

Progress with Urban Spatial Policy

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

3661

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Urban Spatial Policy: Overview

- Evolution and performance since 1994, and influences on its trajectory
- For URD State of Urban Policy book examining urban policy
- Key finding is that despite a dominant discourse accepting the need for urban restructuring in 1994, urban spatial policy has been weak and has remained marginal, but may be resurgent

Emergence of Urban Spatial Policy

- Refers to restructuring of towns and cities towards compaction and integration
- Based on critiques of the apartheid city
- Key ideas formulated by planning academics, but taken up in urban NGOs and negotiating forums of early 90s

Urban Spatial Policy

- Urban spatial restructuring intentions in RDP, in principles for planning in the 1995 DFA, in Urban Development Framework 1997, and in Housing, Transport, Local Gov legislation

- But little effect on spatial patterns in cities, which have continued to sprawl, and remain divided/show new divides, more on class lines

Limits of Urban Spatial Policy

- Severe constraints on policy in mid-90s:
 - Dominance of old practices by bureaucracy
 - State had to demonstrate stability, so challenge to entrenched property interests not on the agenda
- Fragmented local government and competition between cities enabled laissez faire approach to market led urban development
- Focus on delivery, especially in housing

Limits of Urban Spatial Policy

- Closure of RDP Office 1996, and lack of strong centre for Urban Policy, and Urban Spatial Policy: marginal in several departments
- Absence of urban land policy and systematic reform of planning system
- Abstracted spatial concepts
- Lack of strong political constituency

Urban Spatial Policy Resurgent?

- By late 90s, the plausibility and desirability of compaction was debated, and concept was modified to reflect urban realities
- By 2004, compaction-integration was resurgent, albeit in modified form
- Most NB: Housing's Breaking New Ground – brought urban land onto the agenda for the first time in 10 years

Why a Resurgence?

- Broader policy shifts reflecting concerns about social/economic divides
 - Housing: recognition of the limits of delivery
 - Growing sustainability agenda
 - Costs of sprawl evident in some cities
 - Beneficiary surveys showing concerns about housing, including location – ironically in contrast to other studies suggesting that unemployment is marginalising the significance of access to formal employment
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Future of Urban Spatial Policy?

- Seems to be new interest
- Maybe strengthened by growing concerns about spatial exclusion
- But still not well institutionalised, and several policy gaps
- And may continued to be marginalised by greater focus on addressing informal settlements, and service delivery

Future of Urban Spatial Policy: Role of Research?

- Urban Spatial Policy based on a level of research, but still limited
- New policy calls for research in several areas
 - Significant debate on the plausibility and desirability of the policy – and different perspectives arising from studies with varying methodologies
- Need for closer understanding of urban socio-spatial dynamics, and how cities are changing – beyond abstract spatial ideas