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Middelmann, Temba John Dawson

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The interactions between public spaces and spatial (in)justice: Comparing case studies in inner-city Johannesburg

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Temba John Dawson Middelmann

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the history, design, management and use of public space relate to the interaction of public space with spatial (in)justice, focussing on case studies of different public space typologies in inner-city Johannesburg. These cases - namely Gandhi Square, Constitution Hill and Pieter Roos Park - embody key and distinct models for public space management. The research contributes to understanding the changing nature and meaning of privately and publicly managed places regarding their interactions with spatial justice and injustice. While the emphasis in South Africa's spatial justice discourse is largely focussed on inadequate, peripherally located housing, this PhD explores how these issues relate with and impact on central public places. The thesis thus demonstrates how broad spatial injustices influence particular sites and networks of public space, arguing that site-level management and use patterns play important roles in shaping public culture, which has further implications for those broader spatial injustices and attempts at resolving them. Lefebvre's (1968) concept of the right to the city helps to explore the inherently political nature of public space, and how people's rights are enabled or circumscribed in the ways the spaces are managed, used and contested. My analysis of the paradoxes of public space underpin arguments for a more nuanced and processual understanding of spatial justice that emphasises public space more strongly, based on a shift from understanding spatial justice through a necessitation of trade-offs to a more holistic approach. In line with this shift is a call for a more network-based, creative and collaborative approach to the production and management of public space.