

**Promotion of small-town development: The case of the Apollo
Development Association in Victoria West**

by

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DECLARATION

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List of Abbreviations	i

ADA	Apollo Development Association
ANC	African National Congress
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
KVB	Karoo Vleisboere Co-op
LED	Local Economic Development
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MNET	Multinetwork
NDA	National Development Agency
NFVF	National Film and Video Foundation
NRF	National Research Foundation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSDP	National Spatial Development Perspective

RDP

Reconstruction and Development Programme

UNCHS

United Nations Commission on Human Settlements

Promoting small-town development: The case of the Apollo Development Association¹

South African small towns are in desperate need of appropriate forms of Local Economic Development. In terms of their nature and scale, the projects embarked on in such towns tend to be of a much smaller magnitude than those adopted in the cities. This article examines a Non-Governmental Organisation's initiative to promote local economic development in the small rural town of Victoria West. The initiative spans over a decade and includes various projects, which have attempted to improve the socio-economic conditions in Victoria West and, at the same time, to gain national and international recognition for the town. The study shows that despite many difficulties and shortcomings, the initiatives have succeeded, to some degree, in promoting development in a small town. Lessons learned include the importance of the role of "outside heroes," with vast experience and access to resources, in the initiation of development programmes, as well as the importance of community participation and capacity, together with the collaboration of the local authority in development initiatives. Furthermore, the capacity of the local people to continue with initiatives after the withdrawal of the champions is also highlighted. At the same time, the case study also suggests that the quantitative tools used to determine small-town potential have certain limitations.

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1. Introduction

Approximately half of the world's urban population and a quarter of its total population live in smaller urban centres (Satterwaite and Tacoli, 2003). To a large degree, the world is now intent on addressing the very real challenges faced by the big cities in many developing countries (World Bank, 2000; UNCHS, 2001). This seems to have led to the neglect of smaller urban areas, both in terms of policy development and research – a situation that is also prevalent in South Africa (CDE, 1995; Dewar, 1995). Yet, some of the most profound development challenges are encountered in small towns. These challenges revolve around issues of rural decline, in-migration, economic collapse, the absence of sufficient services and housing and the lack of adequate technical and financial resources. In South Africa, it would appear that 50% of the national population do not live in cities, but in small towns, where concentrations of poverty are commonplace (Nel, 2005:254). In respect of poverty, it is estimated that while 19.7 percent of the population of cities live below the poverty line, this figure increases to 40.5 percent in small towns (RDP, 1995).

The levels of poverty in small towns vary across South Africa. On the one hand, there are relatively affluent coastal towns such as Knysna and Hermanus, with Clarens as an inland example (Nel, 2005). On the other hand, economic decline is prevalent in towns in the Karoo, while substantial levels of poverty are found in urban centres in former homelands (Nel, 2005). Although there has been an increase in research on smaller urban centres (see Abrahams, 2003; Marais, 2004; Van Staden and Marais, 2005; Nel, 2005; Van der Merwe et al., 2005; Marais et al., 2006; Donaldson, 2007), the emphasis in economic and tourism research has fallen mainly on the larger urban centres (Rogerson, 2005:1). At the same time, cognisance should be taken of the work of Van Der Merwe et al. (2005), who succeeded, by means of a quantitative model, in ranking the development potential of small towns in the Western Cape. This methodology is also in line with the methodology used to determine areas of potential in the National Spatial and Development Perspective. Essentially, these methodologies reflect on demonstrated potential (which can be measured and compared), as opposed to latent potential. Marais (2006), in turn, questioned this type of methodology and argued that the potential of some small towns

lies not only in their current or historically entrenched potential, but also in the human potential and capital in these areas (latent potential).

It is against this background that this paper aims to evaluate the role of the Apollo Development Association (ADA) in the development of Victoria West (a small town in the Northern Cape Province). Two main arguments will be put forward. First, I would like to showcase the role of “small-town outsiders” and partnerships, but – more importantly – also the fragility of these factors. Second, it is argued that the evidence from Victoria West suggests that the potential of small towns does not only lie in their current or historical economic potential, as suggested by Van Der Merwe et al. (2005). The role of outsiders and partnerships (although fragile) should also be investigated; but it is difficult to account for these factors in terms of the methodology suggested by Van Der Merwe et al. (2005). Against this background, the paper unfolds as follows. Firstly, a description of the current reality of small towns in South Africa in a changing global environment is provided, followed by an assessment of relevant literature in terms of the critical factors related to small-town development. These two theoretical sections serve to highlight the role of the ADA in the development of Victoria West. Thereafter, reflections on the lessons learned from the Victoria West case study in respect of small-town development are put forward. Finally, a number of concluding remarks are made.

2. The plight (and potential) of small towns

Small-town decline was noted in academic research as early as the beginning of the 1980s (Van der Merwe, 1982). However, it does not seem as if small towns feature prominently on the policy agenda of government (Nel, 2005; Atkinson and Zingle, 2004). The main reasons for small-town decline include increasing globalisation, improved transport systems and economic competition. Although a few small-town success stories have been noted, mainly owing to tourism – for example, Still Bay (Binns and Nel, 2002) and Clarens (Marais, 2004) – the overall picture is one of decline. In general, radical economic changes are taking place in small towns and their hinterlands, which impact on the local urban centres (Krige, 1995). Trends in the national and international market forces may either provide potential development opportunities for small towns (e.g. in

tourism), or they may have a marginalising effect on a small-town economy. Some of the most palpable changes taking place in small South African towns and their hinterlands, according to Nel (2005), include:

- The collapse of many once-prosperous mining centres, such as the coal towns in KwaZulu-Natal;
- The demise of railway/transport towns, such as Noupoort;
- The decline in agricultural output in many areas, and/or the shift to new rural activities (such as game farming) which have significantly reduced the reliance on local small centres' points of sale and service supply;
- Advances in transport technology and changes in retail patterns, which have facilitated access to the more distant regional centres and displaced the role of the small agricultural service centres;
- Positive trends include the growth of tourist towns in areas of natural beauty, as well as the emergence of retirement centres and commuting and, to a limited degree, of telecommuting centres;
- Another positive trend has been the growth of the larger centres which have extended service fields and a diversified economy and which have often displaced and absorbed the functions of smaller towns in their hinterlands. This type of growth has mainly been experienced by centres with more than 70, 000 people, such as Queenstown;
- In many of the less prominent smaller centres, there is now an artificial economic dependence on state welfare on the part of the town's people, accompanied by the loss of many formal-sector job opportunities, as well as burgeoning poverty and the out-migration of skilled persons;
- In many towns, as a result of the amalgamation of smaller centres under a single authority, the loss of local government status has weakened the towns; and the new local authorities are often incapacitated by a lack of finances and personnel.

Moreover, Nel (2005:256) is of the opinion that “[t]he absence of specifically targeted state support for small towns aggravates the situation. In many smaller centers[, the authorities] are now obliged to try [to] initiate LED to respond to crises and job loss or to

take advantage of new growth opportunities”. The outcomes of these LED initiatives have been mixed in many small towns, as the majority of these towns are linked to a single economic sector. Nel (2005:261) summarises this situation in the following manner: “The development picture in many once prosperous agricultural towns is unfortunately not as rosy as in Still Bay. Changes in local and international markets, environmental constraints, farmers’ linkages to larger and more distant centers and the frequent decline of stock farming as a result of theft, have all negatively impacted on the once prosperous agricultural service centers across the agricultural landscape of the country”. One consequence of these changes has been the outflow of people with skills and leadership capabilities (Krige, 1995). Considering this reality, the question is: Which factors assist small towns to develop against all odds?

3. Critical factors for small-town development: A literature review

Against the background of the foregoing contextualisation of small-town decline, the focus will now shift to a brief assessment of critical factors in small-town development. A number of factors that directly impact on LED in small towns will be discussed in more detail.

Firstly, the existing literature suggests that strong leadership has played a crucial role in small-town development (Tykkylainen, 1998; World Bank, 2003). For example, Nel et al. (2002:63-64) report that community leaders in Stutterheim, through their initiatives, achieved reconciliation to a large degree, as well as development efforts to promote employment and growth in the town. In Seymour, a catalytic role was played by local charismatic leaders in launching the town’s LED initiative (Nel, 1997:281). Overall, there seems to be sufficient evidence that communities seeking to restore economic prosperity, to create jobs and to initiate a broad-based development, invariably need a few local people at the forefront of these and other initiatives (Marais, 2004; Nel, 2005:205; Robbins, 2005:7). If this strong leadership coincides with appropriate skills and capital, the impact can be substantial, especially if capital from outside the area is used. Although the literature emphasises the role of strong leadership, very little has been written about

the conflict that can arise between strong leaders from outside, and local communities. This aspect will be discussed in more detail later on in this paper.

Secondly, NGOs and partnerships are regarded by many governments and financing agencies as cornerstones of modern rural development processes (Sheperd, 1998:225). International literature also suggests that the formation of partnerships between local governments and businesses is an important process that could foster LED (Blakely et al., 2002). In this regard, Nel (1997) outlines the role of Corplan, an East London-based NGO, in helping the Seymour Community Forum to address the shortfall in terms of technical and administrative capacity; to access international funds; and to implement applied strategies.

Thirdly, government programmes and government-funded organisations often play a critical role in getting community development initiatives off the ground and, in many instances, in sustaining these initiatives (Robbins, 2005:2; Rogerson, 2005:11; Parnell et al., 2005:9). A number of examples can be mentioned in this regard. The Witzenberg Community Centre in Ceres had recourse to the National Development Agency as a major funder (LED Working Group, 16 March 2005). The City of Cape Town obtained funding from the Department of Public works and South African Breweries and a pilot programme was launched to clean the city (Parnell et al, 2005:9). Local Government, in particular, has an important coordinating and facilitating role to play in the implementation of LED (Meyer-Stamer, [s.a]; Blakely et al., 2002). More specifically, Amis (2002) is of the opinion that local government can contribute to LED through the provision of incremental infrastructure, health care and educational facilities, and by providing law and order. In addition, local governments can stimulate specific actions that induce companies to invest and remain in the community, for example by providing premises or reducing the rental on commercial premises (Blakely, 1989; Amis, 2002; Blakely et al., 2002). Furthermore, government should also consider the implications of the policies of various line departments for small towns. The policies of these departments, for example in terms of decentralisation, are crucial for small-town development (Pederson, 2004). Some researchers, for instance, have already indicated

that the amalgamated municipal boundaries have negatively influenced those small towns which were not selected to serve as municipal headquarters (Zingle and Atkinson, 2004).

Fourthly, existing literature suggests that no development programme, however grand, can succeed unless the local people are willing to accept it and make an effort to participate in it (Makumbe 1996:12, in Chinsinga, 2003:132; Robbins, 2005:9). Some examples of community participation in the Eastern Cape have been reported. According to Nel (1997:281), the success of LED efforts in Seymour can be attributed to the active involvement of the community in the LED process. In Stutterheim, the community itself identified the potential for, and initiated, LED (Nel and Mcquaid, 2002:64). Essentially, communities that control the process of development tend to assume greater ownership; and they are more inclined to try to ensure the success of initiatives (Burkey, 1993).

Fifthly, the availability of markets and the promotion of products or services are essential prerequisites for success, especially in smaller towns where markets are limited (Nel, 2005:211; Rogerson, 2004:54; Robbins, 2005:10). Gardyne (2005:12) cites the example of the Ingwe Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, which entered into publishing agreements with prominent local environmental and tourism magazines, to promote tourism in the region. Marais and Botes (2007) also suggest that many LED programmes in remote areas do not consider markets, and tend to over-emphasise supply-side mechanisms in order to promote production. The Stutterheim district provides an example of how the active promotion of a periodic market was associated with bi-monthly state pension payouts in the town, in order to sell a product (Nel and Mcquaid, 2002:64). Closely associated with the emphasis on linking up with markets, is the emphasis on linking up with the business sector in order to create markets. Some of the most prominent hallmarks of successful LED include initiative and entrepreneurship, as critically significant factors (Stohr, 1990). The economic links with the rural hinterland should also be taken into account (Pederson, 2004).

Sixthly, tourism has the potential to enhance and stimulate the economic competence and independence of rural areas, as tourism can bring about a creative combination of natural

resources on an economically sustainable basis, for the benefit of the local communities (Gardyne, 2005:5; White Paper: The Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa, 2002-2005; Donaldson, 2006). The impacts of pro-poor tourism on communities include financial benefits such as wages, new jobs and enterprise earnings (Pro Poor Tourism Pilots in Southern Africa 2002-2005; Parnell et al., 2005: 3). The KwaZulu-Natal tourism industry, for instance, provides 77 000 jobs and brings in R8,3 billion per annum (Van Schalkwyk, 2006). As already mentioned, there are a few small-town success stories which have resulted mainly from tourism, for example in the case of Still Bay (Binns and Nel, 2002) and Clarens (Marais, 2004). These case studies suggest that tourism can be an engine of growth, capable of galvanising and rejuvenating other sectors of the economy.

Finally, the NSDP provides a quantitative framework against which the potential of all places in South Africa should be assessed. Van Der Merwe et al. (2005) build on this by applying the same methodological framework (albeit with different indicators) to small towns in the Western Cape. These methodologies are probably relevant in the sense that they reflect on demonstrated potential. However, as pointed out by Marais (2006), their main shortcoming is that they do not reflect the latent potential of the people in a specific area. In the remainder of the case study, an attempt will be made to showcase the fact that a system concentrating only on demonstrated potential is not fully appropriate to small-town development.

4. The role of the ADA

Considering the background information gleaned from the literature, the focus will now shift to an assessment of small-town development in Victoria West. This town, which was named after Queen Victoria of England, was established in 1843. The town, located along the main route from Cape Town to Kimberley, marks the beginning of the Diamond Way. In 1866, diamond fever was sparked off with the discovery of a diamond in Hopetown, and another in Kimberley. The railway from Cape Town was also extended northward – but perplexingly, it missed Victoria West by 12km. The town is situated on the N12 national road, some 360 kilometres south of Kimberley and 600 kilometres north

of Cape Town. The population is estimated at 14 000, with the following racial composition: Coloured: 10 500; Black: 2 500; White: 1 000. The town forms part of the Ubuntu Local Municipality.

The overall economy relies heavily on agriculture and community services. Three relatively large businesses are operational in the town (the Spar; the KVB Co-op; and the Grib and Vos Joinery), providing employment to a large number of people. Some other, smaller businesses employ a limited number of people. However, as in many small towns, unemployment poses an enormous problem. The role of the ADA in small-town development is discussed under three headings, in terms of the two phases in the development of the ADA, as well as the relationship between the ADA and government structures.

4.1 The establishment and first phase of the ADA (1998-2002)

The ADA was established in February 1998 as a Section 21 company. Prior to its establishment, the general idea behind the envisaged association was to build a local economic development endeavour around the potential of a disused Art-Deco cinema in the centre of Victoria West. The ADA was founded and managed by David and Gail Robbins, who moved from Johannesburg and settled in Victoria West in 1998. David Robbins is a well-known writer on travel and socio-economic issues, while Gail Robbins is an events organiser. During 2001, the ADA was registered as a Section 21 Company with the Registrar of Companies, and also as a non-profit organisation with the Department of Social Development. It was managed by a board of ten members (three black teachers, three white persons, one farmer, one artist and one retired journalist, together with David Robbins) and three members of the local authority. The ADA had six permanent staff members, one of whom served as the CEO. Overall, the ADA comprises an excellent example of a structured NGO with the aim of promoting small-town development. The ADA's slogan was "economic development through culture, tourism and youth training"; and all its activities emanated from this basic mission.

The objectives of the ADA were pursued by means of the following events and activities. First, the Apollo Film Festival was initiated. The main activities in this regard between 1999 and 2002 were confined to restoring, renovating, reconstructing, training, and building in and around the Apollo precincts, in order to lobby for the holding of the film festival in Victoria West. By locating the festival in Victoria West, the ADA was able to attract tourists from all over South Africa. Generally, films were previewed and judged before being shown at other festivals. David and Gail Robbins, project managers at the time, identified the need for a film festival that would showcase independent South African films at one of the last remaining Art-Deco cinemas in South Africa. The festival started off very well, enjoying enormous financial support from the National Film and Video Foundation; Business & Arts SA; the Standard Bank Arts Sponsorship; Mnet Magic Works; De Beers; and the Standard Bank Foundation. The festivals provided economic benefits to the local economy to the amount of more than R300 000, 00 over one week at the end of September each year (Nothnagel, 2003).

Secondly, emphasis was placed on crafts development. The Crafts Development component comprises part of the Arts and Culture initiative that was originally funded by the Northern Cape Arts and Culture Council, for the benefit of the local community. The project entailed local craftsmen and women applying their trade and selling their products via the Apollo Craft Shop. Since 2006, the National Development Agency (NDA) has been funding the project.

During the middle of 2001, the ADA cluster idea began to develop, when the catering and hospitality training programme led to the formation of a catering cooperative by graduates. The aim of these clusters was to generate employment opportunities for unemployed local people, as the film festival had not brought about any direct benefits to the poorer community members. The following clusters were formed: a catering cooperative; a construction cooperative; a craft shop; a computer centre; a video production component; a stationery and document centre; and a research consultancy. The rationale behind the ADA's cluster system was twofold. Firstly, there was a need for appropriate economic development. Secondly, an effective support mechanism was

introduced to ensure that these enterprises would not fail – in view of the fact that a large number of enterprises tend to fail within their first three years of existence (Nothnagel, 2003). The cluster model operated as a vitally important staging post for people on their way to independent small-business activity, on the one hand, and served to bring about improved employment opportunities, on the other. In practice, it was fed by individual initiative on the part of participating enterprises, and – on the part of the ADA – by properly designed and managed financial systems; targeted support training; and a professional marketing function. All these elements, incorporated within the ADA itself, were rooted in an underlying foundation of community participation.

4.2 The community-based era – and decline (2003-)

Three main aspects characterised this era: first, the phased withdrawal, and ultimately the final withdrawal, of David and Gail Robbins; second, conflict between the ADA and the local authority; and thirdly, a continuation of some of the endeavours.

At the end of 2002, David and Gail Robbins started a process of “phased withdrawal” (a decision taken by the Robbinses), designed to shift control of the management of the project gradually into the hands of the local people. This involved, as a starting point, the establishment of a board of committees to control all aspects of project activity, including finance, in order to bring about closer cohesion between those with the decision-making authority (the board) and those who carried the responsibility of executing the decisions (the project managers, including the Robbinses until the latter’s complete withdrawal). To facilitate this move, training workshops were introduced for board members. Despite this measure, most committees quickly collapsed, arguably because board members acting as chairpersons seldom turned up or conducted meetings, with the exception of those responsible for finance and events. At the same time, the relationship between the board and the project management began to deteriorate, owing to conflict arising from the fact that the board wished to assume more responsibility and make more decisions, while the project management still wished to drive the ADA programmes on their own.

A short-term contractual employee resigned after a dispute with the project manager. Within a week, she withdrew her resignation. However, the project manager proceeded to appoint someone else. The board was requested not to accept her withdrawal, but decided otherwise, after considering the legal implications for the ADA, on the basis of consultations in this regard. Meanwhile, the young woman obtained employment at the local bank; but the board was “obliged” to pay her out for the duration of her contract (to the amount of R 15 000), after deciding that approaching the CCMA would not be in the interest of the ADA. This money had to be “found” by being deducted from other dedicated line items on the Apollo budget. Owing to the above conflict – as well as others – the senior project manager, Gail Robbins, was asked by the chairperson to stop working with the staff, after a long history of unhappiness with Robbins on the part of the staff. However, this was unacceptable to Robbins. At that stage – late in 2003, and a year into the phased withdrawal period – the Robbinses made the decision to disengage from the project (Robbins, 2007; Van Rooy, 2007).

The implications of this conflict with David and Gail Robbins led to their final withdrawal – but also to attempts on their part to remove the benefits from Victoria West. David and Gail tried to move the film festival to Kimberley. Ironically, their main argument was that Victoria West was an unsuitable venue for the festival. The NFVF, as the major funder of the festival, made a decision not to allow its money to be spent on any festival other than the Apollo festival.

The management was subsequently entrusted to an internal manager; and a more hands-on approach was adopted by the ADA Board. The era following the withdrawal of the Robbinses has been characterised by asset stripping; a few appointments; sponsored courses; renewed funding – and an all-time low in terms of the relationship with the local authority, as well as internal conflict. Some reflections on a number of activities during this period are relevant at this point.

First, the film festival experienced successes, challenges and changes, as well as a declining number of sponsors for the festival and the withdrawal of David and Gail

Robbins from the ADA in May 2004. These realities necessitated rapid and urgent preparations for the 4th Apollo Film Festival in September that year. The NFVF assisted the ADA in recruiting the expertise of event organisers for the 2004 and 2005 film festivals. The 2004 and 2005 Apollo Film Festivals brought about greater community participation. To a large extent, this was effectuated by the initiation of free entrance to the festivals for everyone. This initiative increased the attendance at the festivals. The 2006 festival comprised another highlight, because producers/actors such as Regardt van den Berg, as well as the Oscar-winning film, “Tsotsi”, were attracted to the festival. Another specific highlight was the establishment of a youth outreach programme between the Apollo Film Festival and the Open Doek Youth Film Festival of Belgium (the Festival is already linked with the Berlin Festival in Germany, as well as local festivals such as Sithengi in Cape Town). In 2007, young people from Victoria West will attend the Open Doek Youth Film Festival as part of the outreach. The relationship with the Open Doek Youth Film Festival could potentially bring about wider exposure for the Apollo Film Festival.

Secondly, in 2003, the Tourism Office (which was the responsibility of the local authority) was taken over by the ADA. A Tourism Officer was appointed with the assistance of the Local Government (albeit with no financial input from the latter), the NDA and the Northern Cape Tourism Authority.

Thirdly, the Film Resource Unit in Cape Town, with a view to creating an opportunity to start small businesses, trained two local youths. In the context of the film festival, this training was evaluated; and the youths participated in film-making (producing one-minute films). This facility is now operated by four local youths. Future plans for the facility include the training of youths in video skills (Martens, 2005).

Fourthly, in 2005, the Department of Labour offered training courses, using the ADA as the service provider. These courses enabled people to become more employable, as they provided the participants with the opportunity to acquire skills for the job market and for self-employment purposes. More than 80 learners benefited from these courses, which

included bricklaying and plumbing. Many of the trainees are still unemployed, and jobs are only obtained on a sporadic basis; for example, only six people were employed for the purpose of the two-week renovation of the Apollo during 2006. Two caterers own their own businesses; but they also have other employment, since they cannot make a living from their businesses alone.

Fifthly, the ADA owns a restaurant that is formally equipped and funded by De Beers. The condition of this funding was that the restaurant should be an economic-empowerment initiative involving local people. The ADA rented the restaurant, at R750 per month, thereby creating the opportunity for local people to start a business (Martens, 2005).

Sixthly, between 2001 and 2006, organisations such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) and the NDA jointly invested nearly R4 million in the Apollo Film Festival (cf. Apollo Festival Company. A position document, 10 May 2004, Festival budget 2005, 2006). The bulk of the money was spent on festival organisers, local businesses such as the B&Bs, Karoo Vleisboere Limited and the Hickmans Country Lodge, as well as a local accounting firm. Other beneficiaries include national and local artists, as well as local caterers.

A symbiotic relationship exists between the Apollo Film Festival and its organisers, the local private sector, and other members of the community. The Apollo paid out more than R125 000, 00 to each organiser of the film festival between 2001 and 2006. (After the withdrawal of Gail Robbins, the Encounters organiser of the Sithengi film festival in Cape Town was appointed to assist and train the Apollo's film festival manager to manage the 2005 festival.) The work of the organisers and the services rendered by the local private sector contributed to a well-organised festival – assisting the ADA to secure a 10% administration fee (for hosting the festival). This enabled the Apollo to meet its own commitments in terms of paying its staff and seeing to the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Another beneficiary of the festival, Young Lions Productions – an independent company of film-makers – sponsored a three-week script-writing and film-making workshop, training youths between 15 and 18 years of age. The young people made three short films (cf. Apollo Development Association Film Festival Preliminary Report to the NFVF, 2006). Although money was spent with no obvious monetary returns, national and international exposure was achieved, and local people received valuable training.

4.3 The ADA and government

Throughout this process, a government structure has been involved in some way or another. However, specific reference needs to be made to the role of the Local Authority. Prominent political role-players (the mayor and another councillor) were founder members of the ADA board, and were involved in diverse ways between 1998 and 2007. In the initial years, they supplied active assistance to the ADA in various forms. In this manner, occasional free labour was provided, while the ADA was exempt from service fees. When funding came into the Apollo, the money was supposed to be channelled through the local authority. When this did not take place, the local authority gradually began to withdraw its support to Apollo. This withdrawal began with the termination of a subsidy on services, followed by the withdrawal of the local authority from the ADA board.

With the formation of the new council in 2002, a different attitude developed towards the ADA. Accounts for large “arrears” amounts were issued; and on several occasions, electricity and water supplies to the ADA were cut off (Robbins, 2006; Vass, 2007). After 2000, the role of the local authority was scaled down to the hiring out of halls for the use of the ADA during film festivals, and the occasional appearance of the mayor at festivals. The standing allocated seat on the ADA board remained vacant, partly as a result of the Robbinses’ actions, but also because the local authority simply did not take it up. The withdrawal of the Robbinses saw an improvement in relations with the local authority. This can be attributed to the fact that many of the board members are ANC members. Staff salaries (for one month) were paid by the local authority when the ADA fell into desperate financial difficulties. The joint council/ADA board encouraged the

Northern Cape MEC for Sports, Arts and Culture to pay off a substantial bank overdraft (R200 000, 00). This intervention of the council paid dividends, because the Northern Cape Cabinet settled the overdraft. After a dispute with the MEC for Sport, Arts and Culture, the ANC-led local authority withdrew its support for the Apollo. The mayor and municipal manager decided not to attend the 2006 film festival, despite the attendance of the Deputy Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture and the district mayor. The reason given at the time by the municipal manager was that the ADA had not made it clear what their role at the film festival would be (Fillis, 2007). Although relations were strained, the local authority approved the allocation of money for specific projects to renovate the Town Hall for the 2006 film festival gala awards. They also put staff on standby in case they were required (Kiwido, 2007). Both the mayor and municipal manager intimated that the Apollo could play a role in the local economic development of the town, but also pointed out the need to realise that the nature of relations had to change (Arens, 2007; Fillis, 2007).

5. Apollo and its role in LED: An evaluation

The narrative of small-town development in Victoria West is one of mixed success, in which the initial “outside heroes” ultimately had to leave as the “unwanted heroes”. Considering the reality of small-town decline, as well as the factors fostering small-town development, as indicated in the relevant literature, a number of reflections need to be made in respect of factors playing a role in small-town development.

Robbins (2003) summarises the relevant achievements in the following words: “It (Victoria West) became the venue for the first national film festival devoted exclusively to South African films. Most importantly, though, it served as headquarters to a development project that in its first six years made significant impacts on local economic development and tourism expansion, education and cultural enrichment, as well as urban renewal and HIV awareness”. However, these achievements should be assessed in more detail. In view of the decline of many small towns, the question is: What made a difference? Consideration should be given to a number of factors. The role of strong and dynamic leaders played a crucial part in the establishment of the ADA. It is important to

note that the partnership collaboration between community groups and the local authority, although its contribution was varied in nature, was of assistance to the ADA. The funding given to the ADA by government institutions and government-funded organisations kept the ADA projects running, and in many instances was responsible for “keeping the ADA boat afloat”. The participation of local people, the promotion of the ADA to markets, and the utilisation of the tourism potential, although not optimal, enabled the ADA to gain recognition locally and nationally, as well as in the international arena. More specifically, four main points should be made, as follows:

First, the role of champions such as the Robbinses should be mentioned specifically. Their ability to realise the potential of the unused Art Deco Theatre showcases the role of outsiders in developing latent potential. In addition, their networks and skills in accessing funding from various funders made a significant difference. At the same time, a number of people who were interviewed for this project also mentioned that the Robbinses’ ability to initiate community participation, which had not been seen in the town before, should be commended (Hartogh, 2007; Horne, 2007; Keyser, 2007). The youth were involved in the large-scale cleanup operation and renovation of the Apollo Theatre. Funders such as the NFVF and NDA, with considerable financial capacity, were brought to the town. On reflection, possibly this was done, not on the basis of principle, but to induce government-aided organisations like the NFVF and NDA to fund the ADA. It is highly unlikely that the Apollo would have received money if the community, and specifically the black community, had not been involved. However, there can be little doubt that the birth of the film festival as a result of the involvement of the Robbinses brought the town to the attention of South Africa, and even to that of Europe.

The second lesson refers to the conflict between the champions and the community. The “fairy tale” of Victoria West’s champions turned into a nightmare with the withdrawal of the couple from Victoria West. Not only were they perceived as outsiders who dominated local people, but in the aftermath of their involvement, it seems as if very little local capacity was actually built. The assistant manager of the Robbinses reflected on his role as follows: “I don’t know what to do”; while a staff member commented: “They

remained the big city champions of development without shaping the champions in the town”. Their withdrawal was ultimately hastened when they realised that their vision for the ADA was being challenged by the desires of the staff, the board and the community at large. The withdrawal of the champions left a void, which was bridged, to a degree, by the local board and manager. At the same time, it also led to the demise of the cluster model; the champions were simply not there to be the driving force behind it. The reality outlined above showcases two lessons that need to be remembered in small-town development (and possibly in other types of projects as well). Firstly, it illustrates the fragile nature of partnerships and the role of outsiders. Existing literature in this regard mostly reflects on partnership formation in a naïve and simple manner. The case of Victoria West suggests that, despite positive outcomes and achievements, there is often an inherent struggle for power between various individuals and groups. Secondly, there is an inherent conflict in most development processes between outcomes and processes. In this case, the outcomes placed Victoria West on the national and international map. However, the processes involved in skills transfer and the taking on board of the broader community resulted in extensive conflict between the Robbinses and members of the community. Essentially, the type of conflict illustrated above occurs between the use of the skills of the champions, on the one hand, and ensuring that local players are kept on board, on the other. According to Robbins (2007), the declaration of the Robbinses’ phased withdrawal at the end of 2002 was interpreted as a signal that the ADA was “up for grabs”, with the result that the people within the organisation and in the community began a process of jockeying for position, in readiness for the new phase.

The board of the Apollo viewed the “phased withdrawal” of the Robbinses as an indication of the need to take on more responsibilities, and to make decisions in order to steer the ADA in a direction that met the aspirations of the board and, ultimately, also those of the community, and not really as an opportunity to seize control of the ADA for economic reasons. Groupings and individuals had little impact on the Apollo, because the board at the time was comprised of people of stature in the community. A few were members of the dominant ANC party, but did not openly try to further the interests of the party. Ironically, they always tried to keep the ANC leadership at bay. Henry Vass

(2007), the former mayor and one of the founders of the ADA board, confirmed that the relationship between the local authority and the ADA became strained after funding (money) began to flow into the ADA. It was publicly stated, for example, that all development funding should be channelled through the local authority, rather than through a civil-society organisation dominated by a small group of people (Vass, 2007; Robbins, 2007). This was indicative of a disregard for the successes achieved by the ADA at the time. This raises the question regarding the degree to which local government is prepared to support NGOs in respect of LED. Does this mean that support from the local authority depends on who manages an NGO, and the extent to which the local authority's influence counts?

The third lesson is related to the fact that much of the potential in small towns is latent. The case of Victoria West illustrates the point that latent potential exists which is not measurable in terms of quantitative methodologies as used by Van Der Merwe et al. (2005) in the Western Cape, or by the National Spatial Development Perspective. What is required in respect of small towns is a funding system, which can unleash such potential with a view to the overall sustainability of small towns and their respective municipalities. Despite the fact that the role-players in Victoria West managed to access funding, the overall current funding mechanisms in this regard are mostly inadequate, and do not assist in the development of creative proposals. Overall, the case study of the ADA, run by two champions, indicates the importance of external champions, in the sense that they bring new and alternative ideas, which are impossible to measure beforehand.

Fourthly, the role of provincial and local government should be assessed. The significant role of local authorities in the development process in South Africa is apparent from the duties and objectives of local government, which are summarised in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as follows: To promote social and economic development as well as to encourage involvement of communities and community organizations in the affairs of local government (Scheepers, 2000:42). Two prominent lessons should be mentioned on the basis of the case study. What seems evident from this case study is,

firstly, that the lack of continuity in the local government sphere has impacted negatively on the relationship between the ADA and the local government. Secondly, both local government and NGOs should still find appropriate ways of working together over the longer term. This requires government institutions to accept the fact that they cannot control everything. The role of provincial and local government should be one of facilitation, or the provision of an enabling environment for economic opportunity, as well as the provision of equitable access to resources for urban and rural development. Provincial and local government should also reallocate resources to promote and facilitate small-town development.

The provincial government of the Northern Cape, through a number of departments, made financial inputs into the Apollo. However, these comprised isolated instances, rather than a deliberate and integrated strategy in collaboration with the district and local government with a view to development. In the development of small towns, a collective effort is required from role-players (local authority, civil society, NGOs) in collaboration with provincial governments, if economic development in the small towns is to be achieved. This also raises the question mentioned earlier, as to whether an appropriate external funding arrangement is available to all towns, and why Victoria West, in particular, was fortunate enough to access certain funds. Surely provision can be made for competing for funds – but then this should be done on a fair basis, with all municipalities and small towns being able to compete for the funds in an equal manner.

Fifthly, the case study also confirms the potential of tourism to enhance and stimulate economic competence and independence in small towns. The important fact in this regard is that monies that did not circulate elsewhere came to Victoria West. Sadly, only the small white community is gaining from the annual film festival, in particular. For example: of the 32 B&B establishments and lodges, only the white-owned ones are actually being used. The only two black-owned B&Bs are largely overlooked (although it should be acknowledged that the B&Bs also provide jobs to black people with lower levels of skills). Local artists earn considerably less than well-known artists such as Karen Zoid who visit the festival. However, this is understandable, given that, in order to

increase the appeal of the festival to a broader audience, it is important to bring in artists who are recognised on a national basis. The Apollo Film Festival is well marketed on national television. The ADA has even attracted visitors from the Brazilian Embassy, as well as Swedish film students. Overall, the lesson from Victoria West is that some smaller towns do have tourism potential. However, this potential needs to be recognised and developed.

Sixthly, the initiatives to develop enterprises have always been under pressure, owing to the lack of a market and local skills. The “cluster” and the mother organisation (ADA) were constantly under pressure to survive, even under the management of David and Gail Robbins. Dependency was one major stumbling block impeding the growth of the cluster; and there were high expectations that placed pressure on both the ADA and the cluster. The financial system also contributed to the demise of businesses that formed part of the cluster model (system). Every small business in the cluster had its own bank account. At some point there were as many as twenty separate bank accounts. This made the administration easy for the ADA and its accountants (Dignon, 2007). However, for small businesses that were only starting out, the costs they had to incur for bank charges, as well as the fee they had to pay to the Apollo for services, created financial strain.

Seventhly, there is a growing uneasiness in the communities regarding the operations of the Apollo, mainly because of opportunism and self-interest amongst the ranks of the ADA management. The money that devolved to the ADA created expectations of money/income for local people. However, these expectations came to nothing, since only a few people seemed to benefit from the ADA. Community participation as far as planning and feedback are concerned is non-existent at the moment. It seems that the larger community is only involved when board members are elected. The current management team operates as an island – even more so than in the case of the Robbinses. Overall, there is increasing evidence that the ADA is becoming dysfunctional – a factor which might impact negatively on the ability of the town to retain the current momentum.

6. Concluding remarks

There can be little doubt that Victoria West represents one of the better examples of small-town development. To a large degree, it confirms the general development principles of partnerships, the role of champions, outside ideas and capital, the role of NGOs and the potential of tourism, as reflected upon in the literature review of this paper. However, the case study also brings two new points to the fore in respect of small-town development. Firstly, it illustrates the fragile nature of such partnerships, and how the involvement of development champions can sometimes be experienced in communities. Essentially, the formation of the ADA partnerships has merely formalised normal power-play in Victoria-West. The danger exists that the positive developments of the past decade could be erased by a dysfunctional ADA. Secondly, and more importantly, the case study suggests that the potential of small towns cannot be measured in terms of demonstrated potential only. In fact, in many cases, and specifically in the case of Victoria West, a large degree of latent potential is present, which cannot be detected by the types of quantitative methodologies reflected in the work of Van Der Merwe et al. (2005), or those used by the NSDP. From a policy perspective, this finding suggests that funding frameworks should consider the use of mechanisms through which all urban areas, and more specifically small urban areas, could compete on an equal basis to assist in releasing their latent potential, by means of partnerships between government and civil society.

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