

In Search of Shared Prosperity in Downtown Regeneration: South Africa's Experience

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Abstract:

The unravelling of the apartheid state and beginning of democracy in the 1990's led to a rapid influx of poorer blacks into the inner-city in search of jobs, livelihoods and economic opportunities. Municipal governments struggled to cope with increased service demands and White businesses and residents took flight into the outer-lying suburbs. This paper considers the process and period of rebuilding that followed the socio-economic shock of the CBDs in the 1990's using the conceptual framework of resilience to frame questions of recapturing economic value and nurturing social inclusion. In the first instance, we use property data for the period 1995 - 2014 to show that the CBDs did experience some measure of recovery, although their market values remained depressed relative to outlying nodes. Cape Town is the exception which fully recovered and enhanced its former economic prosperity. Efforts at ensuring social inclusion during the period of rebuilding were less coherent. Drawing upon a series of semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, we find tensions in the social outcomes pursued by stakeholders within CBD-development partnerships. Municipal government is also at times contradictory in its practice and approach. Property-developers are willing to invest and show some measure of innovativeness but smarter regulations are needed to charter shared-prosperities.