



CONSIDERING SMALL TOWNS RESEARCH AND LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Why Small Town South Africa?

- Regional and local economic development project in KZN
- Approx 500 small towns in South Africa
- Interface between urban and rural politics, economies, communities and development processes
- Require the application of a varied, multidisciplinary and innovative set of ideas and interventions to be fully understood and engaged with.

Local Economic Development

- LED Toolkit states that LED is:
an approach by which local people continuously work together, and with other stakeholders, to achieve sustainable local economic growth and development that brings improved quality of life to all
- Seeks to build thriving, well managed, competitive, robust local economies through increased local participation and consensus about economic priorities and direction of economies.
- Centred on stakeholders, their relationships and the development of local economies through the leveraging of local resources.

Small Towns Research in South Africa

- Key areas of research:
 - Small town classification
 - The dynamics of change
 - Policy and small towns
 - Economic development and small towns

Therefore

1. How to enrich and improve our understanding and practice of LED in (and for) small towns?
2. Improve the likelihood of successful interventions?



What is Needed?

- Where research is **NOT** focussed on small towns and LED:
 - Opportunities to draw other research themes more closely together with understandings of the practice of LED in small towns
 - The characteristics of small towns which are described within specific case studies are vital to building a critical, pragmatic, understanding of small towns to inform the design and implementation of LED interventions.

Where research IS being conducted on LED and small towns:

- Research should not simply document LED projects, activities, and general interactions of stakeholder groups involved in LED initiatives within towns
- Assessments of LED in small towns which address the symptoms of poverty and low employment but which do not focus enough on the systemic and supporting mechanisms and contexts which prevail are inadequate
- The micro-decisions taking place to facilitate LED?
- The regular 'everyday' interactions within LED processes between actors and institutions in towns?
- The roles of leadership, accountability, social capital and trust?

- Engagements between actors and both institutions and markets
 - How best to design and implement LED for specific small towns?
- Implications of out-migration for LED in small towns?
- How to innovatively utilise a very small pool of human capital resources?
- Research which promotes the retention and up-skilling of a youthful population
- Small towns which are the most economically marginal or spatially isolated

- How can the concept and purpose of LED can be woven into local development programmes already taking place?
 - champions, leaders and entrepreneurs that facilitate LED
 - social capital within small towns
 - partnerships which can leverage economic development in an integrated manner.
- Inter-relationships through partnerships, networks, organisations and governance systems

New methods?

- Diverse data collection methods and multi-method approaches
- Currently, much research is conducted through an ‘outsider’ positionality
- Action research?
 - the development of support systems for champions of young and emerging entrepreneurs in small towns
 - improved understanding of how best business support can be given in small towns
- Practitioner-based research?
- Further spatial diversity in the towns being researched
- Regional focus
- Avoid falling into the ‘case study’ trap