

ABSTRACT

O.R Tambo International Airport (ORTIA) holds strong prominence as Africa's biggest airport. Additionally, the anticipated growth of aviation within Africa will further enhance its relevance. Airports in their own right are becoming city cores of which its surrounding environments (aerotropolis) attract special industries which result to a transformation of the urban fabric. Ekurhuleni has followed global trends by asserting its decision to transform ORTIA into an Aerotropolis. The legitimacy of the aerotropolis model however is being questioned for the effects on the natural environment, displacement effects and its heavy dependence on government incentives required that tend to have a bias focus on foreign investment. Ekurhuleni is confronted by unique contextual factors of inequality and spatial racial-segregation that are the result of the historical South African apartheid system. Additionally, Ekurhuleni comes from a unique premise that it is a relatively newly established city that has been formed by amalgamating nine previous towns.

Irrespective of this incomparable situation of being a non-traditional metropolis, Ekurhuleni not having a traditional metropolis, notably relying on the adjacent City of Johannesburg for its identity, it has sought punch above its weight and thrive to become an airport city. This research explores the spatial impacts of O.R Tambo International Airport on Ekurhuleni Area through qualitative research methods and a review of key theories that are born from neo-liberal policies and airport orientated developments. It explores current developments with O.R Tambo International Airport and Ekurhuleni focusing on physical, economic and social spaces that are owed to the existence of the airport.

O.R Tambo International Airport has had significant spatial impact on Ekurhuleni area. The spatial impacts undeniably led to positives through the conception of competitive, economically thriving and innovative environments which align to global, competitive cities. As part of the Gauteng City Region (GCR), Ekurhuleni is placing strong leverage on the existence of the airport to shape the city spatially.

There is a strong focus on increasing scale and density within the immediate surrounds of the airport through development infill and replacement of single dwellings with apartments and hotels. The corridors and spines developed place focus on links to the airport as the key central

point in which its development stems. The environment reveals industrial clusters which gain economically through the agglomeration effects. It is also stimulating focus on the presence of social facilities such as tourism, retail and hotels which would serve the airport.

The traditionally manufacturing based economy of Ekurhuleni is integrating with knowledge economy industries which are aligned to global cities. The city is focusing on compaction with new development being mixed- use spaces connected by a multi modal transport network. These Integrated Transport Networks are concretised by recent investments into the Gautrain and the Bus Rapid Transitsystem (BRT). The previous far reaching edge cities that were the black traditional townships are being connected to the metro core through increasing available modes of public transport.

There still remains the threat that airports become contributory factor to the creation of exclusionary spaces faced with environmental threats. It is noted that in an unequal society such as South Africa, areas surrounding airports may exacerbate the challenges of crime and further displacement of residents. The spatial formation process within Ekurhuleni involved multi-disciplinary actors from various industries and decision making cuts across the various spheres of government. Non-robust community engagements coupled by their lack of knowledge on the aerotropolis initiative has reflected that there needs to be a focus on the empowerment of citizens. Branding has been recognized as critical for city competitiveness. The resultant effects of Ekurhuleni being formed from a combination of towns has left it with meek and ambiguous identity. The formulation of robust branding policies and building on the strength of ORTIA brand has the potential to give Ekurhuleni's vague character significant leverage.

Overall, ORTIA's spatial contribution has both a positive and negative spatial impacts on Ekurhuleni. ORTIA gives competitive advantage to the Gauteng City Region (GCR) and it acts as an urban development stimuli to Ekurhuleni as the GCR gateway airport. Planning can however be instrumental in remedial actions on addressing the negative corollaries caused by airports to their surrounds. Hence it is recommended that a communicative and collaborative planner; who encourages equitable capacity development practices, would be effective in managing the spatial formation process within Ekurhuleni.