

# (W)Escaping the Challenges of the City: a Critique of Cape Town's Proposed Satellite Town

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**Abstract** Much of the current planning discourse has come to reject master planned 'new cities' as both unrealistic and undesirable. However, with growing urbanisation challenges in the Global South, master planned cities, suburbs and communities have come back on the agenda driven by both public and private interests. This paper explores the WesCape Development (WD), a proposed satellite suburb to be located north-west of Cape Town, South Africa. Situating the WD in a longer lineage of utopian and new city planning approaches, I argue that the proposal is deeply flawed. Rather than being the solution to the urban ills facing Cape Town, it is an 'anti-urban' strategy which supports suburbanisation and assumes a particular and problematic urban growth scenario. It relies on 'environmentally deterministic' assumptions and depoliticised and deinstitutionalised designs. Ultimately, it tries to escape, rather than confront, the operational, political and social challenges of the city leading to the devaluation of planning instruments and citizenship engagement. The WD highlights the importance and power of radical and utopian thinking as well as the necessity of grounding and situating these impulses in the specificities and complexities of the city.

**Keywords** Cape Town · New towns · African cities · Utopian planning · Participation · WesCape · South Africa · Urban edge · New cities

## Introduction

'The existential core of urbanism is the desire for radical change to bring all the good implied in the original utopian association of "the city". This radical impulse stands in contrast to the necessary prudence and constraints of incremental change, which is the only way of intervening in conditions of profound complexity and entrenched power dynamics' (2008:6).

- *City Futures*, Pieterse 2008

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On March 15, 2013, to the shock of many who had peripherally observed what was seemed to be the conceptualisation of a master planned utopian fantasy, the Cape Argus newspaper printed a full page spread celebrating the WesCape Development (WD) proposal. It announced the support of the Mayor, Patricia DeLille, and described the many benefits of jobs, housing and connectivity which the new ‘mini-city’ would bring to Cape Town. However, it failed to make reference to the long list of concerns which had been presented by Cape Town officials in the Economic, Environment and Spatial Planning Portfolio Committee some months earlier. The Committee cited the lack of bulk infrastructure, the peripheral and potentially hazardous location, and lack of detailed information in the proposal as some of the issues. The Committee also surveyed the departments in all three spheres of the government (national, provincial and local). They found that only the departments of human settlement (i.e. housing) supported the application. Perhaps more diplomatically than professors from the University of Cape Town School of Planning who, some months later, describe the project as ‘doomed for failure’, they concluded the report stating their ‘recommendation that the application should not be supported’ (Nicholson 2013; City of Cape Town 2012b, p. 433).

### The Re-emergence of Master Planned Towns and Suburbs: Cape Town and Beyond

Much of the current planning discourse has come to reject master planned cities and suburbs as both unrealistic and undesirable (Watson 2009b; Fainstien 2000). Decades of critiques are drawn from cities such as Brasilia, Chandigarh and more recently places like Abuja. These critiques are testament to the intellectual disfavour given to dogmatic and top-down ‘new city’ approaches to planning (Hall 2002). Critics draw attention to the depoliticising, deterministic and ‘utopian expectations that the form of development can produce a better way of life’ (Gwyther 2005, p. 58). Foregrounded are the social and economic processes which continually unbundle the sterility and perfection of such spatial and, by extension, social prescriptions (Epstein 1973; Holston 1989).

However, as the challenges of southern cities take the international spotlight, master planned cities, suburbs and communities are being built in unsuspecting locations such as Palestine, Nairobi, Egypt and India to name a few (Moser 2012). These ‘new city developments’ have become increasingly attractive to property developers and planners who wish to design and implement their envisaged developments unencumbered by complex and entrenched social, political and infrastructural legacies. Such languages deployed include ‘neo cities’, ‘gated communities’ and ‘ecotowns’. While rationales may differ across context, planners are increasingly asking what is at stake, and for whom, in these emerging urbanities (Parnell and Robinson 2012; Swilling and Annecke 2012; Lemanski and Oldfield 2009; Hook and Vrdoljak 2002).

With these questions in mind, the purpose of this paper is to explore the case study of the WD and the contentious debates which surround it. The WD has recently been passed through the Cape Town City Council, motivated and supported by the desire to proactively respond to the urbanisation pressures facing the city. The premise of the proposal is that an appropriate urban strategy involves the creation of jobs and housing in a satellite city which can be adequately and sustainably master planned from its inception. The developers envisage a:

'community/city which would lack nothing... a safe walkable neighbourhood located in a new urban space (i.e. a new city) that has meaning and is economically sustainable for millennia. It is in these newly created spaces where people are to enjoy a renewed sense of value in their lives and be part of a community characterised by being a place to live, work and play' (Goven et al. 2012, p. 5, 7).

These ideas are particularly radical in their departure from the reality in South Africa where motor car domination, isolated land uses and poverty traps are marked legacies of apartheid planning. However, the desire to respond to the social ills of cities by building new ones is hardly an original provocation. In an effort to situate the WD in a longer legacy of planning theory and critique, I will provide a selective history of utopian 'new city' thinking. Following this, I will unpack the particular 'urban imperative' which faces Cape Town and serves as the motivation for the WD informing both its explicit and implicit designs and assumptions. Finally, I will pick out the most pertinent critiques of the WD and highlight the implications for the City of Cape Town and other cities which may find new cities, towns, suburbs or communities amidst their urban agendas.

## Utopian Dreams of Cities

Utopian thinking, as 'the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from what we know to be a general condition in the present', is arguably an inherent condition of societal transformation (Friedman 2000; MacLeod and Ward 2002, p. 153). From the Paris Commune to the Zapatistas of Mexico, urban theorist and modern utopian thinker David Harvey argues that the search for "something different" is not only possible, but foundational for the defining of revolutionary trajectories' (2012: xvii). By extension, utopias are persistently grounded in particular assumptions about what changes must take place and how this might be achieved (Batchelor 1969).

### The History of Utopian Thinking

From science fiction to architecture, utopias and dystopias have attracted controversy and fascination for centuries (Eaton 2002; Meyerson 1961; Winter 2006). In 1516, Sir Thomas More published the seminal *Utopia*. The title of the book and his imaginary society were an intentional pun which combined 'outopia' (meaning 'nowhere') and 'eutopia' (meaning 'good place') (Mumford 1965, p. 275; Goodey 1970, p. 16). More's *Utopia*, a subject of ongoing scholarly debate, draws from some of the oldest traditions of European, and particularly Greek, political philosophy echoing sentiments of Plato's *Republic* and the purported desire for a more egalitarian commonwealth (Logan 1989). Over the centuries to follow, More's work inspired many thinkers concerned with the production of schemes for better communities and societies (Batchelor 1969).

In particular, in the early nineteenth century, many utopian thinkers were deeply disturbed with the plight of the capitalistic city (Hall 2002). They found resonance

with More's work in response to modern industrialisation processes (Myerson 1961). Robert Owens's industrial town model and Charles Fourier's factory colonies are among some of the detailed and highly principle designs for better, decentralised, more redistributive, efficient and more sustainable human settlements (Houghton-Evans 1975; Pollard 1964). However, in documenting the specificities of these utopian visions, Batchelor (1969) argues that the majority of attempts to realise these plans were both socially and economically impractical. While creative in their designs, they were often met with little support and people were often unwilling to conform their lifestyle to align to the rigorous demands such plans imposed.

While Ebenezer Howard has come to be the figurehead of new city designs, his 'Garden City' concept was drawn from these earlier utopian thinkers. Perhaps because of time and place, his seminal book *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, first published in 1899, is frequently cited as one of the most important contributions to planning theory and practice (Fishman 1982; Richard and Lapping 1998; Hall 2002). In England, the late 1800s, the growth of slums, fear of urban revolt and the environmental degradation of cities were emerging in the political imaginary (Hall 2002). Responding to these ills, Howard envisaged a 'constellation' of semi-rural communities which could achieve 'a healthy, natural, and economic combination of town and country life' (Howard 1946; Petersen 1968, p. 160). With diagrammatic clarity, Howard proposed a circular shaped town of a mile and a half circumference surrounded by green belts and structured with boulevards. This was accompanied by a financial strategy which exploited the conversion of low-cost agricultural land (again, ideas taken from earlier thinkers). These specifics attracted both utopian thinkers (interested in the making of greener and more garden like towns) and developers who waved the 'garden city banner' in justification of such profitable endeavours (Alonso 1970; Batchelor 1969).

Emerging from this ideological movement was a more programmatic uptake. In Britain, the national government launched a New Towns urbanisation strategy premised on the concepts of the Garden City. The approach included the construction of 26 isolated urban centres, detached from the existing fabric, which would cater for mixed classes in an 'integrated' urban environment (Petersen 1968). The state rationalised public investment in New Towns, claiming that they would ease the urbanisation pressures (Alonso 1970). Following Britain, France launched a similar programme building a number of new towns in lagging regions. In both cases, these towns struggled to achieve their stated goals. While most of the French towns were able to attract residents, economic growth was often stagnant. The converse was true for Britain. Moreover, they both consistently failed to stifle growth of metros which continued to be burdened with the pressures of urbanisation (Stewart 1996). What was perhaps most clear was that these towns could not defy social, economic and political logics. While being conceptualised as a new social and spatial order, they were implemented through the existing bureaucracy and thus, social, economic and operational realities came to bear on the outcomes.

Twentieth century modernist thinkers were more concerned with authoritarian centralism than their more socialistic (and perhaps anarchist) predecessors (Hall 2002). They produced their own plans for more utopian cities. The revival of master planning and the renewed focus on the city (rather than Howard and other's fixation with the countryside) marked the work of Haussmann, Le Corbusier and the CIAM Movement (Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) more generally

(MacLeod and Ward 2002; Robins 2002). Through the modernist planning era, the belief that one's environment was the biggest determinant of social, economic and political outcomes persisted (Holston 1998; Hall 2002). Utopian planning, particularly master planning, has been critiqued for its prescription, sterility and incompatibility with social and economic processes. In Mumford's (1965) *Utopia, the City and the Machine*, he writes '[a]ll ideal models have the same life-arresting, if not life-denying property: hence, nothing could be more fatal to human society than to achieve its ideals. But fortunately nothing is less likely to happen.' For example, the Opus Plan designed by Le Corbusier for Algiers envisaged a gleaming 'world capital of Africa' (AlSayyad 1992). This was quintessential of modernist city utopias and was never built. Much of utopian thought has either failed to be realised or largely deviates from its principles. Notwithstanding the chequered history of new towns and master planned settlements, adaptation of these visions echo in today's urban experiments and planning movements.

### Modern Utopias in the Global South

From Egypt to Johannesburg, Sao Paulo to Mumbai, master planned communities, gated 'lifestyle estates' and urban villages are growing in popularity (MacLeod and Ward 2002; Gwyther 2005; Wang et al. 2010). As cities, particularly in the Global South, become more crowded and 'unmanageable', private and state developers have responded by offering a utopian alternative to those who can afford. These urban utopias have been the point of much controversy. In the case of China, many of the new towns have remained under occupied creating 'hollow villages' and 'ghost towns' (Woodworth 2012; Lin 2007). The utopian replica of Paris is one of the most obvious examples. Egypt's satellite town experiment also proved difficult. As part of the Greater Cairo master scheme, attempts were made to disperse population. These towns have remained deeply divided; the poor suffer from the lack of infrastructure and job opportunities in these areas (Ali 2013)

In the case of many private sector driven initiatives, while using 'green' and 'brown' language, the financial reality of the investor climate has often stripped such projects of their egalitarian principles (Fainstien 2000). They become sites of social fragmentation and 'splintered urbanism', a critique well developed by critical urbanists concerned with capital accumulation and spaces of exclusion (McFarlane 2011). Wang et al. argue that new towns in India are either residential enclaves or planned gated communities (2010). Lemanski and Oldfield write (2009, p. 1) '[p]rivate territories and gated communities in southern cities are criticised for creating exclusionary spaces, increasing residential segregation, restricting freedom of movement and exacerbating social divides'. Graham concurs, 'logics of bypass are evident in the pipelines of potable water which thread across the surface of Mumbai, lacing together the gated communities of the affluent, whilst providing no access to the informal cities which they bisect' (Graham 2010, p. 13). Many authors across the Global South have stressed the problematic nature of spaces of social and political exclusion (Murray 2011; Robins 2002). These new urbanities, far from conceptualising societal reform, have come to offer better urban futures to those who can afford to escape from the insanities of city life.

In Africa, the emergence of elite enclaves is prevalent. In addition to gated communities, there are 'tech hubs', 'smart cities' and 'satellite towns' which intend

to serve Africa's emerging middle class and decrease the spatial and infrastructural pressures on existing cities. More recent African 'neo city' and suburban utopias include the Hope City on the outskirts of Accra, Eko Atlantic City in Lagos, Tatu City in Nairobi and Luanda's Kilamba Kiaxi (Landau 2012). These projects are sold of their ability to address issues of jobs and housing and alluring in their aptitude to bypass the sunk infrastructural costs and entrenched social patterns of metros. It is too early in the development of these projects to assess their utopian nature. However, the sparkling images presented on their promotional websites raise questions of both feasibility and desirability, reminiscent of modernist fantasies of earlier utopian thinkers.

Many urbanists reject the extremism of Dubai, Brasilia and other impressive state-led urbanities. They compete to vigorously critique gated communities, fortified enclaves or exclusionary 'better city' projects. However, a turn to pragmatism and an elimination of utopian thinking from urban planning and design appears even less favourable. Acknowledging the 'caricature nature' of utopias, Meyerson (1916) argues for 'utopian formulation [as] a method for testing innovation in the city'. In a balancing act between practicality and urban visioning, Pieterse (2008, p. 6) argues for a 'radical incrementalism' as 'deliberate actions of social transformation but through a multiplicity of processes and imaginations, none of which assumes or asserts a primary significance over other struggles'. Parnell and Robinson argue that utopian ideals can be used to 'motivate institutional change and provide useful markers of progress' (2012, p. 608). Holston argues for the inclusion of the 'ethnographic present' in planning, that is, the possibilities for change encountered in existing social conditions (Holston 1999, p. 166). While these authors stress the necessity of radical imagining of more just cities, so too do they reiterate the need for such change to be grounded in and through the complex systems of the city. The following section will begin by homing in on the critical issues facing South African cities generally and Cape Town particularly. These problems, and their particular framings, set the stage for the WD.

## The WesCape Development Proposal

For decades, South African cities have experienced high unemployment, widening income inequality and increasing backlogs in housing (Lemanski 2007; McDonald 2008; Pieterse 2002). This has been particularly evident in the growth of informal settlements in large urban areas (Statistics South Africa 2011). These issues are in part legacies of apartheid spatial planning which forcefully segregated populations by race and responded to the influx in urban migration in the 1950s with anti-urban policies which supported suburban sprawl (Mabin and Smit 1997; Khan and Thring 2003). This approach persisted until 1986 when the release of the White Paper on Urbanisation marked concession to the impossibility of halting urban growth. However, the need to continue to protect the whites and the cities was resolved by building new satellite towns for black and coloured residents (Ibid.). During this period, a range of new suburbs (known as 'townships') were created including Khayelitsha in Cape Town, Motherwell in Port Elizabeth and Ekangala near Bronkhorstspuit. Inspiration was drawn from the New Town models of Britain (Jürgens and Donaldson 2012; Cook 1986; Smith 1992).

In addition to this legacy of social and spatial injustice, the problematic post-apartheid policies have continually exacerbated urban sprawl and perpetuated the production of suburban ghettos (Harrison et al. 2008; Tomlinson 1990; Bond and Tait 1997). This confluence of forces has resulted in what Pieterse calls 'the spatial paradox'. He argues that South Africa has made strides in poverty reduction in absolute terms. However, the poverty reduction instruments of the developmental local state, i.e. the social grants, participation processes and particularly the South African Reconstructing and Development (RDP) housing subsidy programme, have facilitated deep social and spatial inequality, the burden of which falls heavily on the poor and the state (Harrison et al. 2003; FFC 2011; Watson 2009a).

### The Spatial Paradox in Cape Town

This 'spatial paradox' manifests in unique ways in the different South African cities. In Cape Town, housing and land are an everyday struggle. Driven by political provision targets (and the search for cheap land), sprawling RDP housing projects line the periphery of the city creating ghettoised pockets of violence, dependency and civic unrest (Skuse and Cousins 2007; Pieterse 2002). Service delivery riots, evictions, xenophobic violence, fires and floods in informal settlements, land occupations and a range of other indicators mark painful tensions and persistent demand for access to land and housing in the city (Dodson 2010; Miraftab 2009; Darch and Emezi 2012). However, while Cape Town's paradox of inequality highlights the struggles of the poor, it is also a story of wealth, prosperity and practices of urban governance (Lemanski and Oldfield 2009). The city boasts vineyards, shopping complexes, gated communities and a resistance to processes of redistribution (McDonald 2008). Planning and participation platforms become critical means to facilitate NIMBY (not in my back yard) behaviour. This ensures that the spatial value production embedded in particular neighbourhoods and areas remain intact (City of Cape Town 2012c). This is done not only through rallying around particular budgetary and investment processes but also by blocking infill developments seen to threaten the character and exclusivity of middle and high-income areas (Ibid.).

In this context of persistent inequality, the 'business as usual' poverty reduction and urban development models are clearly in need of a radical make over. In reference to the South African 'RDP' housing programme, the National Development Plan writes 'the inefficiencies and inequities in South Africa's settlement patterns are deeply entrenched. Bold measures are needed to reshape them' (National Planning Commission 2011, p. 233). There is an emerging consensus from NGOs and research organisation, such as the Development Action Group, Isandla Institute, Financial and Fiscal Commission and the African Centre for Cities, of the need to think differently about building, sustaining and managing South African cities in contexts of fragmentation and completing development imperatives (Lemanski 2007; Pieterse 2008; Watson 2009a; Turok 2001). In a WD discussion at the Cape Institute for Architecture, Edgar Pieterse commented on the political appeal of the WD proposal. He called it 'the only big idea which Cape Town has had for a while'.<sup>1</sup> Here, he urged the urban and development stakeholders in the room to consider the rationale, merits and pitfalls of the proposal.

<sup>1</sup> This is based on transcriptions from the 'Presentation and Discussion on the WesCape Development Proposal', on May 15th, 2013 at the Cape Institute for Architecture.

## The Proposal and Process

After nearly 8 years of conceptual development, in October 2011, CommuniTgrow submitted an application to the City of Cape Town to amend the 2012 Spatial Development Framework (SDF) (City of Cape Town 2012a). They requested that the urban edge be extended to include the area wherein the WD would be situated. This area is currently zoned for agricultural use and is disconnected from the built foot print of the city. In December of 2012, the application for amendment was approved by the Mayoral Committee and subsequently submitted to the Provincial Administration of the Western Cape responsible for making the final decision on urban edge extensions.

Not unlike the utopian city and town models of the past century, the WD is a highly principled ‘holistic’, ecologically ‘regenerative’ and ‘design-led’ new suburb development model.<sup>2</sup> The model has been developed by CommuniTgrow, a private development company driven by a team of urban designers, engineers and property developers. The basis of the model has been presented in a book, written by the developers and entitled *Two Billion Strong*—in reference to the projected population growth in Africa by 2050. Here, they argue for applicability of this template across the continent and perhaps beyond. The WD would be the pilot. The intention is to proactively address the ‘second wave of urbanisation’, characterised by rapid urbanisation of the poor to developing cities, through the creation of planned satellite towns and cities (for an explanation of the ‘second wave of urbanisation’ see UNFPA 2007). The developers summarise the R140 billion project; ‘the WesCape project will be developed over a 20-year period and comprise approximately 200,000 housing units and all the supporting infrastructure required of a city including transport infrastructure (roads and rail), educational institutions (day care centres, schools, colleges, university) and the full spectrum of municipal services’ (Goven et al. 2012, p. 72).

Responding to the sprawling and disintegrated nature of South African urban development, the developers propose an integrated settlement with an average dwelling unit density of 65 dwelling units per hectare (du/ha). This is a relatively high density considering Cape Town’s new Densification Strategy aims to achieve developments with 25 du/ha, and the average across the city is as low as 10–13 du/ha (City of Cape Town 2012c). In addition to higher density living, the development proposal includes a range of urban facilities, to be integrated with the mixed income housing development. This includes approximately 400 educational facilities, 370 public service facilities, 648 public open spaces including a hospital, a university, Home Affairs and other amenities are listed on the promotional website.

On the sustainability front, the developers have conceptualised a ‘sub-ward watershed’ (i.e. neighbourhood scaled) as the main unit of design for community services and infrastructure. The developers propose a sustainable system in terms of water, electricity and waste management. To achieve this decentralisation, a number of advanced ‘sustainability technologies’ are included, such as solar and

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<sup>2</sup> The WD is often referred to as a ‘new city’. This is in fact not true as it would be part of the Cape Town metropolitan region and would fall under the City of Cape Town administration. ‘New city’, perhaps sounds better than new suburb. This content is based on the WesCape proposal as it is explained in *2 Billion Strong: A Regenerative Solution to Building Sustainable African Cities* and the unpublished fact sheet which was given to the author by the developers. It is also based on personal communication with CommuniTgrow representatives.



wind energy, recycling processes and grey water separation and reuse. The proposed use of these technologies is intended to decrease dependence on state infrastructure provision and the negative ecological impacts of the project.

While the aforementioned designs are of interest and require interrogation in their own right, the real justification for the WD is the need for housing and jobs. The settlement intends to provide 300,000 jobs and 200,000 houses. As per the plan, the first residents will work in the construction sector towards the building of the project, their mortgage applications contingent on local employment. In addition, scaled job production is envisaged through ongoing construction over the 20-year project life span, light and green industry which may be attracted to the low land costs, commercial sectors, community and public services and financial sectors. Much like the new towns model, job production is linked to housing provision. The housing development in WD is intended to serve a combination between open market and subsidised housing. Fifty percent of the development is aimed at those who make below R1,500 per month, to be cross-subsidised by the other half comprising of competitively priced semi-detached and free-standing units. While the details of this integrated housing model are still in early phases of the development, much of the political support for the proposal has stemmed from desperation to address the backlog in housing and meet housing delivery targets.

Despite a broader discourse of compact city form, the location of project is also adamantly justified by the developers. The development, to be located 30 km north-west of the City of Cape Town, between Atlantis (Cape Town's failed decentralised industrialisation project) and the northern suburbs of Table View, offers an opportunity to connect the Western Growth Corridor. If adequate transport investment is undertaken by the city and the parastatal The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), there is the potential of integrating Atlantis, currently a deteriorating and disconnected suburb, with the city. While there is open land closer to the city, this land is owned by other housing developers (namely Garden Cities and Milnerton Estate). The land which is currently available within the city boundaries has been difficult to assemble at scale.<sup>3</sup> While the developers accept that the location of housing is WD might be second best, they see no option but to extend development to this region and thus create a satellite city.

### **Critiques of the WesCape**

There are many critiques of the WD proposal. To date, these have primarily been expressed by academics and activists through a range of media and public platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc.). Some of these critiques are particular to the WD, such as its unsafe proximity to the Koeberg Nuclear Power Plant, the likely ghettoization of the poor whom may remain stuck between Atlantis and the city and the 'locking' of the future 'Western Growth Corridor' into 'leap frog development'. However, there is a range of important critiques which have resonance with past 'new city' and 'new town' projects and will likely offer insight into future projects of this nature. While having

<sup>3</sup> This is for a range of reasons. Many of the large tracts of land are tied to the asset books of parastatals and government departments. Smaller infill sites tend to be burdened by planning constraints such as infrastructure capacity issues.

been expressed in many ways and through a range of disciplinary registers, I have attempted to reduce such critiques into the essence of their arguments. These include critiques that the WD:

- Is an ‘anti-urban’ strategy which supports suburbanisation and assumes a particular and problematic urban growth scenario,
- Relies on ‘environmentally deterministic’ assumptions and depoliticised and deinstitutionalised designs,
- Tries to escape, rather than confront, the operational, political and social challenges of the city.

### Anti-urban Strategy

The WD is presented as an urban strategy which intends to combat ‘rapid urbanisation’ and population growth in the City of Cape Town. There are two main concerns with this proposition. The first is that the ‘rapid urbanisation’ narrative, applicable in many places in Africa, is not such a reality in Cape Town. The second is that, historically, new towns have failed to attract populations and/or economic motors (Stewart 1996). In Cape Town, this is particularly likely.

While perhaps more relevant elsewhere on the continent, urbanisation in South Africa has been in decline since the mid-1990s (Turok 2012). In Cape Town, the 2011 Census data suggests that the population has only grown by a total of 700,000 households in the past 10 years, and the rate of growth is decreasing (Statistics South Africa 2011). While there is in-migration to the city, this is matched by outmigration to other regions and metros. In addition, the current population of Cape Town is ageing. As such, population growth will likely continue to decrease in the foreseeable future. Using the population projections of the Dorrington Report, the City of Cape Town’s Spatial Development Framework argues that the population of Cape Town will likely peak at 4.5 million people (City of Cape Town 2012a). This suggests that the fear of ‘rapid urbanisation’ and the need to abate migration is less of an issue than popularly assumed. If the basis of the WD model for housing demand is premised on the assumption of a population of 6 million people, the integrity of the calculations should be interrogated more robustly.

Secondly, in terms of migration to WD in particular, it is assumed that the wealthy (or open market housing) will come to the WD in search of a ‘better’ (read well designed) urban environment. For the lower income, who are excluded from the housing market but still above the ‘poor’ (known in South Africa as the gap market) and the very poor, it is assumed that they will work in the construction industry through which they will have income and be able to pay for housing or, conversely, they will be relocated from existing overcrowded informal settlements where they currently lack opportunities for upward mobility. However, despite selling the WD on the hope of racial and class integration, there is little articulation of how this will actually take place and how the WD will overcome the deeply embedded institutional and social practices of the apartheid legacy noted by a number of authors (Turok 2001).

There is a need to better understand how the political economy of housing in Cape Town works. In reality, open market housing is unlikely to find the WD attractive as there are many other options, in much more attractive locations available. The premium paid to live in a new build house, which cross subsidises lower-income

housing and may lack other social amenities, will likely repel this market and compromise the success of the (underdeveloped) finance model. Given the volatile and risky nature of the construction sector, the gap market housing will likely be impossible without the cross subsidisation for the open market housing and thus becomes financially infeasible without the former. For the poor, the Department of Human Settlements would graciously move subsidy housing to the WD (as they struggle to meet housing provision targets within the city and are under political pressure to deliver). However, creating a mega-RDP settlement located far from the city would likely emulate past low-income housing projects which frequently failed to create liveable human settlements and perpetually peripheralised the poor. As Pieterse notes, the 'numbers game' played by officials and politicians vis a vis the South African Housing Policy cannot continue to be the de facto planning policy (Pieterse 2009). The need to desist straining poor households who experience the loss of social networks and locational value is articulated in the South Africa's Breaking New Ground Policy (2004) and National Development Plan (2011) which stress the importance of in situ housing development. Understanding this reality is essential in the building of more robust plans for social and economic integration in the context of post-apartheid cities.

By no means, however, should this suggest that there should not be a clear urban strategy. In fact, with two thirds urbanised population, the need for an urban strategy, and even polycentric development, is augmented (Turok and Parnell 2009). However, echoed by Petersen's (1968) observations of new towns in the UK and the Wang et al. (2010) Indian and Chinese counterparts, such strategies which seek to intercept those coming to cities and de-densify from within, while syphoning capital from city budgets into risky new towns or satellite development, can only be seen as a continuation of 'anti-urban' or suburban approaches which are neither innovative nor particularly effective.

### The Limits of Environmental Determinism and Master Planned Settlements

One of the leading rationales for the WD is that a 'better suburb' can be envisaged and realised in the context of a master planned greenfield site. Here, all of the pieces of the 'human settlement' puzzle can seamlessly be integrated through comprehensive design. The culmination of all of these pieces creates locational value for the future residents shifting the site from peripheral (to Cape Town) to central (to the WD). There are two main issues with this proposition. The first is the concern that, in fact, the environment tends not to determine social behaviour. The second, which is more important for the case of the WD, is the assumption that all of the pieces necessary to build an integrated settlement will come together as per the plan.

The design and engineering professions have tended to assume that the physicality of environments can shape, reform and determine behaviours and outcomes and that outcomes necessarily follow the plans through which they were envisaged (Fainstien 2000). As previously noted, this modernist viewpoint perpetually privileges settlement form, over the economic, social, institutional, political and historical dynamics and processes which come to bear on urban environments (Harvey 1997). This is particularly evident in the case of the WD, where it is assumed that designing integrated human settlements and sustainable urban infrastructural systems will lead to the production of

more just and resilient living environments. Simply planning or even building an ‘integrated settlements’ does not ensure that the requisite social and economic responses will accompany it. In Lemanski’s analysis of the desegregated suburb of Muizenberg (Lemanski 2007, p. 584), she found that ‘on the whole, physical [racial] desegregation has not led to social integration’ except in cases where differences in class were minimal. As I have already discussed, given the lack of robust financial model which would facilitate mixed income housing, it is sufficient to say that the production of mixed income housing requires deeper inquiry.

Secondly, the integrated and liveable nature of the development and the locational viability (in distinction from past projects of social and spatial marginalisation) are reliant a range of actors. Both state departments and non-state entities are required and expected to invest in social, economic and physical infrastructures—schools, roads, churches, banks, hospitals, etc. As all planners know well, simply drawing such amenities onto spatial plans does not ensure that the budgets, functions and capabilities are available, supported, sequenced and accordingly aligned. Even within the state, deep fragmentation between departments and spheres is evident. In articulating the drivers of the reproduction of apartheid spatial formations, Pieterse (2009, p. 5) writes ‘[a]ll of the key built environments functions such as housing, transportation, land management, energy, environmental planning, economic development, and so on are awkwardly split across the three levels of government, which reproduces highly problematic outcomes’ (Pieterse 2009).

The private sector, responsible for job production in the WD, is also driven by a complex set of factors. Past evidence from the case of Atlantis and more recent interviews with representatives of local industry in Cape Town suggest that industry does not follow cheap land. In a recent report entitled ‘Preliminary Overview of the Economic Sectors Driving Cape Town’s Non Residential Property Market’, McGaffin (2013 p. 2) argues that the demand for space is derived from the need to undertake a particular activity in that location. The most attractive locations for industry are ‘Epping, Blackheath/ Kuilsrivier Industria, Paarden Eiland, Maitland, Airport Industria Sheffield Park Montague Gardens and Woodstock....The key location requirements are access to the transport network [public and private], municipal infrastructure, economic infrastructure [port, airport, etc.], labour, related industries and appropriate and affordable space. Historical location choices and relocation costs can play a large role in determining current location’. This suggests that a complex set of factors impact on industrial situation which cannot be factored into a master planned design.

There is not space here to fully unpack the alternatives to the modernist and master planning approach nor is that the purpose of this paper. Suffice to say that more participatory, political, collaborative, strategic, communicative and relational approaches are increasingly attractive to urban practitioners who humble themselves to the limits of their profession and the complexity of city planning processes (Sandercock 2004; Forester 1999; Healey 1992, 2007; Watson 2002). In more incremental developments, losses and gains, alignments and dissonance and contest and collaborations are manageable and negotiated in and through the volatile, disorderly and costly, factors, actors, economies, transactions and institutions—as cities, more generally, are wont to be (Simone 2001; Pieterse 2008; Swilling et al. 2003).

## Escaping the City

Implicit in the WesCape project is the belief that integrated and sustainable urbanisms cannot be built within the city. More specifically, urban transformation cannot be achieved in the operational, political and spatial registers of the existing South African city. This section will explore the implications, risks and concerns of this argument. Perhaps most obviously, the development is spatially dislocated from the city. It is outside of the existing urban edge and disconnected from the urban fabric of the city. This spatiality is justified by the operational or administrative difficulties associated with accessing land for housing in the city. This includes the difficulties with land delivery, administration and servicing, budgeting frameworks, planning tools and funding instruments. The developers argue that it is not feasible and, by extension, impossible, to access well-located land at the scale necessary to address the housing backlog and create integrated human settlements. While this spatial dislocation offers concern in terms of issues of sprawl and densification, the physical circumvention of the city symbolises a deeper desire to bypass complex institutionalities and operationalities of the city.

Additionally troubling, in 2010, the City of Cape Town issued an audit of 37,000 sites, assessing each for potential use, density and development timeframes. Here, they conclude that 'there is sufficient land availability for development within the Urban Edge until 2021' (City of Cape Town 2010, p. 9). While sites such as District Six, Youngsfield, Wingfield and Ysterplaat have been parts of highly politicised debates (Turok 2001), it seems infeasible that the WD would be a lower hanging fruit. Reflecting on the new towns debates, land economist Alonzo (1970, p. 50) writes 'arguments based on the ease of assembly or cheaper prices [for land outside the city] are reminiscent of the drunk who, although he had lost his wallet farther up the street, went looking for it under a lamp post because the light was better there'. While well-located land access is, no doubt, a major issue in Cape Town, justifying a utopian dream on the back of this difficulty is both far-fetched and counter-intuitive to the underpinning concerns over spatial form, access and densification evident in the discourse of the developers.

Another part of the operational avoidance of the city is the WD's claim that it will use sustainable technologies and not rely on the City for infrastructure provision. If sustainable urban systems such as those which are suggested in the proposal are implemented, there may be less of a burden on bulk energy, water and other municipal systems. While attractive for the environmentally inclined citizen and the budget restricted state, there is scepticism of the feasibility. Such technologies are expensive and the consumers (most of whom are already low income) would need to carry the majority of the cost. Officials and built environment specialists fear that the burden of servicing and managing the infrastructure provision will, ultimately, fall onto the City (McGaffin 2013). The cost of servicing the WD will likely be taken out of existing city budgets. This will leave gaps in housing provision, transportation investment, energy delivery, bulk infrastructure investment, educational facilities and infrastructure maintenance and repair. If after development there is no housing demand in the WD, the City is left with two options: either to sell off the serviced land to other (less utopian minded developers) or to simply build an RDP housing settlement. Both of these options undermine the utopian vision of the settlement and

waste any future opportunity to develop sustainably on the Western Growth Corridor. As such, the avoidance of the operational city through unrealistic claims of sustainable technology use could have deleterious outcomes.

More than discontent with the inefficient and ineffectual operational processes within the City, the avoidance of public participation and the dismissal of the existing policies foregrounds a deeply political concern. Despite participation processes falling within the mandate of city officials, many authors have noted that the publicness of participation is itself an activity of power, and thus politics (Forester 1999; Hickey and Mohan 2005; Pieterse 2013; Cornwall 2008; Arnstien 1969). While public participation is often seen as an operational duty, avoiding participation and undermining policies, such as the SDF (City of Cape Town 2012a) and the Densification Strategy (2012) which have emerged out of the deep and prolonged citizenship engagement, is at its core a circumvention of a political process. Thus, supporting the WD suggests that one is not only giving up on the administration and institutionalities of the city but also giving up on the public whose opinions and insights are seen as detriments to the political imaginary. The blatant disregard for the existing frameworks and strategies both devalues the existing instruments available to officials to guide development and undermines important and well-consulted decisions regarding the future spatial form of the City. This sets precedent for undemocratic and contra-policy decisions—such as ill-informed urban edge amendments—in Cape Town and across South Africa.

## Conclusions

‘New suburb’ developments, such as the WD, will not fundamentally reconfigure problematic urbanisms in post-apartheid cities. Experiences in China, India, Angola and elsewhere in the Global South have shown that mega-housing projects in peripheral locations cannot ‘solve’ the complex issues associated with urbanisation. Such ‘grand solutions’ will more likely put additional resource constraints on cash strapped local governments struggling to retain decent rates base and provide even the most basic measures of redistribution.

In Cape Town, if integration—both social and ecological—cannot be achieved through mixed income and mixed use spaces which are based on regenerative principles of sustainability, a large part of the utopian vision for a better South African city is already lost. In its place rests a failed housing development and a weight on the budget of the city. The picture which emerges is not drastically different from the distant RDP housing projects which lack integration, amenities and employment opportunities or the historic satellite towns built under apartheid. It is very unlikely that the WD could or would achieve its stated goals. However, I concur with Alonso’s (1970, p.53) statement that the success or failure of new towns and suburbs is ‘irrelevant to our present urban problems and that as sirens of utopia, they might distract us from our path’. Thus, attempts to implement a utopian master plan, particularly one which seeks to avoid rather than confront the existing natures of the city, defeats the purpose of urban visioning and undermines the work of a plethora of NGOs, officials, academics and private companies who are tirelessly dedicated to fighting the challenges of integration and to the construction of a more just and sustainable Cape Town from the inside out.

The case of the WD shows that there is no one-size-fits-all urban transformation agenda. Each city offers a unique context through which urban transformation, integration and sustainability will need to grapple. The City of Cape Town is particularly distinctive. The history of racial segregation, low-density sprawl, slower pace of urbanisation and free housing delivery are some of the unique characteristics which impact on urban transformation agendas and the viability of alternative development trajectories. None of these issues can be adequately addressed through the building of a new 'mini-city' or suburb. In fact, as I have shown in the paper, many of these issues would only be exacerbated by the WD. A better city is not a fancy design or innovative technology. The building of a better city is a continually contested and political process with deeply institutionalised springs, levers and obstacles (Pieterse 2008).

However, the WD proposal is not without benefit. The story which the proposal tells in its justification and in its journey through the political and social arenas foregrounds the need and power of radical visioning. The ability of the WD to capture both the political excitement and the subsequent ferocious public debate suggests that the time is ripe to present more radical ideas into the discussion on the future of Cape Town. There is a clear desire for boldness which transcends the state-led visioning processes (which rarely impact on practice) and translates both imperatives and principles into action. In parallel, as expressed by the critiques of the WD, a need to ground such actions not only in the evidence and rigour of technicalities but also in the programmes, processes, institutions and spatiality of the city. While utopian, radical and visionary imaginaries are essential to the making of better material realities if these realities are not grounded in our current spatial, economic, political operational contexts, we run the risk of wasting vast amounts of resources, capacities and potentials. Since these are necessarily complex systems, more provisional and incremental interventions—rather than silver bullet solutions—are necessary. It is essential to encourage innovative suggestions and 'out of the box' responses to the challenges our cities face. However, the decision-making must be transparent and follow the rigorously established processes which ensure accountability. Moreover, decision-making needs to be wholly based on analysis and evidence. Particularly, development proposals which impact on the future of the city and the region with repercussions for every citizen, department and sphere of government cannot be political projects devoid of technical, conceptual and participatory rigour.

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