (Nel and Rogerson, 1995, 1996). In this phase LED was largely associated with attempts to attract industrial development, focusing on advertising, the provision of infrastructure and limited incentives. During the apartheid era, after the Second World War, the strategies of Keynesian state economic management and apartheid-based denial of self-expression to the majority in the country combined to suppress local initiatives and independent action such as LED (Nel, 1996). It was only in the era of late apartheid, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, that LED can truly be said to have been raised to prominence in the country. The first key example of this revival was the town of Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape, where community-based local development initiatives, based on local political reconciliation, laid the basis for identifying a new development logic (Nel, 1994). The projects focused on the provision of domestic services and urban infrastructure (roads, electricity, water and housing sites) for the disadvantaged section of the community. Small-scale employment projects in crafts, farming and various businesses were also encouraged.

Since the early 1990s interest in LED has blossomed. For instance, in 1994 the private sector think-tank, the Urban Foundation (now known as the Centre for Development and Enterprise), published a policy document which strongly reflected and advocated western LED experience. In 1995, SANCO (South African National Civic Organization, 1995) published their own strategy document which reflects community-based dimensions of LED. In 1996 the private sector body, the National Business Initiative, in collaboration with the then RDP ministry, published a LED manual which argues for both community-orientated strategies and neo-liberal principles of independent entrepreneurial action (NBI, 1996). The government has also been actively engaged in policy development. Its role and position regarding LED is naturally of critical significance, since LED requires *de facto* legislative changes to operate, given the traditionally restrictive nature of local government

legislation and a narrow interpretation of the powers of local government. LED principles and the notion of locally driven development parallel the RDP principles of community-based development.

In 1995 the government published its urban and rural development strategies (RSA, 1995a, b) and identified LED as the prime mechanism for job creation, empowerment and local development. A range of provincial documents placing emphasis on LED and LED training are starting to emerge. Other key policy or legal provisions which provide a basis for LED are:

the Constitution (RSA, 1996a) which obliges local government to engage in 'social and economic development',

- the Local Government Transition Act of 1993 and 1996 (RSA, 1993, 1996b),
- the Development Facilitation Act (RSA, 1995c),
- the Rural Development Framework (draft) (RSA, 1997), and
- the Local Government White Paper (RSA, 1998).

The principles contained in the White Paper were being translated into parliamentary bills at the time of writing. The White Paper is the most important national document to date to set out a vision for LED in South Africa. However, this document only refers to LED as a local government strategy. Furthermore, although reference is made to the need to establish partnerships between key local stakeholders, provision has yet to be made to encourage and sanction non-local government versions of LED, which are detailed in the section below.

The White Paper introduces the concept of 'development local government', which departs from the traditional, limited focus of local government activity on service and infrastructure provision. 'development local government' is defined as 'local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives' (RSA, 1998, p.17). Within this context local government should:

- maximize social development and economic growth — in order to meet basic needs, deliver services, invest locally, develop land and encourage investment so as to create the conditions for economic development, to provide basic household infrastructure and to pursue affirmative procurement policies,
- integrate and co-ordinate development — in other words provide leadership and vision to local role players and to establish sustainable and liveable settlements,
- democratize development, empower communities and redistribute resources — including service subsidies and support for community organizations,
- lead and learn.
- Specific aims of local government should be:
 - to provide good basic services and to provide for cross-subsidization to support the poorest communities and to lever private sector investment,
 - to create liveable, integrated cities, towns and rural areas through the promotion of spatial integration and sustainable environments,
 - to simplify regulations and support local procurement policies, zoning, the speeding up of delivery, the provision of one-stop shop facilities, marketing and investment, small business, training, research and links with relevant role players in the local area (RSA, 1998).

Local Economic Development in Practice in South Africa

The radical policy shifts detailed above have allowed greater personal freedom. This has directly aided local self-expression as evidenced in the rise of a range of locality-based initiatives. Globalism has also played a role as the large metropolitan areas are all seeking to market themselves on the global stage as places for international investment and leisure-related activities. Johannesburg and Pretoria's place marketing initiatives, Cape Town's Olympic bid and the building of the International Conference Centre in Durban all illustrate how, in an era of greater local freedom, local centres are confidently seeking investment and a role for themselves in the global community. There has also been a noticeable flourishing of locality-based development as evidenced in the activities of NGOs (non-governmental organizations), CBOs (community-based organizations), local governments, tourism promotion agencies and locality-based small business.

It needs to be borne in mind that a local economic crisis, for example de-industrialization (or the rationalization of industries as in South Africa), often acts as catalyst for LED. The establishment of the Free State Gold Fields Development Centre in Welkom to seek alternative employment is probably the best example of this type of reaction in South Africa (Van der Walt, 1998). In other areas the general shortage of jobs has provoked responses ranging from small business support to small-scale farming initiatives.

LED in South Africa occurs at a variety of levels and assumes widely differing characteristics. It is clearly more than the business and large city enterprises which traditionally characterized thinking on this topic. Apart from enterprises such as the business-orientated National Business Initiative, there is a plethora of, for instance, CBO and NGO initiatives in local areas which also promote social and economic upliftment.

Four variants of LED currently feature in South Africa (Nel, 1998):

- (a) Formal local government initiatives — which parallel traditional western thinking and, to a large degree, overlap with government thinking on the topic as detailed in its Local Government White Paper.
- (b) Community-based/small town initiatives which often develop as a result of NGO facilitation and support. Overlap with the government's Rural Development Framework (RSA, 1997) is evident.
- (c) Section 21 development corporations — i.e. companies that promote local development within a selected spatial area, but 'not for gain'.
- (d) 'Top-down' LED in which government, usually at the provincial level, and/or various national organizations attempt to catalyze and support local initiatives.

Many of the initiatives cited above are in their incipient phases and in many cases there is little in the way of tangible results. In the following section, key features of the above four categories are outlined and assessed.

Local government initiatives Even though the larger cities pursued a degree of LED throughout the apartheid era, largely in the form of place marketing and limited endeavours to attract investment, it is only in the last few years that such activity has increased dramatically. In tandem with the development endeavours in the larger cities there has been an increase in academic writing on the topic.

Rogerson (1995) has examined how Johannesburg has purposefully sought to 're-image' and promote itself as a 'global city' through various marketing strategies, extensive lead projects, infrastructural investment, property development and the promotion of the city through the use of its sporting facilities. In Durban, property-

related development of the Point area and business tourism promotion through the International Conference Centre are key examples of LED in that city (Durban Metropolitan Council, 1996; Maharaj and Ramballi, 1998).

In Pretoria, the Metropolitan Economic Development Chief Directorate has been actively engaged in the promotion of business activity since 1996, particularly that of smaller firms, through information provision, networking and advice. There are also policies in place to involve disadvantaged communities, to promote the overall competitiveness of the city and to develop human resources and tourism (Pretoria Metropolitan Economic Development, 1997). Clearly, such strategies reflect the better resources, finances and personnel available in the larger centres.

The response of the city of Cape Town is particularly instructive as to how a local government has responded to the constitutional mandate regarding social and economic development. In 1997, an 'Economic and Social Development Directorate' was established at the metropolitan level to oversee, co-ordinate and assist the six metropolitan local councils in the Cape Town area. These councils focus on informal sector promotion, promotion of small and big business, tourism, business and RDPforums, job centres, local industrial parks, property development and development facilitation (Cape Town Metropolitan Council, 1997).

Although LED has drawn interest at the local government level, only the better-resourced, larger centres have gone beyond the planning phase and committed funds to the establishment of dedicated LED units and the pursuit of LED policies (*LED News*, 1996-1998). The lack of resources, the tenuous fiscal position and the shortage of skilled staff are all serious impediments to the successful pursuit of LED in smaller centres — an issue which may well require a degree of central or provincial government facilitation along the lines of the UK's partnership or enterprise zones policy (Healey and Ilbery, 1990).

Community-based/small town initiatives Whilst local governments operate within the constraints of various legislative acts which prescribe the activity in which they can engage and how they can utilize their funds, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations can, operate on a far broader plain. Church or other socially responsible organizations active in destitute communities are usually the key change agents in local areas and the main proponents of LED-type activities. In all cases a measure of local partnership has helped to ensure the success of initiatives and the representation and participation of key stakeholders.

The best documented cases of small town LED include the cases of Kei Road, Seymour, Hertzog and Stutterheim (Nel, 1996). In the case of Kei Road, church intervention in a community scarred by apartheid-based removals, led, in the early 1990s, to a variety of community-based initiatives, including brick-making, bulk-buying and housing construction. one of the most innovative features was the way in which the church acted as a broker between a women's co-operative and large parastatals to secure lucrative sewing contracts (Nel, 1996). In Hertzog, a rural village in the former Ciskei, a CBO revived the area's economy through a community agricultural co-operative, independent of external support. This illustrates that, even the most marginalized communities have the potential to embark on self-reliance initiatives. In the town of Seymour (Nel, 1997), a well-intentioned NGO provided the necessary expertise and contacts with donor organizations to assist with LED. Stutterheim, which has already been discussed in the section 'Local economic development in South Africa', is arguably the best-known case of LED in the country.

Whilst LED at the micro level has yielded impressive results and operates in dozens of areas (NBI, 1996; *LED News*, 1996-1998), shortage of skills, the limited number of NGOs and resource constraints are all impediments to its wide-spread application.

Section 21 development corporations In many parts of the country LED-type activities are overseen by Section 21 companies. Such companies usually have a strong business leaning and are active in the promotion of small entrepreneurs in particular. The institution of local business service centres as locality-based centres to promote small, medium and micro enterprise development is a case in point. The activities of the 'Beehive' in Lydenburg, the Stutterheim Development Foundation and COMSEC (the Community Self Employment Centre) in Port Elizabeth are good examples of well-resourced local-level organizations, usually based on a partnership between key local stakeholders, which have positively assisted literally hundreds of prospective entrepreneurs through advice, loan applications, training and the occasional provision of workspace (*LED News*, 1996-1998).

There is at least one regional development authority in South Africa, namely WESGRO in Cape Town. Like the Irish and Welsh Development Authorities in the British Isles, it is pro-active in local areas. It has become the *de facto* marketing, research and development arm for a range of local centres across the Western Cape. WESGRO has the potential to actively facilitate LED, and in so doing, could become a model for other parts of the country (Hein, 1998).

'Top-down' LED Although LED should, in principle, be locally driven and led, there are numerous examples around the world of limited 'top-down' support, direction and advice which have unlocked local potential and initiative (Stöhr, 1990). In South Africa, the most apparent equivalents exist in the provincial ministries of Local Government and Economic Affairs. Strategies ranging from the provision of seed funds to training and consciousness raising regarding the potential of LED have been embarked on by a range of provincial governments. The most prominent areas in this regard are the Western and Eastern Cape, the Northern Province and Mpumalanga. The activities of the National Business Initiative, a development agency that assists in these provincial programmes, is particularly noteworthy (Nel, 1998).

Top-down LED could make a significant difference to local communities. Unfortunately there appears to be no commitment at this stage to long-term funding of projects and the employment of LED facilitators. The apparent success of the European Union (EU) Structural Fund and the positive role played by EU-funded development facilitators under the LEDA programme are noteworthy and could serve as a model for South African institutions committed to achieving long-term LED (Stöhr, 1990).

Critique

Although LED has become an established feature of the development scene South Africa, the number of LED projects is small. This can be attributed to serious resource and skills constraints, which are compounded by the lack of strategic guidance, facilitation and role models.

Despite the fact that the principles of LED accord with the notions of people-centred development embodied in documents such as the RDP, there is no established process to either support or fund community-based projects, and where such projects do exist, they are often forced to rely on external, usually foreign aid grants, as the LED endeavours in Seymour and Stutterheim illustrate. Moreover, in many instances the projects are of a temporary nature and depend on the availability and goodwill of an NGO to provide guidance and advice (Nel, 1996).

In terms of LED at the local government level, a range of other constraints will, for the foreseeable future, prevent the widespread application of the concepts embodied in the Local Government white Paper (RSA, 1998) in all but the larger, better equipped cities. One constraint relates to administrative issues. The current Local Government Transition Act (RSA, 1996b) prevents non-metropolitan areas

from pursuing a broad range of activities. Simultaneously a plethora of local government ordinances rigidly control and often prohibit the raising of funds and expenditure on training and business. The situation is aggravated by constraints inherent within most local authorities, namely the near bankruptcy of many local governments, the shortage of skilled staff and the absence of any major organization to offer extension support and advice to local governments moving into the development field. In addition, political conflict and the reluctance of newly elected councillors to co-operate with the private sector and the latter to reciprocate hinder the formation of local partnerships. This also leads to a situation in which the responsibility for the economic development of the local area is not fully accepted by either partner. A last problem is the absence of clear guidance from higher authority and the fact that conflicting demands are being made on local government by other levels of authority. In the words of one local government, there are 'contradictions, conflicts and a lack of common purpose (which) occur between and within national and provincial government departments. These unconstructive tensions and the lack of unity resonate within local government' (Anon., 1997, p. 16).

Conclusion – The Way Forward

Despite the rather negative picture which has been painted above, the successes of LED in South Africa suggest that if the constraints can be addressed, LED endeavours can be significantly expanded. The key policy requirements for LED, if it is to succeed, are:

- LED policy must acknowledge and encourage the participation of a wide range of actors in the local economy. Current policy stresses the role of local government. The place and functions of the private sector, NGOs, CBOs, unions and more specifically of partnerships between key local stakeholders must be properly acknowledged and encouraged.
- A LED fund is necessary to 'kick start' development at the local level. In other countries tax rebates and start-up and training funds are available to either local governments or agencies active in the local development field.
- In smaller towns and rural areas a clear need exists for LED facilitators to encourage local initiative and leadership. Such leadership could either come from the provincial government or from institutions such as the National Business Initiative (see above), or it could be based on available pools of skill, such as universities (many USA universities provide extension support to the communities around them).
- The establishment of a formalized LED structure such as a LED Institute might go a long way to broadening the potential and scope of LED activities.

President Mandela announced at the 1998 Presidential Job Summit that '[t]he government has had no illusions about the massive social problems that our new democracy has to deal with. We know too keenly that government alone cannot address these problems' (Mandela, 1998, p. 1). Given this acknowledgement and the blossoming of LED-type activity in recent decades in the North and the South, the solution to current difficulties with implementing LED in South Africa and a more widespread application of the procedure can be expected.

LED is a response to contemporary forces of globalism and localism. Local areas cannot but investigate their own resources and skills for promoting local

development and find a unique place for themselves in the global village. In this context, the words of SANCO (1995, p. 1) are appropriate:

As a new era of administration dawns, new forms of development, appropriate to meeting the needs of the majority of the people and their economic and employment requirements, need to be embarked on.

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