

CAPITAL CITIES PROJECT

The University of Pretoria's newest
Institutional Research Theme

Capital Cities: Space, Justice and Belonging

Research Subthemes:

- 1. Cities Represented: Arts and Culture**
- 2. Cities Lived: Movements, Exchanges, Memories and Histories of the Present**
- 3. Cities Remapped: Industry, Power and Linkages**
- 4. Cities Revisioned: Violence, Dignity and Interventions**



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Capital Cities: Space, Justice and Belonging

1. Cities Represented: Arts and Culture

Research in this subtheme explores cultural and artistic mappings of the social and political power geographies and complexes that dominate cities. A main research question is how urban culture can be voiced, claimed, negotiated and contested, especially in the context of capital cities as sites where there is a conflation of global and local influences. Mendieta (2001:15, 23) argues that cities have become the 'vortex of the convergence of the processes of globalization and localization... [and] epitomes of globalization, to use Robertson's language (1994)'; and that the 'city is the site at which the forces of the local and the global meet: the site where the forces of transnational finance capital and the local labour markets and national infrastructures enter into conflict and contestation over the city.'

Pretoria (and more recently Pretoria/Tshwane) as a city, has experienced a turbulent history over the past two centuries and those in power continue to monumentalise their visions of the past and an envisioned future. Representations of this monumentalisation in Tshwane include Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument, while Church Square and the Union Buildings represent legal and administrative seats of power. Here, as in many other cities and countries, marginalised groups contest such spaces and construct alternative meanings around them. As Joe Austin (2010:33) argues, since the early twentieth-century turn towards the everyday, there has been an adjustment of the analytic lens to centre on the mundane experiences within urban walls and streets, including aesthetic experiences and cultural artefacts. Research has since dealt extensively with this local urban place-scale in response to the human-scaled city experience.

Urban studies and the arts have shown a dynamic interrelationship since the nineteenth-century 'Haussmannisation' of Paris, and the subsequent writings of Walter Benjamin, for instance, who identified productive relationships between the artist as public figure, the artwork as public object and the urban or street culture of the time. Notions of the urban stroller or the flâneur have become extraordinarily significant since Baudelaire's nineteenth-century male stroller in the city, an image that is accompanied by a dedicated and embodied take on the city that reflects the philosophical urban musings of, for instance, De Certeau, Lefebvre, Zukin, Tuan, Mirzoeff and many others. In art, music and theatre, interventions are set up in the urban space, which are interrogated in this theme in terms of the level at which these interventions take place; the sets of relationships involved; the sustainability of the intervention; and the meaning produced through such intervention. Staff and students involved in such projects will draw on a number of modes of academic and artistic research and production, broadly understood under the rubric of practice-led research.

Other research questions that may emanate from the research around the importance of place is how people construct their identities psycho-geographically and how this is evident in cultural and art production; the continuities and discontinuities between apartheid and post-apartheid culture; and the 'phenomenology of intermedial production in the urban context driven by technological, political and economic developments, and as reconfiguring three former separated cultural domains – established in the nineteenth century – of the arts, politics and science, especially philosophy' (Oosterling 2003:30).

Sources quoted

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Capital Cities: Space, Justice and Belonging

2. Cities Lived: Movements, Exchanges, Memories and Histories of the Present

This subtheme will explore the city not simply as triangulated space of local authority, urban planning and spatial design, but as a place where people make sense of what living in the city means to them. This process of giving meaning to the city as lived space relates to interactions and exchanges between urban citizens that are shaped by history, social structures and cultural practice. These interactions and exchanges take place between memory and history, as well as between private and public spaces. How we understand this process of giving meaning to city life is influenced by the interplay between what is forgotten and what is preserved in the archives, as well as what is hidden in the private domain or celebrated in public. This renders interactions and exchanges absent or present, as well as hidden or visible. They encompass the traces of comings and goings, movements and removals, location and mobility, departures from and arrivals in the city, and form striated spaces in memory, perception, and experience. These find their visualisation and expression in distinctive markings, choices and styles reaching towards a sphere of the common. They variously mark the meanings of the cityscape as home and the everyday acts that instantiate alienation. Taking account of these traces as lines of inclusion and extrusion, this subtheme provides a spectrum of possibilities for studying and crafting active citizenship. It engages the agencies, practices, and policies shaping the built environment and, with it, social interactions in the city, both historical and current.

Among others, the research projects shaping this research theme will include a study of particular socialities around life choices and orientations, in relation to a differentially drawn normativity; a study of the dynamics of the diversity of language uses, and the respective challenges and possibilities; a study of public spaces; an exploration of urban agriculture and permaculture; an ethnographic study of urban subcultures and the gendered negotiation of mobility and of leisure spaces by young women, gays and lesbians within townships and across the township-city divide.

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Capital Cities: Space, Justice and Belonging

3. Cities Remapped: Industry, Power and Linkages

This subtheme explores how urban economic structures and the nature of the state influence social processes. Put differently, the social outcomes of urban political economies will be explored. The map of Tshwane has been shaped by decades of state intervention. The city became a key part of the apartheid state's military-industrial-complex with the location of the Iscor steel works in the west in 1934, as well as the importance of the military's headquarters in Thaba Tshwane (previously Robertson Heights, later Voortrekkerhoogte). A part of the state's intervention in the mapping of the city is large-scale forced removals in the 1950s and 1960s of people from places such as Lady Selborne to further north – notably Soshanguve and Mabopane – essentially stripping urban citizens of their national citizenship as well by moving them to apartheid's Bantustan's (Carruthers, 2000). This is part of the reason why Tshwane is currently one of the world's largest cities in terms of square kilometres. The Iscor works were closed down in 1982, even before the end of apartheid, and the city's map was redrawn yet again, to be dominated by the civil service and the increased construction of shopping centres around the city's suburban peripheries, drawing commercial activities out of the inner city. Current attempts to redraw this map through urban planning are constrained by apartheid's spatial legacies, as well as the development of new gated communities alongside urban slums (Landman, 2006). The city's hinterland to the north and the west is also changed fundamentally with the rise of new mining activities, notably of platinum in places such as Rustenburg and Mokopane. Tshwane also remains the heart of South Africa's diplomatic community, which provides a local cosmopolitan flavour with global linkages, typical of capital cities.

Questions to be examined under this subtheme include: What is the relationship between location, power and mobility in the city? What networks have historically tied up the meanings and practices of citizenship, the military, state and civil service? How are these networks and relationships being transformed? How are they linked to similar global systems of power, or contestation of such systems, by ordinary citizens and state officials in the current post-apartheid moment? What is the nature of the state bureaucracy-military-industrial complex? What is the relationship between welfare, warfare, and workfare that has shaped the history of the city?

This subtheme focuses on how urban power is constructed, reproduced, evaded and contested and how these processes relate to the concretisation of space in place in the form of industrial and state linkages to social structure (see Harvey, 2012). Initial studies within this subtheme will include an ethnographic account of gated communities; the relationship between the city and its hinterlands, such as the erstwhile Bantustan territories of Bophuthatswana, the mining hinterland (the platinum belt to the north and north-west); a study of cooperatives and the solidarity economy in Tshwane; the diplomatic community and other non-state diplomatic actors; the development of shopping malls as spaces that generate alternative public space, new lifestyles, identities, alongside new forms of exclusion; and the spatial economies of Pretoria/Tshwane.

References

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Capital Cities: Space, Justice and Belonging

4. Cities Revisioned: Violence, Dignity and Interventions

Inasmuch as cities are expressions of layered identities, memories and practices of belonging and inasmuch as they give rise to a multitude of artistic and cultural expressions across landscapes, they are also social laboratories of sorts. It is often in cities where we experiment with new technologies, consciously create new markets, and witness the emergence of new social groups. This subtheme explores the multitude of ways in which academics and other social and political communities are revisioning the city in their everyday lives and their professional practice.

What are the implicit moral visions of society and selves implied by various practices within the city as social laboratory? Which metaphors do planners, academics, activists and civil workers deploy in their talk about their city? How is the city envisioned by city planners? How does the vision of such planners coexist with those who live in the city? What does a comparison between the visions of city planners across continents and countries tell us about the capital city of Pretoria? What is the relationship between social power complexes and political power complexes? How have geographies of power, of inclusion and exclusion, shaped the city? How do we promote the enhancement of quality of life by making cities more resilient? How to best engage with the city so it can regenerate itself? What happens when we envisage the city as an ecosystem rather than a constellation of objects? We also ask the question of aesthetics: Why do we try to create aesthetically appealing buildings and how do people respond to this?

Initial studies within this subtheme will include a comparative study of Herbert Baker's architecture in New Delhi and Pretoria, with specific emphasis on linkages between cities as subjectivities of power; an archaeological excavation of one of the city's four forts, in the context of historical fortification and defensive positioning, and current commemorative practices; a history of enclosing institutions constituting subjects of particular classifications (illness, insanity, and criminality) in the context of particular rationalities of governance, and their discontents; poverty and justice in relation to history and the law; the activities of home-making and work taking in unusual spaces such as the park, the street and the city dump; and a study emanating from inner-city development projects linked to faith-based organisations.

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