

RESEARCH ARTICLE



A tale of no cities? The neglect of cities in South Africa's post-apartheid national economic policies

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ABSTRACT

Cities and the economic processes they host are widely seen to be central to the economic prospects of nations. This reality presents city and national actors with challenges of how to jointly conceive of urban economic development policies, with a view to contributing to local and national economic development. Whilst national urban policies often outline the need for cities to contribute to economic outcomes, the treatment of spatial dynamics in national economic development policies remains highly uneven across countries. This paper critically reviews South Africa's national economic policies, specifically industrial policies, to analyse how they have reflected the changing dynamics of the economic geography of the country and, in particular, the contributions of large cities. The research demonstrates that despite some growing discursive recognition of the importance of spatial dimensions of growth, policies have said little on the economic role of cities and have not generally promoted multi-scalar policy making and implementation.

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摘要

无城记事?南非后种族隔离时期国家经济政策中对城市的忽视 *Area Development and Policy*.

城市及其承载的经济过程被广泛视为影响国家经济前景的核心因素。这一现实给城市与国家的政策制定者带来了挑战,即如何协同制定城市经济发展政策,以促进地方与国家的经济发展。尽管国家层面的城市政策通常强调城市对经济成果的贡献,然而各国在国家经济发展政策中对空间动态的处理却高度不均衡。本文批判性地回顾了南非的国家经济政策,特别是产业政策,分析其如何反映国家经济地理格局的动态变化,尤其是大城市所作出的贡献。研究表明,尽管政策话语中对增长的空间维度的重要性有了越来越多的论述性认识,但政策对城市经济角色的关注仍然有限,且未能普遍推动多层级的政策制定和执行。

关键词

城市, 地理, 经济发展政策, 产业政策, 城市经济

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RESUMEN

¿Una historia sin ciudades? El abandono de las ciudades en las políticas económicas nacionales de la Sudáfrica post-apartheid *Area Development and Policy*.

Para las perspectivas económicas de las naciones son fundamentales las ciudades y los procesos económicos que acogen. Esta realidad representa un desafío para los participantes en las ciudades y a nivel nacional cuando se trata de concebir conjuntamente políticas económicas de desarrollo urbano con miras a contribuir al desarrollo económico de ámbito local y nacional. Si bien en las políticas urbanas nacionales se destaca con frecuencia la importancia de que las ciudades contribuyan a mejorar los resultados económicos, los métodos de gestionar las dinámicas espaciales en las políticas nacionales de desarrollo económico siguen siendo muy desiguales entre países. Desde un punto de vista crítico, en este artículo se revisan las políticas económicas nacionales de Sudáfrica, en concreto las políticas industriales, con el fin de analizar cómo reflejan las dinámicas cambiantes de la geografía económica del país, y sobre todo, las contribuciones de las grandes ciudades. En este estudio se demuestra que pese a un creciente reconocimiento discursivo de la importancia de las dimensiones espaciales de crecimiento, las políticas dicen poco sobre el papel económico de las ciudades y en general no han fomentado una formulación y aplicación multiescalar de políticas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

ciudades, geografía, políticas de desarrollo económico, políticas industriales, economías urbanas

АННОТАЦИЯ

История без городов? Пренебрежение к городам в национальной экономической политике Южной Африки после апартеида *Area Development and Policy*.

Города и экономические процессы, происходящие в них, имеют решающее значение для экономических перспектив страны. В связи с этим перед городскими и национальными субъектами стоят сложные задачи по совместной разработке политики экономического развития городов с целью содействия местному и национальному экономическому развитию. Хотя национальная городская политика часто подразумевает необходимость того, чтобы города вносили свой вклад в достижение экономических результатов, учет пространственной динамики в национальной политике экономического развития остается крайне неравномерным в разных странах. В данной статье представлен критический обзор национальной экономической политики Южной Африки, в частности промышленной политики, с целью анализа того, как она отражает динамику изменения экономической географии страны и, в частности, вклад крупных городов. Исследование показывает, что, несмотря на расширяющееся на словах признание важности пространственных аспектов роста, политические документы мало говорят об экономической роли городов и, как правило, не предполагают разработку и реализацию комплексной городской политики.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

города, география, политика экономического развития, промышленная политика, городская экономика

1. INTRODUCTION

Cities are increasingly understood as central to the economic prospects of nations, with UN Habitat estimating that upwards of 80% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is generated in cities (UN Habitat, 2016, p. 27). A considerable body of evidence shows that this trend occurs in many different countries, facing quite different development

circumstances. This evolution presents policy makers at different government levels with challenges on how to take account of actual and desired geographic patterns of economic activity. It has also prompted proponents of national urban policies and local actors to increasingly articulate an economic role for cities (Turok & Parnell, 2009). Alongside this, city actors have increasingly been experimenting with various economic development initiatives (Storper, 2013), many of them seeking to work with the dynamics of agglomeration (Pike et al., 2017). Yet, despite arguments that, ‘Under neoliberalism, the economic dynamism of localities came to be seen as the sine qua non for national economic development’ (Sheppard, 2014, p. 145), the treatment of spatial dynamics, particularly those related to urban areas, remains highly uneven in national economic development policymaking across countries (Clark & Doussard, 2019; Feldman & Storper, 2018; Martin et al., 2016; Todes & Turok, 2018). Yet alongside this unevenness, recent literature highlights the ways that multi-scalar governance arrangements gives recognition to the contributions of actors at the local scales to both national and local economic policy goals (Kennedy, 2014; Pike et al., 2017; Zhang, 2015).

According to Turok and Parnell, this ‘growing body of international evidence suggests that cities can make a disproportionate contribution to productivity growth and job creation’ (Turok & Parnell, 2009, p. 160). This emphasis on the role of cities has been further reinforced by the recent promotion of national ‘urban policies’ for countries, which often make the case for the need to consider how national policy choices might impact the extent to which urban regions can contribute to a range of national agendas, including those related to economic development. However, whilst Todes and Turok (2018) report a growing trend for national urban policies to give attention to cities’ roles in economic development, this has not necessarily been consistently reflected in national economic policies. In some countries, policies have recognised the significance of economic processes with strong sub-national influences or features, or they have recognised the role of sub-national actors – such as regional development agencies – in carrying out more localised initiatives relevant to national economic policies (Pike et al., 2017; Storper, 2013). In other contexts, approaches that allow markets to determine spatial impacts, as proposed by the World Bank (2009), remain predominant. As a result, there are competing tendencies to ignore or even curtail a strong spatial agenda in national economic policies (Feldman & Storper, 2018).

To unravel these trends in specific places, it is vital to examine the politics at work. In both highly urbanised contexts, and in areas of the world undergoing rapid urbanisation, the relationship between national economic policies and the evolving geographic patterns of settlement and economic activity is often the object of considerable contestation (Goodfellow, 2022; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). For South Africa, as with many countries of the Global South, these matters have been of particular interest as they intersect with national debates about economic growth, employment and inequality (Turok, 2021). In 2001 South Africa’s eight largest urban centres accounted for 36% of the national population (around 16 million people) compared to 40% in the 2022 national census (almost twenty-five million people).¹ Turok and Visage reported that the country’s largest six metros accounted for 6.6 million formal jobs, almost two-thirds of the total, whilst the remainder of the country accounted for 4 million formal jobs (Turok & Visage, 2023, p. 12). Taking these facts into account, it is not surprising that South Africa’s urban policy makers have argued ‘Cities are the driving force for economic development ...’ (Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs [DCOGTA], 2017, p. 15).

However, moving beyond the realm of urban policies and cities’ own claims, it is less clear how the country’s economic policy makers have approached, and continue to approach, the interactions between economic processes and geography and, more specifically, the role of cities as hubs of economic activity. These are important issues not least because national

economic policies often serve as the bedrock for other state policies. Furthermore, these are likely to produce both intended and unintended spatialised impacts. For example, these policies influence patterns of investment, as well as the role and reach of institutions and how they shape certain distributional outcomes. As Pike et al. point out, even ‘non-spatial policy, can ... have distinct geographical effects’ (2017, p. 49). In an effort to explore these dynamics further, this paper takes up Todes and Turok’s call for ‘more rigorous evaluation and careful consideration of past efforts’ of national governments’ approach to policies impacting spatial dynamics (2018, p. 26). However, instead of focusing on urban policies, which by nature are likely to have an explicit spatial content, the paper scrutinises national economic policies to uncover their implicit spatial dimension, and thus examines the sensitivity of national policies to the economic contribution of cities in national economies.

The paper first highlights some key features of the literature on interactions between economics and geography, with a focus on cities, in both the international and South African contexts. It then provides a detailed report of research findings arising from the analysis of South Africa’s relevant national economic policies and, in particular, industrial policies. The paper then shifts its focus to officials in charge of economic development in the country’s largest cities to reflect on national-scale policies from their vantage point. The concluding section highlights the key findings and their implications for supporting South Africa’s efforts at confronting its spatially uneven economic and social challenges. In doing so the paper provides a specific contribution to the South African literature on the economy by highlighting a lacuna in exploring the specific urban and, more especially, larger city features. Furthermore, the paper makes a specific contribution to literature on South Africa’s urban context, and indeed other contexts, by giving prominence to the examination of interactions between national economic policies and large cities, where both urbanisation and related changes in economic geography have seen the economic significance of these cities change markedly in recent decades.

2. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN GEOGRAPHY, ECONOMIC PROCESSES AND STATE RESCALING

Practitioners and scholars across many disciplines have engaged in the study of the interactions between economic processes and geography. Alfred Marshall, writing on dynamics arising from the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom, pointed to increasing returns to firms and society in the growing concentration of activity in expanding towns and cities: ‘When an industry has thus chosen a locality for itself, it is likely to stay there long; so great are the advantages which people following the same skilled trade get from neighbourhood to one another ...’ (1920, p. 271). These processes, commonly referred to as the dynamics of agglomeration, have become central to understandings of the geography of economic activity (World Bank, 2009).

However, the appreciation of geography and its interaction with economic processes has not always found favour within mainstream economics (Feldman & Storper, 2018). Despite this, recent decades have witnessed a rediscovery of the importance of geography, not just in a Ricardian sense of differentiated factor attributes between countries, but also the Marshallian legacy of understanding the agglomeration effects that arise from spatial concentrations of production. A major element of this has been the growing body of ‘relational economic geography’ work, which Yeung defines as ‘concerned primarily with the ways in which socio-spatial relations of actors are intertwined with broader structures and processes of economic change at various geographical scales’ (1995, p. 37). Some influential examples of this include works exploring historical and contemporary regions associated with industrial districts in the

'Third Italy' (Amin & Thrift, 1992) and Porter's studies of industrial clusters (2000). This work has stimulated other research, including approaches giving prominence to the contribution of local or regional interactions within global production networks (Coe & Yeung, 2015).

Core to many of these strands of work has been research into 'the making and remaking of social, political and economic scales of organization' (Swyngedouw, 2004, p. 26). Examples of this include Brenner (2004) who's work highlighted how rescaling of political and administrative systems have been demanded by increasingly influential urban actors, or adopted under the influence of globalised state reform initiatives. Others, such as Andriessse (2014), have noted how the resultant variations in institutions across national and local scales can further accentuate sub-national variations within national varieties of capitalism. Here it is important to note that national governments have often been active in seeking to engineer particular political or economic outcomes, and thus to define new national and local state roles across a wide range of policy spheres (Bayirbag, 2011; Brenner, 2004; Kennedy, 2014). At times these moves have sought to reinforce local arrangements, whilst in other instances, national governments have tried to thwart them (Goodfellow, 2022).

In this context of the growing importance attributed to cities in complex global economic processes, Peck and Tickell have highlighted the 'restless landscape of urban competition, narrow channeled innovation, and policy emulation ...' (2002, pp. 396–397). Scott and Storper have also highlighted this drive for cities to outcompete one another, noting that, 'Rising levels of local activism in the matter of regional economic development', often contribute to 'irrational development races' (2003, p. 588). According to Harvey (2006), this has also been influenced by conditions where globalised corporations and power interests of financial capital have combined to elevate the wealth-accumulating capacity of some urban centres, whilst marginalising others. These debates have been sharpened in the context of growing attention to matters of increasing and persistent spatialised inequalities, with, for instance, Rodríguez-Pose raising concerns about policies which lead to 'places that don't matter' (2018, p. 191).

It is thus no surprise that national economic policies have displayed much variation in how they articulate geographical intent or recognise spatial influences or outcomes. Pike et al. (2017) highlight two common approaches in these national policies: those focusing on how national growth gains might benefit from enhancing regional or location agglomeration processes and their possible spillover benefits; and those focusing on attending to areas that are considered to be disadvantaged in a context of spatialised inequalities. The differences in these approaches can have profound impacts on regions and localities in that they can reinforce certain types of policy interventions and their related scalar arrangements. The following section explores how the South African-focused literature has engaged with some of these themes.

3. SOUTH AFRICA'S CITIES AND POST-APARTHEID NATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICIES

There is a relatively diverse, albeit modest, body of literature that explores the relationships between South Africa's economic development policies and its regions and cities. Much of the contemporary material focuses on local government responses to changing national urban policies and evolving local economic circumstances (Houghton, 2016; Nel & Rogerson, 2014; Todes & Turok, 2018). These have tended to highlight matters seen conventionally as part of an urban policy discourse, such as issues of decentralisation and devolution of authority and how these influence local economic development efforts. Despite researchers noting the somewhat limited menu of economic development focus areas in local policies, it is also

reported that these local responses have shown considerable diversity (Rogerson, 2011). The larger cities particularly have widened the scope of their economic development related activities, both to tackle deep-seated problems inherited from apartheid-era inequalities and to address issues of weak economic growth (Houghton, 2016).

Other key themes have included those related to the lasting impacts of apartheid-era policy choices on the economic geography of the country (Bank, 2019; Todes & Turok, 2018), as well as the issue of how local government policies are interpreted nationally and implemented locally (Nel & Rogerson, 2014, 2016; Turok, 2012). Others, such as Crankshaw (2012), have analysed the economic processes in cities to argue that South Africa's economic challenges can be better understood when informed by insights into the particular and differentiated economic features of major urban areas.

Todes and Turok (2018) have provided a substantial examination of the country's space-based policies, showing the ongoing efforts by government, during apartheid and in the period since, to influence patterns of spatial development and highlighting how these have shaped economic development outcomes. They highlight three categories of spatial policies in the post-apartheid context: (1) spatial rebalancing where the intent is to 'Narrow the prosperity gap between regions and reduce unemployment in poorer areas' through using state-directed investment; (2) space neutral policies where public efforts follow the trends of market investment and patterns of urbanisation; and (3) place-based policies where regions or localities are encouraged and supported to develop their unique capabilities (Todes & Turok, 2018, p. 26). In reflecting on the country's post-1994 experience, they argue that, 'The main response to spatial inequalities has been to skew substantial amounts of social spending towards marginalised communities in rural areas ...' (Todes & Turok, 2018, p. 26). More recently Turok (2021) has suggested that a reason for this focus was, that for much of the mid-to-late 2000s and 2010s, the African National Congress sought to build a support base in predominantly rural provinces.

Other research, focused more directly on South Africa's national economic policies, has examined factors framed at the national and international scale, or alternatively at the household level. Examples include research on the political economy of South Africa's economic policy choices (Hirsch, 2005), the impact of these choices on households (Leibbrandt et al., 2012) and impacts on firms (Black, 2023). Although the economics-oriented literature has sometimes offered additional insights by using the provincial scale as a unit of analysis, or by distinguishing between urban and rural patterns of distribution, generally there has been little focus on the geography of economic activity or on cities and their urban economies. That said, work such as that by Lewis and Bloch's (1998) on Spatial Development Initiatives and Bell's (1984) work on apartheid-era industry decentralisation schemes have shed light on the spatial consequences of national economic policies. So too has the work of Naudé and Krugell who concluded 'that cities matter for growth through human capital as they allow the reaping of dynamic externalities associated with learning and information' (2004, p. 15). Selected features of city economies have also been demonstrated by researchers drawing on survey work (Francis et al., 2019; Kaziboni et al., 2015). More recently, innovative studies have used administrative data to analyse labour market and firm variations across South Africa's cities and between cities and rural areas (Turok & Visagie, 2023).

However, the material highlighted in the international literature on issues such as agglomeration, the dynamics of the dense interactions of urban actors in highly urbanised environments, and how these might intersect with national and global economic processes is less well covered in the literature on South Africa's economic features. That said, work such as that by Naudé and Krugell (2004), Morris and Robbins (2006), and Roberts (2006) do engage with how patterns of economic activity in cities and related national economic policy frameworks might constrain or enable nationally significant economic dynamics associated with cities.

Turok (2021) has also looked at some of these factors, pointing out the relevance of new economic geography approaches to thinking about cities' trajectories, but also noting that specific local political economic contexts can generate a considerable degree of variation in how factors such as institutional features, at different scales, might enable or disable agglomeration effects.

This modest body of work has provided some important contributions to how local or national urban policies support or constrain urban development trends. Yet the attention paid to exploring various spatialised features of the national or sub-national economy, and policies that have influenced this, has been somewhat limited.² The paper now turns its focus to the content of South Africa's national policy frameworks to critically analyse how spatial or geographical dynamics, in particular those relating to cities, have been reflected in economic policy documents.

4. SOUTH AFRICA'S ECONOMIC POLICIES AND THE DYNAMICS OF LARGE CITY ECONOMIES

The examination of South Africa's economic policy material forms the heart of the paper's methodological focus. This analysis covers the most significant general economic policies in the post-apartheid era, but has a focus on the country's national industrial policies³ for two reasons: firstly, it has been an important part of South Africa's economic policy orientation in recent decades (Black, 2023); and secondly, industrial policy has been widely associated in the literature as being both impacted by geographic and spatial features and in turn impacting those features (see Porter, 2003; Schindler et al., 2020; Storper, 2013). Informed by the latter argument, Altenburg concludes that, 'Deliberately or not, industrial policy always impacts on economic space' (2011, p. 22). Industrial policy can thus provide an important lens through which to explore the geographic and spatially-informed features of South Africa's national economic policies, with a focus on major cities.

Using a qualitative approach, the research process combined a detailed analysis of primary material in terms of official documents together with twenty targeted interviews with past and present government officials, tracing the treatment of spatial features in policies since the mid-1990s.⁴ The interviews provided insights into the decision-making behind the preparation of these policies, their content and experiences with their implementation. The research also drew on the author's own prior experience working in government and also subsequent participant experiences as a researcher and advisor, working on urban and economic development matters.

The aim of the research was to reveal the presences or absences of concepts or terminology that pointed to some appreciation of the influence of geography, and especially cities and the economic features associated with them, in national economic dynamics. Taking account of South Africa's history of apartheid segregation, and the accompanying economic policies geared to sustain segregation and inequalities (Bell, 1984), the research also explored the extent to which the undoing of this legacy around explicitly spatially framed contemporary national economic policies.

In conducting the research, the focus was on South Africa's cities with metropolitan status and, more particularly, the largest cities within this category. These cities, according to the 2022 Census, have populations ranging from just under one million to well over four million people.⁵ For this reason, the paper generally uses terms such as city, cities, largest cities or metropolitan cities, to denote this focus on what are the most significant urban centres in the country. In selecting this focus, it is important to be aware that national policies, including urban policies, often use the terms urban and city interchangeably. The paper's focus is not

intended to suggest that policies should not focus on a broader array of urban, and indeed rural areas and the connections between these and urban centres, but instead seeks to examine the specific attention given in national economic policies to the most significant metropolitan cities.

In the immediate post-1994 period, South Africa's most prominent economic policy framework was the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme, adopted by Cabinet in 1996 (National Treasury, 1996). GEAR introduced economic liberalisation reforms intended to increase growth and job creation (Hanival & Hirsch, 1998). It also called for reforming apartheid-era industrial policy instruments, including those with specific spatial foci such as the Regional Industrial Development Programme (RIDP), which had supported labour-intensive manufacturing in industrial nodes in the former apartheid 'homelands'. Beyond this, GEAR was silent with respect to any future geographic agenda, leaving spatial impacts of policy to what one senior former government advisor described as 'unintended consequences'.

However, this ostensibly space-neutral approach did not last long. Not only did some elements of a revised RIDP remain in place for some years, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also announced a number of spatial development initiatives (SDIs) in the late 1990s. These initiatives were explained by the lead DTI official as a tool to unlock the 'unrealised economic potential' of a number of nationally selected priority areas (Jourdan, 1998p. 718). Another former lead official of the DTI described the SDI programme as 'an experimental accident' (Hirsch, 2005, p. 146), which attempted to facilitate some level of infrastructure and investment synergy in nationally selected priority areas. Another former advisor to the programme explained that the focus on economic infrastructure aimed to bring economic activity to regions where it was lacking (Bloch, 2000).

These choices suggest the existence of a set of spatialised policy objectives to inform decisions, but the rationale for focusing on some regions, and not others, remained somewhat opaque. The SDIs were selected by national officials: they were initiated by a team within the DTI and funding of the programmes was largely nationally driven. Although the lead DTI official on SDIs at the time explained that it was their expectation that, 'local and provincial institutions [would] become the key drivers of the SDI' (Jourdan, 1998, p. 720), the DTI retained its role in directing the SDIs. In an effort to enhance the SDIs attractiveness to foreign investors, the DTI then initiated the formation of a number of industrial development zones (IDZs). Whilst Rogerson (2002b) noted that this was intended to herald a shift of responsibility to provincial governments, others reported on frustrations from sub-national stakeholders, about the limited appreciation of local contexts in guiding these national economic policy choices (Bank, 2019; Haines & Hosking, 2005; Nel & Rogerson, 2014; Robbins, 2015).

Whilst the SDIs and IDZs did receive a fair amount of national attention, they were in fact only one element of the DTI's emerging industrial policy efforts. Amongst the most notable policy documents to emerge from the early post-apartheid DTI were the Micro-economic Reform Strategy (MERS) and the accompanying Integrated Manufacturing Strategy (IMS) in 2002–2003. Together these arguably constituted post-apartheid South Africa's first explicit industrial strategy statement. Hirsch (2005) explains that they were intended to bring some coherence to a series of somewhat disparate programmes that had characterised the DTI during the late 1990s and early 2000s. In terms of spatial considerations, the MERS, did note a 'need to specifically include a geographical dimension to growth and employment' (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2002, p. 16). According to the document this approach was needed to confront the 'uneven development of South Africa's regions' and 'to achieve greater geographic equity' (p. 27). This was the first explicit argument, in industrial policies, expressing the need to take the country's historical geographic legacies of under-

development into account. However, the document was silent on the urban dimensions of that apartheid legacy.

In fact the IMS bemoaned the fact that, ‘... the dominance of metropolises has continued ..’ (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2003, p. 19). It also endorsed the idea that industrial policies should encourage the ‘geographic spread of economic activity’ (p. 27). Although the bulk of the IMS documentation gave almost no attention to the geographic patterns of the economy, beyond ideas of unevenness of ‘opportunities’, it did recognise that effective action would require some level of partnership at, ‘all levels in the economy, from the shopfloor, to local areas and geographic clusters, value chains and sectors ...’ (DTI, 2003, p. 50). However, despite these statements, Morris and Robbins (2006) reported that the DTI at the time was deeply uncomfortable in working with emerging cluster programmes that were being orchestrated by city actors.

South Africa’s next significant national economic policy was the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative – South Africa (known as AsgiSA) in 2005. This sought to mobilise action around a set of ‘binding constraints’ (The Presidency, 2005, p. 7) such as the supply of skills. Although AsgiSA did not emphasise the spatial dimensions of economic development, it did note an imperative for improving the economic development capacity of local governments generally and made a case for national investment in existing major transport corridors. This suggested at least some recognition of the need to articulate more explicitly national economic and investment policies within a national spatial framework.

One possible reason for the inclusion of these statements was that the Presidency had for some years been working on a framework to guide spatial investment choices (Oranje & Merrifield, 2010). This culminated in the release of the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP; The Presidency, 2006). In the same way that the DTI’s MERS had sought to impact on wider government policy fields, so the NSDP was also intended to influence wider government policies, including economic policies and state investment choices. In the NSDP’s preface it was described as, ‘... a framework for deliberating the future development of the national space economy and recommends mechanisms to bring about optimum alignment between infrastructure investment and development programmes within localities’ (The Presidency, 2006, p. i).

Oranje (2010), reports that the 2006 NSDP⁶ provided an explicit attempt by the national state to grapple with both the legacy of apartheid spatial fragmentation and inequality, whilst also setting out a framework for prioritising future state expenditure to inform growth and development objectives. Whilst this document was somewhat watered-down in its urban focus from its earlier drafts (Oranje & Merrifield, 2010), it was nonetheless a departure from a very strong view held by many in government that argued for a focus on areas outside the main urban regions.⁷ The 2006 NSDP asserted that the country could best meet both economic growth objectives and broader development goals by giving priority to 26 urban regions, and their hinterlands, which covered 84.46% of the national population, 73.31% of those living below the poverty level and 95.59% of the national economy (The Presidency, 2006, p. 70). Also significant was the appreciation that urbanising ‘economic spaces’ were ‘not homogenous entities’ (p. 74). With specific reference to metropolitan government structures, it called for policies, ‘to seek out new areas of comparative advantage, and identify and develop clusters of specialisation in collaboration with especially the provincial and national departments of trade and industry, labour and economic affairs’ (p. 90). Therefore, whilst the other national policies had sought to downplay the growing urban dimensions of South Africa’s economic challenges and potential, the NSDP sought to centre them (Oranje, 2010; Turok & Parnell, 2009).

However, it is important to note that the NSDP was not enthusiastically championed by government leaders, including by some in the Presidency (Oranje, 2010). Subsequent industrial policy documents such as the National Industrial Policy Framework (NIPF), the first

Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) and the Regional Industrial Development Strategy (RIDS) (DTI, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c), reverted to pre-NSDP formulations around geography and the economy. Most prominently, the RIDS, whilst infused with references to the country's spatial economic characteristics, argued that the most important task of the national economic policies was to 'play a fundamental role in the promotion of regional industrialisation outside the three traditional metropolises of Johannesburg, Cape Town and eThekweni [Durban]' (DTI, 2007c, p. 11)

Whilst the NIFP did note that, 'Substantial industrial policy work has been undertaken at the sub-national level', and that, 'Provinces and relevant metros and local authorities need to be amongst the stakeholders that are included in the "self-discovery" processes' (DTI, 2007a, p. 51), it offered little about the need to harness agglomeration forces in major urban regions. Indeed, the DTI asserted, through these documents, that any local processes by sub-national actors would need to be subject to 'periodic discussions with the [DTI] to ensure alignment on the overall national strategy for industrialization' (p. 52), and further emphasised that the priority should be 'marginalised regions' (DTI, 2007b, pp. 2 – IPAP1), something repeated in many subsequent IPAPs.

Although IPAP 1, and the subsequent IPAPs, are riddled with the term 'local', this almost always referred to 'local content' or 'local production' as in 'domestic' content or 'domestic' production, rather than any notion of a sub-national space and territory.⁸ Other terms implying a geographic intent, such as 'clustering' or 'cluster', were used in IPAP 1, but a closer look revealed that the terms were in fact used as short-hand for the administrative collective of *national* government economic departments, and not for any group of firms and related institutions in different geographic regions or major urban areas.

Subsequent IPAPs persisted with this timid engagement with agendas of economic geography and spatially informed industrial policy efforts, other than those pertaining to areas outside the larger cities. Furthermore, only national-scale economic data was used in support of claims made in the policy: sectors were described as either growing or declining, but no sub-national variation in these trends was discussed. Whilst IPAP 2011/12–2013/14 (DTI, 2011) mentioned terms such as 'clusters' and noted some sub-national economic features, such as the 85% of boat-building concentrated in the Western Cape (DTI, 2011, p. 112), the document made no reference to possible multi-scalar governance arrangements associated with the cluster nor was there any explicit discussion of the possible national implications for this and other 'clusters'. The IPAP of 2012/13–2014/15 (DTI, 2010)⁹ followed these same formulations, but for the first time there was a single mention of the term 'agglomeration' whereby newly proposed special economic zones (SEZs) would 'provide a framework for the economics of agglomeration; the creation of regional specialisation; the establishment and building of hubs and clusters; and build up and downstream linkages in strategic value chains' (p. 49).

However, despite the statement that SEZs would 'enable the development of new industrial regions and the strengthening of existing ones' (p. 48), the tendency to focus outside major urban regions was sustained with the assertion that the policy would 'be *specifically used to promote the creation of a regionally diversified industrial economy by establishing new industrial hubs in underdeveloped regions of the country*' (DTI, 2010, p. 48 – author's *italics* added for emphasis). The subsequent IPAPs (DTI, 2013, 2014) did not depart much from this approach. The only discernible shift was the adoption of a more text-book use of the term 'cluster', where it was recognised that the concept applied to 'a relatively limited geographic area' (DTI, 2013, p. 107). This shift was also carried into IPAP 2014/15–2016/17 (DTI, 2014), where reference to specific geographic foci, in relation to the clustering commitments of the past IPAPs, were a more notable feature.¹⁰

These IPAPs from 2010 were prepared alongside two new national economic policy initiatives. The first of these was the New Growth Path or NGP (Department of Economic Development, 2011), which set out a framework for supporting the creation of decent work in a growing economy. The second, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012), proposed a longer-term plan for the country to address poverty, inequality and weak economic growth. The NGP highlighted rural areas as key sites for interventions whilst the NDP 2030 acknowledged that, ‘about 60% of the population lives in urban areas ... and by 2030 about 70% of the population will live in urban areas’ (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 29). Significantly, neither engaged much with the spatially infused economic development analysis that had been proposed in the earlier NSDP. That said, the NDP 2030 did point to key infrastructure connections, within cities, between cities and with cities and their rural hinterlands, that needed to be enhanced to support the social and economic prospects of those living in the country.

IPAP 7 soon followed and, whilst noting a role for SEZs to integrate existing producers into national and international value chains, it also suggested that the priority focus for industrial programmes should be, ‘regions lagging behind in industrial development’ (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2015, p. 73). However, it did provide some acknowledgement of multi-scalar governance of cluster programmes with specific mention being made of ‘national and sub-national clusters’ (p. 83). This IPAP also contained rare mentions of the terms ‘urbanisation’ and ‘urban’ in reference to the imperative for South Africa to develop the electrical vehicle transport sector. Somewhat strangely, after the admittedly modest shifts in IPAP 7, IPAP 8 (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2016) did not pick up on any of these themes, despite national government having widely publicised an integrated urban development framework (DCOGTA, 2017). The framework, which was adopted by the national cabinet as a guideline to inform national policies, made an explicit call for a greater alignment between urban and economic policies. This might thus explain the DTI’s recognition, in IPAP 9, of the importance of building local institutions to support clusters, and that clusters might vary from one region to another. This IPAP also mentions municipalities, in relation both to partnerships for supporting various cluster programmes, and to growing concern that local government failures in infrastructure were a threat to investment (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2017, p. 34). Although references to cities are largely absent, Part 2 of IPAP 9 noted that South Africa had – ‘some of the fastest growing cities in the world’ – and suggested they could be a key source of demand for domestically produced goods such as construction materials (p. 66).

The final IPAP (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2018) repeated some of these issues and also included the statement that, ‘apartheid spatial geography contributes to constrain the economy in terms of worker travel time and costs’ (p. 26). However, as with most of the previous IPAPs, statements such as this were not built upon as part of a more spatially-informed analysis of the economy. In a similar example, this IPAP announced the rehabilitation of infrastructure in a handful of apartheid-era state-owned industrial parks, but the document provided no explicit engagement with issues of multi-scalar policy formation or what imperatives might exist for the nationally significant industrial areas in the major cities. Interestingly, a DTI official questioned about this, indicated that working with local stakeholders around discreet sub-national features was necessary in less-developed areas but should be handled cautiously in the metropolitan areas where ‘national interests could be compromised by powerful local firms’.

After the 2018 IPAP, the DTI, now called the DTIC (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition) pivoted away from these aggregated industry policy documents to the production of industry ‘masterplans’ produced with the guidance of government, industry and union working groups. The first of these was the Automotive Industry Masterplan (Department of

Trade, Industry and Competition [DTIC], 2018). This pioneer masterplan, and the one for the clothing, textile and leather industry, offered no substantial analysis about the geographic patterns of these industries, other than noting that the automotive sector was concentrated in three provinces. Despite the fact that in these sectors there was a presence of programmes in some provincial and metropolitan governments, these did not feature explicitly in any of the intended programmes, and neither did any specific sub-national scale efforts to respond to spatial variations that some of the latter IPAPs had started to recognise.¹¹ Even the DTIC's much vaunted SEZ's seem not to feature explicitly, despite the fact that some of the project commitments, for example, those arising out of the automotive masterplan, have resulted in the orientation of some of the existing and intended SEZs to the industry.

Beyond what was discerned from the policy documents, the range of interviews conducted revealed that, across almost three decades of national economic policies, the gradual morphing of SDIs into IDZs and later into SEZs was most often noted as the stand-out feature of nationally directed spatial interventions with impacts on cities. Nel and Rogerson (2014) have suggested that the growing SEZ programme could be seen as a further step in building a more spatially infused economic and industrial policy in South Africa. However, as with the SDIs and the IDZs before them, the DTI, and in fact the national Minister, retained the exclusive role as the arbiter of whether any proposed SEZs were worthy of being considered. Furthermore, although some of the existing and planned SEZs are within, or close to major urban centres, the fact that the bulk of selected IDZ and SEZ locations were outside the main urban centres (Farole & Sharp, 2017), suggests very strongly that these were primarily seen as tools for the distribution of economic activity beyond the metropolitan centres.

For these reasons, as has also been noted by Todes and Turok (2018) and Farole and Sharp (2017), the apparent shift to a more spatialised policy focus was in fact not a significant departure from past national industrial policy efforts with respect to integrating particular sub-national economic processes. Oranje has argued that this reflected a continued tendency in national policies towards 'Geospread' (2010, p. 62), rather than engaging with how national economic policies could be improved through a more substantial engagement with distinctive urban features. This raises the important question of how officials in charge of economic development matters in the major cities experienced these various iterations of national economic policy, and what they understood the consequences to be for their own efforts. This is discussed in the following section.

5. THE POLITICS OF MULTI-SCALAR ECONOMIC POLICY MAKING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SA'S CITIES

Whilst the framing of national policies appear to have been largely preoccupied with trying to balance economic development across national territory, city actors reported that they were active in cultivating a range of policies and programmes, including some that had explicit implications for national economic policy actors. Interviews conducted with present and former officials working on city economic development programmes, and with those working on national economic policies, highlighted three themes emerging from this context. The first of these was the absence, for much of this period, of an 'evidence-base' adequately covering sub-national features of the economy in national policies, something also highlighted by Rogerson (2010) and Duminy et al. (2020). Interestingly, officials working both in cities and at the national scale mentioned this in interviews. One former senior city official argued that this, 'allowed opinions to crowd out actual evidence'. A respondent working on national urban policy indicated that without data they could not counter the strong anti-urban sentiment of influential politicians or those of powerful bureaucrats who continued to ignore

the economic dynamics of South Africa's urbanisation. A National Treasury official did point to over two decades of efforts to enhance the sub-national evidence base as a sign of national commitment, but was coy about reasons why these efforts had not yielded progress earlier. Some city-level officials indicated that they had commissioned city-level economic surveys, but noted that the results tended to be dismissed by national officials as having little bearing on national decisions.

The second issue raised was the absence of meaningful processes for participation of city-level actors in national economic policy forums and a related concern about 'top-down' policy making. City officials lamented that they often first heard about national initiatives when they came across work being done by consultants appointed by national departments. Concern was also raised that the DTI only maintained a skeleton administrative staff in its regional offices, with the result that engagements on policy were at best infrequent. Respondents were unable to report on many instances of what Cornwall (2004) refers to as 'invited spaces', for local government representatives, and other local stakeholders, to articulate perspectives on national economic development matters. Some officials suggested that this situation was often aggravated by an apparent reluctance of cities' elected leadership to express themselves on matters of national economic policy. Todes and Turok also note a lack of interest from national decision makers, where in the case of SEZs, the need, 'to adapt zone regimes to their particular regional circumstances and deliberately learn from the experience has not been apparent' (Todes & Turok, 2018, p. 5). Drawing on the work of the World Bank Urbanisation Review for South Africa, Lall (2016) noted that, DTI programmes such as the SEZs 'do not fully appreciate interactions with the most natural sources of agglomeration economies – cities'.¹² Farole and Sharp (2017) and Bank (2019), also report that, as a result of an inclination towards a top-down approach, these projects often appeared disconnected from the local industrial base. Two exceptions to this were noted in interviews, namely the East London IDZ and the relatively new Tshwane SEZ, both of which were designed around the inclusion of pre-existing large automotive assembly operations. Beyond this, metropolitan officials could not offer other positive examples, and in the case of one of the cities, the respondent reported hostility from national officials to the idea of including existing local firms in a planned SEZ.

A third theme, raised largely by present and former metropolitan officials, was the tendency, most apparent at the national level, to portray metropolitan economic development programmes as being exclusively about local economic development (LED). Whilst South Africa's embrace of this agenda has been widely acknowledged (Houghton, 2016; Rogerson, 2014), city officials interviewed expressed some frustration with LED because it was generally associated with a relatively limited range of activities, such as small business development. They spoke of experiencing considerable push-back from national officials on occasions when they voiced perspectives or shared their experience on issues of national significance in their local economies, for example, where industry sectors experienced challenges with nationally-controlled infrastructure such as ports and energy supply.

These issues point to the broader question about the responsiveness of national economic policies to a growing imperative for more substantial forms of multi-scalar governance pertaining to economic policies and programmes. It appears that, even in South Africa's relatively decentralised system, when it comes to economic policy the relative freedom for local city actors to develop their own plans and initiatives has not provided a basis for deeper forms of engagement or forms of multi-scalar governance to set national economic policy priorities. As a result, they do not appear to be designed to operate across what Houghton refers to as 'integrated and complex scales of economic activity' (Houghton, 2016, p. 54).

Whereas some of the cities actors, appreciating the limits of their influence over economic processes, have been active in seeking to build various forms of local multi-stakeholder compacts on economic development, national policies have, for much of the 2000s and

2020s, tended to assert the primacy of the national state as the lead actor. Under the banner of a 'developmental state', the central government has adopted an approach where it 'identifies economic challenges clearly and develops innovative solutions and then generates broad public support for these' (DED, 2011, p. 62). This has often left national policy makers disinclined to appreciate the geographic features of the economy beyond their regularly stated concern about economically marginal regions. It has also served to push those making claims for a more spatially-infused economic policy agenda, around economically significant urban centres, away from national decision-making on the economy. A number of respondents noted that during the President Zuma era, covering much of the period under focus, their experience was that political signals from national government were decidedly pro-rural and that placing city issues on the agenda was a major challenge.¹³

Despite these experiences, some city officials still expressed a degree of optimism that a more assertive national urban policy stance, such as the one associated with the adoption of the Integrated Urban Development Framework (DCOGTA, 2017), could possibly pave the way for national economic policies to better accommodate city dynamics and their potential contributions. Further examples provided, were the role of the Cities Support Programme¹⁴ under the National Treasury in highlighting the national significance of cities (also noted by Duminy et al., 2020), and the recent adoption by the national cabinet of a National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF; Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development [DALRRD], 2022), an inheritor of sorts of the previous NSDPs.¹⁵ Whilst few of the national officials interviewed referred to these, there was hope among some city officials that these steps could herald a growing future recognition of the scope for cities to contribute to future national economic policy processes. Whilst the absence of any scope for specific spatially-oriented programmes in the various DTIC industry masterplans was noted, two city officials were nonetheless hopeful that some of the stakeholder collaboration in the masterplan processes could, in future, be recognised as something worth replicating at the scale of relevant localities where these industries were concentrated.

6. CONCLUSION

There is increasing acknowledgement, in both academic and policy making circles, that economic development processes, both historically and under contemporary capitalism, are influenced not just by climate patterns or physical features, but also by particular geographies of social and institutional features and their interactions with regional, national and global scales. Informed by this understanding, a considerable body of literature has explored the multi-scalar alliances and contestations between actors and interest groups that accompany policy interventions seeking to influence outcomes in localities and regions (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Sheppard, 2014). Several authors have also noted the interactions between particular spatial arrangements, both fixed and dynamic, and economic processes (Amin & Thrift, 1992; Pike et al., 2017; Storper, 2013). These contributions reflect how the agency of local, national and international actors might combine in varied, often asymmetrical, ways to interact with these economic processes. Taken together, these contributions make a strong case for both local and national economic development agendas to involve 'multiple actors at multiple scales' (Pike et al., 2017, p. 12).

This paper has documented and analysed the path taken by South Africa's national policy makers and other actors, including local ones, in developing national economic policies and programmes and their experience with the implementation of these. It has demonstrated not only the very muted recognition, in these policies, of the economic importance of cities, but has also provided numerous examples of a less than enthusiastic response of national level policy makers to emergent conceptualisations about the dynamics of spatialised economic

processes as they pertain to cities. It is clear that national economic development policy efforts in South Africa have demonstrated very little coherent and consistent appreciation of the intersections between geographically distinct economic processes and national economic objectives. Whilst this finding echoes to some degree that of others, such as Todes and Turok (2018), in terms of their reflections on a broader set of spatially targeted policies, it makes an added contribution in that it provides an evidence base pointing specifically at the significant lacunae in national economic development policies, and more especially industrial policies, in relation to the economic dynamics of cities in the post-apartheid era.

The paper highlights the critical role of an ever-evolving strata of national economic and industrial policies in influencing the character of local-national policy interactions and governance arrangements. Furthermore, the research reveals that despite the existence of a relatively substantive set of urban policies, grounded in the knowledge of the country's urban centres as being both dominant hubs of economic activity and social need, these have, to date, had little sustained impact on national economic policy formulations. The latter have persistently expressed a bias, at least in their stated intent, towards areas outside the major metropolitan areas. This perspective still gets repeated in policies despite evidence that South African cities have contributed most effectively to declines in poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2017) and in job creation (Turok & Visagie, 2023).

The absence of a progressive shift to a more multi-scalar approach to governance of economic development programmes has inevitably had ramifications for the effectiveness of national policy to enhance economic growth and to achieve wider development impacts. As noted above, national programmes such as the IDZs and SEZs, located near large cities, have tended to have somewhat disappointingly weak development impacts on pre-existing local clusters of industry.¹⁶ It is thus no surprise that South Africa's recent urban policy framework confirmed, somewhat somberly, that 'national industrial development strategies and strategic economic infrastructure investments are generally not pursued in consultation with even the largest metros, and thus tend not to consider local development plans'. (DCOGTA, 2017, p. 84). Turok (2021) also notes how the consequences of 'ambivalence towards urbanisation' in national policies undermined prospects for different spheres of government to contribute towards improving cities as key locations for nationally significant social and economic transformation.

The paper has noted factors that have contributed to this, including centralising intent behind the South African government's approach to the notion of the 'developmental state'. This elevated the role of national state in directing economic programmes in a top-down manner. This was further reinforced by the country's governing party, the African National Congress, prioritising the securing of a rural support base. These factors, alongside considerable knowledge gaps across a wide variety of institutions, over the availability of data and analysis on the geographic patterns of the economy, including insights about how urban concentrations of economic activity in cities can influence national patterns, also contributed to downplaying the importance of urban dynamics in policies and discourses beyond specifically urban policies.

In the broader context of the Global South, major cities are increasingly host to both the largest national shares of poverty and of economic activity. Whilst elements of the South African experience might not necessarily be replicated elsewhere, work such as that of Bayirbag (2011) on Turkey, Kennedy (2014) on India (2014) and Goodfellow on East Africa (2022), suggests that this scrutiny of national economic policies, and their associated features, is critical for those interested in understanding both national and city economic trajectories. The South African experience thus points to a wider imperative for those concerned about cities' contributions to complex national challenges around growth and poverty,

to integrate local processes and engage local stakeholders in policies designed to promote economic development at both the local and national scales.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author has, for many years, had regular interaction with local, regional and national economic policy making, initially as a government official, and subsequently as a university researcher and occasional advisor to government and civil society organisations.

NOTES

1. Author's workings using data from Statistics South Africa's Census 2022 (<https://census.statssa.gov.za/>). The 2023 General Household Survey reported that the eight metropolitan areas had a 42% share of the national population in 2023 (https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0318&SCH=73897).

2. Perhaps the inclusion of Turok's (2021) contribution, in a book focusing on South Africa's economy, reflects a shift amongst the country's key researchers in their efforts to influence national economic policy.

3. Rodrik sets out a broad definition of industrial policy: 'to denote policies that stimulate specific economic activities and promote structural change' (Rodrik, 2008, p. 2).

4. Interviews were done with a selection of present and former senior government officials with direct experience of economic development or urban development issues. These included people who had worked, or were still working, in four of South Africa's eight metropolitan cities and in relevant national government departments. Interviews were also conducted with a number of people working in domestic or international organisations with experience around national economic policy or urban policy matters. These were supplemented with some personal exchanges with respondents and with observations made at various national economic policy or urban policy conferences.

5. Using data from Statistics South Africa obtained from <https://census.statssa.gov.za/#/>. Five of the metropolitan cities have populations over four million and three are either just above or below one million.

6. Prior to the 2006 NSDP, there was a 2003 version which aimed to try and provide a spatial framework to guide the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of the early post-apartheid government. Whilst this did reflect an effort by technocrats to encourage a more explicit recognition of the scope of urban areas to help drive social and economic change, Merrifield and Oranje (2010) report that this did not receive a positive response more widely in national government.

7. This imperative that areas outside the major cities should be prioritised in government programmes was reported in interviews with a number of senior government officials active in policy making at the time.

8. In only a handful of mentions of the term 'local' was it used in the sub-national sense (see Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2007b, pp. 17, 28, 34).

9. This document was actually published in 2012 but the date on the document is recorded incorrectly as 2010.

10. For example, the document states, with reference to emerging high-tech SMEs, that support must, be *properly attuned to their specific supply chains and geographical location (clusters/manufacturing zones)* (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2014, p. 60).

11. The DTIC's masterplan guide offers no specific methodological tool to help facilitators to process participants understandings of the geographical features of their industry offers no category of interventions that might have clear multi-scalar arrangements. The document's only mention of the sub-national is to suggest that provincial and local government stakeholders should be consulted (DTIC, undated).

12. From an article in the Business Day (<http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2016/07/05/geography-can-be-exploited-to-ensure-prosperity-for-all>) by Somik Lall (2016).

13. Also reported by Butler and Southall (2015).

14. The Cities Support Programme was reported as having worked with city economic development officials on an intervention to provide sub-national analysis of tax data to better inform both local and national policy choices (see <https://spatialtaxdata.org.za/>).

15. The NSDF goes as far as stating, 'urban areas must and will become South Africa's "new gold"' (DALRRD, 2022, p. 95).

16. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out this instance where actions of national government officials accommodated a range of local inputs in planning the ELIDZ project, but this flexibility appeared less apparent in other contexts.

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