

Abstract

INSERTION: THE REVITALIZATION OF A SMALL TOWN THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW LAND USE [FUSING EDUCATION AND LIVING]

The formation of small towns in South Africa was a result of the spread of colonialism. Indeed, these towns were conceived for a minority of settlers and set up in the image of British or English towns. Their logic has always been that they would be service towns and most of them have remained as such servicing the rural hinterland. The advent of democracy has allowed for fluid migration patterns creating linkages between urban and rural areas opening these towns to a new demographic.

The prompt for endeavoring in such research stems from personal experience and noticing how small towns in the Eastern Cape are deteriorating and losing their strength as service centers which offer jobs, facilities, amenities and focal points from which developments spread to the greater region. The purpose of this research is to conceive a strategy to revitalize the town of Port St Johns by capitalizing on the intense flow of people, goods, capital (both public and private), services and information taking place between urban and rural areas (Ministry of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs, 2014).

The town of Port St Johns finds itself in the periphery of the Eastern Cape Province as an 'end of the road' town. It services over 130 villages most of which are rife with poverty. Its main economic drivers are the tourism and farming sector with tourism being more dominant. As a result of this, it experiences huge population influxes at different periods of the year from people coming in to buy groceries at the end of the month to holiday makers filling up the town and its beaches during the end-of-the-year holiday period.

This presents an opportunity to capitalize on these fluctuations but they are often met with poor infrastructure, particularly that of education and accommodation. Although the tourism sector is the major economy of the town it is undeniably stagnant, a situation further exacerbated by weak partnerships between local government and non-governmental institutions.

Efforts to revitalize the town must then begin at the regional scale by linking strategic and sectoral initiatives between functional geographic areas (Port St Johns Master Plan). Value chains must be developed between various economic sectors. Research on the demographic makeup of the area shows it to have a large young and unskilled population. Up-skilling the large youth resource initially in the sectors that are strongest in the region must be rigorous. An institution of higher learning dedicated to farming, tourism and hospitality could help aid this as it would anchor the population throughout the year and residences developed could then be used to accommodate holiday makers during the holiday period when a majority of tourists visit the area.



Figure 1. by Author , 2016