Entanglement: The Negotiation of Urban Development Imperatives in Durban’s Public–Private Partnerships

Jennifer Houghton

[Paper first received, May 2011; in final form, December 2012]

Abstract

Theorisation of urban development in cities, especially in the global South, often entails consideration of how the imperatives of economic growth and an improved quality of life are addressed. In this paper, the cultural studies notion of ‘entanglement’ is used to present an intensive examination of the development imperatives articulated by actors in two public–private partnerships in Durban, South Africa. The discussion focuses on the ways in which actors discursively enmesh the imperative of post-apartheid redress and the pressure for economic growth and improved urban competitiveness to produce an entangled development agenda. The presentation of these imperatives as ‘entangled’ illustrates complexities inherent in processes of urban development. Consequently, the value of a relational approach, such as that offered by the notion of entanglement, for understanding urban development processes is examined.

1. Introduction

Economic growth and an improved quality of life are commonly theorised as imperatives for development in the contemporary city (Pieterse, 2008; Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones, 2002). Hence, much research on urban development focuses on one or both of these imperatives, or on the competition between them (Pieterse, 2008; Robinson, 2006). At best, cities, especially in the South, are theorised as needing to negotiate between these two development priorities in order to overcome the development dilemma when both imperatives compete in contexts characterised by limited resources and skills (Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones, 2002; Rigg, 2007; Pieterse, 2008). Although these categorisations of development priorities can be a useful starting-point for assessing cities, in a recent examination of transformation in South Africa, Gillian Hart (2010,
p. 77) argues that “ideal type categories run the danger of obscuring as much as they reveal”.

In this paper, the cultural studies notion of ‘entanglement’ (Nuttall, 2009) is used to present an intensive examination of the development imperatives articulated by actors in two public–private partnerships (PPPs) in Durban, South Africa. The discussion focuses on the ways in which actors discursively enmesh the imperative of post apartheid redress and the pressure for economic growth and improved urban competitiveness to produce an entangled development agenda. Furthermore, the characteristics and outcomes of a social construction of entangled development priorities are illustrated through consideration of urban development projects undertaken by the PPPs. Thus, the analysis provides insight into the construction of a relational agenda for urban development by actors at the local scale. This facilitates a shift away from a dualistic consideration of competing urban development priorities and suggests a means for enhancing our understanding of the decision-making processes through which particular forms of development emerge in cities.

2. Entanglement: A Lens through which to Interpret Urban Development Imperatives

Entanglement is a concept that has typically been used to understand the integrated and dynamic nature of social and cultural relationships in which traditional binary thinking fails (Nuttall, 2009). Nuttall has described entanglement as a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication (Nuttall, 2009, p. 1).

Hence, the notion of entanglement entails a shift beyond dualism and concentrates on relational processes of engagement in which the contradictions and oppositions found within binaries can be conceptualised as interlinked, co-constituted and enmeshed (Massey, 2000; Sharp et al., 2000). ‘Entanglement’ invites an interrogation of language, discourses and social interaction as a means of understanding social relationships. Furthermore, it is an idea which signals largely unexplored terrains of mutuality, wrought from a common, though often coercive and confrontational, experience (Nuttall, 2009, p. 11).

Thus, an entangled relationship is one in which the ‘components’, be they social groups, individuals, ideas or discourses, are closely bound and entwined such that they co-exist and are co-constructed, even if this manner of interrelating is resisted (Massey, 2000; Sharp et al., 2000; Nuttall, 2009).

As well as being relational, entanglement is conceptualised as being inherently spatial in nature (Sharp et al., 2000). The spatial character of entanglement draws on recent theorisations of space and place in which places are the physical spaces in which activities occur; the product of networked social relations; and active producers of material and social relations (Sharp et al., 2000). In these theorisations, places incorporate the discourses, beliefs and images of those who operate within them and contribute to their creation, through individual and institutionalised activities and processes (Cresswell,
2004). Accordingly, the practice of entanglement occurs in and through the geographies of “social networks, communication processes and economic relations” as they occur within the contingencies of place (Sharp et al., 2000, p. 27).

Recently, the notion of ‘entanglement’ has been used to expand conceptualisations of race, identity, power and social and organisational networks, and the interrelationships between commodities and culture (Sharp et al., 2000; Goodman, 2008; Nuttall, 2009; Pieck and Moog, 2009). It is proposed here that the concept of entanglement offers an approach to re-examine the categorisation of urban development imperatives. In its metaphorical, real and spatialised imaginary, the notion of entanglement stimulates a shift in interpretation away from a sense of dualism and frequently normative theorisations towards a more complex and nuanced understanding of the interrelationships between the elements which coalesce to produce tangible outcomes in places. The prioritisation of relational interpretations and the review of discourse invited through an application of the concept of entanglement offer a substantive understanding of the social construction of urban development agendas by actors in cities. This understanding leads to new engagements with common categorisations of urban development imperatives.

Before turning to consider the entanglement of imperatives by development actors in Durban, the next section of the paper presents a brief overview of the PPPs examined in this study. Furthermore, the methods employed in this research are outlined.

3. Public–Private Partnerships in Durban, South Africa: Background and Method

Across the globe, traditional discourses and practices of planning and urban development are increasingly viewed as insufficient to meet the competing development priorities which have emerged in cities (Harrison et al., 2008). New development mechanisms, such as public–private partnerships, have thus emerged in cities across the world to produce urban change (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; Weihe, 2006). Typically, PPPs for urban revitalisation serve as processes in which actors with greatly varying development priorities must negotiate their differences and consider the broader urban environment in order to work together effectively to improve city development (Mullin, 2002; Weihe, 2006; McCarthy, 2007). In order to produce an urban development agenda which can be actualised, PPPs rely particularly on the operation of social networks and intensive, continuing communication amongst actors (Mullin, 2002). The engagement and negotiation inherent to PPPs offers a valuable lens through which to explore the entanglement of urban development imperatives.

In South African cities, such as Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, PPPs have played a significant role in reshaping the urban landscape (Rogerson, 2004). Durban, in particular, has a strong history of partnership-driven development as actors within the city have attempted to quickly address development needs and leverage opportunities (Maharaj and Ramballi, 1998). As a port city of approximately 3 million people on the east coast of South Africa and the second-largest economic hub in the country, Durban has all the advantages of functioning as an important economic hub in the Southern African region. However, the city faces the challenges of development associated with socioeconomic inequalities wrought by apartheid, consistently high unemployment and an underskilled labour force (Houghton, 2011). Furthermore, economic growth in the city is strongly linked to port activity, manufacturing and tourism which are typically
impacted by global economic shifts (Freund and Padayachee, 2002).

Following the successful PPPs for flagship development in Durban in the early 1990s and in response to the broader transformation of the South African political economy during the 1990s and 2000s, the Durban Growth Coalition (DGC) and the eThekwini Municipality–Moreland Developments Joint Venture Partnership emerged from 1999 to address development concerns within the city (Freund and Padayachee, 2002; Houghton, 2011). Originally, the DGC was devised as a mechanism through which public- and private-sector actors sought primarily to ‘unblock development’ thereby encouraging economic growth and boosting the city’s port and tourism capabilities (Wilhelm, 2002). The Coalition undertook negotiations for urban development through its formal meetings, economic development summits and through informal, often closed-door negotiations between powerful decision-makers in both the public and private sectors (Houghton, 2011). To date, the partnership has actively facilitated a range of interventions in the city which have ‘fast tracked’ development, particularly where progress had been limited for many years with no foreseeable outcome (Sewsunker, 2004). The large property development projects associated with the DGC include the development of the Suncoast Casino complex on part of the city’s beachfront area; the revitalisation of the Point waterfront and the development of the Wilson’s Wharf complex (Houghton, 2011). According to a recent co-chair of the DGC, since 2003, the Coalition has become progressively less active in project-specific developments but continues to address constraints to economic growth at the city and provincial scales (personal interview, 6 March 2007).

Prompted by the negotiations for urban development being undertaken in the Durban Growth Coalition during the late 1990s, the eThekwini Municipality developed a plan to revitalise the decaying docklands area known as the Durban Point into a waterfront precinct including an aquarium complex, hotels and apartments. As part of this planning, the municipality took a decision to utilise Moreland Developments as a locally embedded, experienced property development company to assist with the project implementation. This decision prompted a series of negotiations regarding the undertaking of three successive flagship projects through which both parties could undertake development in the city which would satisfy a combination of development goals.

In 2001, the formal eThekwini Municipality–Moreland Developments Joint Venture partnership emerged. The Joint Venture operates through a contractual arrangement which facilitates collaboration by the partners on the Durban Point waterfront revitalisation; the development of the Riverhorse Valley Business Estate north of the CBD; and the Bridge City mixed-use development node in the township area of KwaMashu (see Figure 1). A Joint Venture representative committee, including high-ranking municipal officials, the deputy mayor and executives of Moreland Developments, drives and manages the work of the partnership. It is within the closed discussions of this committee and its engagement with planners and urban designers that much of the discursive negotiation of development priorities takes place (personal interviews, 22 November 2006; 24 February 2007).

As of December 2012, only the Bridge City project remains incomplete. The successes of the waterfront and business estate projects continue to be praised by business and city representatives of the PPPs and in local news media (personal interviews, 22 November 2006, 27 February 2007, 6 March 2007, 10 April 2007; West, 2012). These projects will be returned to in the discussion
as they provide evidence of the ways in which an entanglement of development imperatives can be realised in the city.

Although varied in approach and operation, Durban's influential partnerships and their projects offer the potential for gaining new insights into the social construction of the development agenda in South African, and other, cities. In order to gain these insights, a qualitative research methodology was employed in this research. Primary data for the study were collected through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Interview data were supplemented with documentary and newspaper evidence. Twenty-six in-depth, semi-formal personal interviews were conducted during 2006 and 2007 with key informants from the eThekwini Municipality and private-sector partners within the PPPs. Additional actors, such as journalists, academics and development consultants involved in the PPPs or the city’s development arena, both currently and historically, were also interviewed. These respondents formed a purposively selected sample derived initially

Figure 1. Projects undertaken by public–private partnerships. Source: author.
from an interrogation of newspaper articles related to the partnerships and then expanded through the use of a snowballing technique. Although conducted four to five years ago, these key informant interviews relate to on-going urban development interventions in both public–private partnerships in Durban, thus maintaining their relevance to contemporary considerations of urban change and pointing towards a broader debate on the social construction of urban development agendas.

The data collection and interpretation for this study are grounded in social constructivism and have prioritised language as a means through which “social agents generate shared meanings and therefore give meaning to their actions” (Mottier, 2005, p. 5). This study thus relies on interpretations of shared (and sometimes contradictory) language and discourses to generate new understandings of the meanings ascribed to urban development agendas and to the localised discourses of development themselves.

The following sections begin with a description of the urban development imperatives articulated by the role-players interviewed in the study. The discussion then brings to light the ways in which actors in the PPPs construct priorities of economic growth and social upliftment as entangled development imperatives.

4. Urban Development Imperatives Articulated within the Public–Private Partnerships

Representatives of both business and local government in Durban’s PPPs articulate a number of urban development requirements. These can be broadly categorised as contributing towards either an economic growth imperative or an imperative which asserts the need for redress and redistribution in the post-apartheid city in order to improve overall quality of life for urban residents (see Table 1). Hereafter, the imperatives will be referred to as an ‘economic growth’ imperative and as an imperative for ‘redress’ for ease of reference.

Within the range of development needs conceptualised as constituting an economic growth imperative, there is a strong focus on development which will directly strengthen the private sector and improve the overall economic environment in the city. Specifically, representatives of the private sector argued that an economic growth imperative should include the need for economically focused development projects, the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic growth imperative</th>
<th>Redress and redistribution imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Black economic empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth and capacity building of small businesses</td>
<td>Increased service provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted improvement of specific sectors (such as tourism, textiles, vehicle manufacturing)</td>
<td>Improved urban infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of a positive image for the city</td>
<td>Maintenance of services and infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved global competitiveness</td>
<td>Poverty eradication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing the inequalities of apartheid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved employment levels/job creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of crime</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limiting environmental impacts of development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* all interview respondents.
enhancement of the small business sector within the city and government support for critical or struggling economic sectors. All respondents expressed a concern for the improved competitiveness of the city as an arena for profitable investment and economic activity as central to achieving economic growth. Furthermore, a number of senior municipal officials and business representatives believe that economic growth requires an entrepreneurial approach which promotes the creation of a more positive city image, particularly in order to attract foreign investors and tourists.

Respondents also presented development goals which can be categorised as components of an imperative for redress and redistribution needed to address the inequalities within the post-apartheid city. These goals include empowerment of the formerly disadvantaged Black business sector, increased housing provision and an overall effort to eradicate poverty. Furthermore, the need for increased social equality was highlighted through calls for more widespread and efficient provision of basic services and the improvement of urban transport and bulk service delivery infrastructure. On-going maintenance of existing services is also viewed as necessary to prevent urban decay.

Furthermore, three priorities for development can be considered as contributing to both economic growth and redress imperatives. These priorities are the need for higher employment levels within the city; a concern for crime reduction; and the need to limit or mitigate the environmental impacts which can accrue through urban development. Local business and government representatives were concerned that, in each instance, the failure to meet these needs could have a strong negative impact on the overall quality of life in Durban.

The interest in boosterist entrepreneurial development activities related to the service economy, tourism and foreign direct investment are typically representative of an urban development agenda associated with neoliberalism and a concern for progressing up the global urban hierarchy (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Swyngedouw et al., 2002). In addition, the priorities for urban development indicate concern for resolving problems which reduce the quality of life of urban communities in the developing world (Pieterse, 2008). These priorities are thus typical of the categories of development imperatives found in contemporary theorisations of cities. Furthermore, their co-existence is representative of the dilemma facing many cities in which often divergent priorities for urban development must be rapidly addressed to meet the needs of urban populations (Parnell and Robinson, 2006; Pieterse, 2008). The competition between these development imperatives is typically exacerbated in resource-poor and rapidly urbanising contexts and requires that stakeholders in cities urgently accommodate these competing needs (Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones, 2002; Pieterse, 2008).

The next section examines the ways in which these imperatives for urban development are currently negotiated within PPPs in Durban. It is argued that the urban development imperatives of redress and economic growth are entangled.

5. Entanglement: The Interweaving of Priorities for Economic Growth and Post-apartheid Redress

The social construction of development imperatives in Durban’s PPPs can be interpreted as the entanglement of variable and often divergent priorities for development. This entanglement is presented here through an examination of how actors within Durban’s PPPs discursively interweave and enmesh the priorities for
economic growth and post-apartheid redress as they attempt to undertake development which must accommodate and reconcile these imperatives.

The discussion will examine the various discourses used by actors to produce an entanglement of economic growth and redress imperatives. These are concerned with expressions of a ‘need for balance’ and the discursive conflation of redress and economic growth; as well as the expression of economic growth as incorporating the goals of post-apartheid redress and redistribution. Furthermore, evidence of the materialisation of this entanglement in PPP projects is presented.

5.1 Interrelating Imperatives through a ‘Need for Balance’

A dominant expression of the interrelationship of economic growth and redress imperatives is that of ‘a need for balance’. This seeking of balance in urban development by business and government actors highlights the ways in which these development imperatives are relationally constructed such that they become implicated within each other.

When addressing the question of how to meet the development needs of Durban, a number of respondents, representing both the public and private sectors, expressed the need to achieve a balance between development imperatives as critical to the future of the city. For example, the former CEO of a large local paper milling company stated

Talk to me, I talk like a capitalist—we’ve got to spend billions, we’ve got to build new factories … we need a new airport and then you talk to the social community and their needs are often very very modest, they just need better health care, they need … unless you achieve all of those you will achieve none of them, so it’s about a balance (personal interview, 6 March 2007).

In addition, a powerful Black businessman in Durban and the then incoming CEO of the Durban Chamber of Commerce, argued that even though the interests of business and local government ‘are not the same’ there is the need for compromise or negotiation

They [local government] have got to balance out their act as well, while economic growth is important but the welfare is also critical … but the challenge is that both of us have to agree that economic growth is critical and also have to agree that the fundamentals that drive our interests in our respective areas of performance are not the same. We have to try and strike that balance all the time (personal interview, 15 May 2007).

The eThekwini Municipality’s deputy mayor expressed his concern for the ‘seeking of balance’ metaphorically, as a tightrope walk

In a kind of broad context we have to balance the investment in the economy with providing basic services, the social side of society. So you got to build homes for the poor and the homeless people, we’ve got to provide basic services like water, electricity and sanitation, so you take people out of the misery of informal settlement and give them a much more decent and dignified life. On the other hand, in terms of development, it’s about building the economy and investing in the right kinds of projects … So it’s a tough one, walking the tightrope, because whilst you want to grow the economy, create jobs, at the very same time you’ve got to satisfy the needs of communities (personal interview, 6 March 2007).

Further to his invoking of the metaphor of “walking the tightrope”, the deputy mayor
repeatedly talked of undertaking redress-focused and economic growth-focused development activities “at the same time”. He stated that

Investment in the broad development context must be seen as being balanced and taking care of peoples’ needs and at the same time building the economy [and] we have to be globally competitive, but I’m also saying that at the same time the budget will be used in a way we get maximum out of it for the community at large (personal interview, 6 March 2007).

This simultaneous adoption of both imperatives and their conceptualisation as requiring a synchronised implementation process illustrates how the imperatives are discursively constructed as interwoven, such that one imperative cannot be prioritised or addressed independently from the other.

A concern for the interwoven prioritisation of economic and social development was further expressed by a director of the city’s investment promotion association

There is no getting away from the fact that we have a huge social development agenda, huge social development need in Durban. By the same token, we have a huge economic development and business development opportunity and the two are not mutually exclusive (personal interview, 27 February 2007).

Here, the respondent clearly rejects the binary of economic and social development by classifying these two imperatives as being “not mutually exclusive”. By rejecting this binary and, instead, discursively producing a strong interrelationship between the two development agendas, actors within the PPPs are interweaving these imperatives and thereby producing their entanglement (Sharp et al., 2000).

The production of an entanglement of the development imperatives through the notion of balance can be extended to a discourse which conflates redress and economic growth. This conflation is believed to occur in spite of the recognition that there are frictions created by the competition between the two development imperatives (Sharp et al., 2000; Pieterse, 2008). For instance, a senior municipal official, in discussing development in the city, addressed the need to accomplish simultaneously pro-poor and pro-growth development by fusing these imperatives together: “the city is pro-poor to the extent of being income-driven” (personal interview, 6 December 2006). These approaches would not normally be viewed as conflated since the notion of being ‘income-driven’ is typically construed as constitutive of an economic growth approach. In these statements, however, the difference between the approaches is eliminated by the indication that the city’s income-driven approach is a pro-poor approach—i.e. the one is the other and they are conflated. Here, the discursive technique used to meet both priorities simultaneously, is to ‘knot’ them together and thereby, harness them as an entangled collective (Sharp et al., 2000; Nuttall, 2009).

As with the temporal discourse described earlier, the entanglement implies equal prioritisation of development imperatives. Overall, the seeking of balance within urban development is indicative of the recognition by private and public representatives that there is a need to take account of both the growth and redress imperatives for development in Durban. Furthermore, the articulation of the notion of ‘balance’ offers opportunities for the relational interweaving of the imperatives since it requires a shift away from a dualistic understanding of the imperatives. The notion of balance can be varied, incorporating a range from attempting to prioritise development priorities
equally, addressing the different goals in tandem, or simultaneously, or through a discursive construction in which these development imperatives are conflated.

Although discursively produced, the entanglement of development imperatives through the conceptualisation of ‘balance’ is evident within the projects undertaken by the PPPs. Partnership-related projects have been driven by actors with ‘balance’ in mind and efforts have been made to incorporate redress into projects prioritising economic growth. For example, the third project of the Joint Venture, Bridge City, was agreed upon as it furthered the addressing of the economic growth and redress agendas of both parties through the unlocking of a further piece of the Moreland Developments landholdings and providing a development node at a critical site to redress the marginalisation of communities within the city.

The mixed-use development was therefore designed with employment strategies and spatial planning that aimed to address the lack of public space and high unemployment characteristics of communities adjacent to the site in tandem with the more purely profit-driven goals for the development of a commercial zone (Iyer Rothaug and Vines Mikula, 2006; personal interview, 17 February 2007). An eThekwini Municipality official highlighted the sincere intent to create jobs by noting the formulation of a register of local small businesses and individual labourers from communities adjacent to the project (personal interview, 19 February 2007). This register facilitates the matching of project employment requirements with locally available skills. As the project has been implemented, these goals have been evident in the creation of safe and secure public spaces, easily accessible public health and transport services as well as the creation of employment opportunities (African Renaissance Trust, 2012). The project thus works towards balancing economic growth with the socioeconomic upliftment of communities in the marginalised former townships of Phoenix and KwaMashu.

Beyond the construction of an entanglement through a sense of balance, interpretation of the interview data shows that the entanglement of the imperatives of economic growth and redress is produced through discourses which draw the need for redress into concerns for growth. These discourses rely on concepts such as competitiveness and ‘trickle-down’ to interrelate the development imperatives.

5.2 Conceptualising the Achievement of Redress through the Pursuit of an Economic Growth imperative

Central to the negotiation of urban development imperatives is their entanglement through the interweaving of the imperative of redress within a more dominant economic growth imperative. This form of entanglement challenges the notion of competition between the two development imperatives.

Although strongly articulated as a development imperative for Durban by both government and business representatives, the imperative for economic growth is not viewed as an isolated imperative. Respondents express a belief that the benefits of economic growth can be used to address socioeconomic inequality within Durban and South Africa. The dominance of economic growth in the articulation of urban development goals is exemplified by a representative of the private sector who stated that

A country with no money, with social problems like we have, is a recipe for a real disaster; the only way out of this mess is to keep the economic growth going (personal interview, 4 April 2007).
The inclusion of redress in economic growth is evident in the kinds of changes suggested by interviewees as examples of ways to achieve economic growth. Representatives of the private sector argued that the achievement of economic growth is best enacted through increased growth rates, increased employment and improved equality within the economic arena. Rapidly increasing economic growth rates which exceed existing goals for growth are explicitly highlighted by three powerful private-sector actors in the PPPs as critical to producing overall transformation within the city. Furthermore, providing employment, often cited as a social goal, is prioritised by business and government as an aspect of economic growth. Aspects of transformation within the economy also contribute to conceptualisations of economic growth, which enmesh the imperatives of economic growth and redress. For example, measures to advance the contribution of Black businesses in the mainstream economy and, consequently, to help to address overall employment equity are explicitly highlighted as vital to the process of economic growth by government and business representatives.

Respondents from both the public and private sectors further argued that there is a need to bring smaller businesses into the development arena and for the building of skills in small businesses and in sectors where skills are in short supply. In addition, a representative of both Black business and the Durban Chamber of Commerce argued that there is a need for greater focus on redress and empowerment within the business sector since past inequalities in the economy have created a deeply unequal business environment (personal interview, 15 May 2007). These proposed measures to improve economic growth highlight the ways in which a concern for redress is woven into an economic growth agenda, thus facilitating the co-existence and enmeshing of these development priorities. This interrelationship of the imperatives can be considered an example of the ‘foldedness’ of an entangled relationship in which each part becomes implicated in the other and cannot be fully understood outside their mutual involvement (Sanders, 2002; Nuttall, 2009).

Furthermore, discourses used to assert the need for urban competitiveness as a means of achieving economic development within the city provide evidence of the entanglement of growth and redress imperatives. Both the municipality and the private sector believe that the city should be increasingly competitive in the global economy and must therefore undertake development which addresses this concern. The need for improved competitiveness was seen as unavoidable even by those city officials, such as the city manager, who felt that their portfolios focused primarily on development for redress and redistribution (personal interview, 20 February 2007). From the municipal perspective, the deputy mayor argued that

In terms of the investment destination … we are seeking investments that can go to Sydney, San Francisco, London or Ireland so, and, of course, to the emerging economies of Brazil and India and China, so we’ve got to really be geared up to take on the competition (personal interview, 6 March 2007).

Representatives of powerful capital in the Joint Venture partnership also supported competitiveness as a means of growth. For example, a property developer working on the Joint Venture partnership argued

I think we need development … making ourselves more competitive, building our economies is essential for South Africa. The city has to be Durban PTY Ltd and it has to be able to compete (personal interview, 22 November 2006).
The enmeshing of redress and growth imperatives is also evident in the rationale for increased urban competitiveness asserted by PPP representatives. In a manner which is typical of development policies in many cities (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; McCarthy, 2007), six interview respondents integral to the work of the PPPs link economic development to social development goals by arguing that the benefits of economic growth and increased urban competitiveness will ultimately spread, or ‘trickle down’, to urban residents and thereby facilitate the meeting of social development priorities. This would ultimately improve their quality of life and reduce inequalities. The use of a discourse of ‘trickle-down’ is apparent in the following example of motivations for economic development provided by a senior municipal official:

Get more private-sector investment because the more economic development and the more business expansion that we get, the more money we as a city earn in rates and services revenues, which we can then apply to social development needs. So the two are not mutually exclusive ... I'm advocating that ... government investment in the grey areas and the clear economic development areas will pay larger and more immediate dividends as opposed to making all the investments in social development areas because the economic investments would pay financial dividends ad infinitum and would create annuity-style revenue streams for the city to then spend more and more and more in the social development areas (personal interview, 27 February 2007).

This argument stems from the conviction that economic growth in the city will create the resources which can be reinvested in socially focused development, such as community development projects implemented with municipal income derived from the partnership activities (Bond, 2005; Harvey, 2005; McCarthy, 2007). Thus, in many instances, a discourse of ‘trickle-down’ is used implicitly to enmesh a concern for redress within the arguments for urban competitiveness. Even as economic growth and competitiveness are viewed as vital aspects of urban development, they are argued as being a foundational step towards redress and can thereby be viewed as entangled with social goals.

Even as interview respondents supported a discourse of urban competitiveness through their argument for a trickle-down of development benefits (Swyngedouw, 2000), in many cases actors placed little emphasis on questioning whether trickle-down actually achieves what it promises but instead affirmed their belief in the spread of wealth from a stronger urban economy into the social realm of the city. Where scepticism or uncertainty of the positive effects of trickle-down were expressed, by a handful of municipal officials, there followed a sense of the pre-eminence of these growth processes and reliance on trickle-down mechanisms since they were seen to be so strongly advocated by important actors in the PPPs and within the local municipality. Thus the competitiveness discourse and its associated metaphors dominate and produce an understanding of the interrelatedness of redress and economic development in which the redress imperative is constructed as an outcome of economic growth.

Thus, the articulation of these imperatives by respondents does not simply occur as the listing or categorisation of types of development goals into either economic growth or pro-poor goals. Instead, actors working together to implement urban development through the mechanism of PPPs are seen to construct an urban development agenda which accommodates elements from the ‘competing’ imperatives in the transformation of the city. As already evidenced, this
negotiation of the development goals occurs through the discursive conceptualisation of the imperatives as enmeshed and mutually constitutive—as entangled.

The next section elaborates on some of the central features of this entangled relationship. Furthermore, the projects undertaken by the PPPs are considered in order to highlight the ways in which the incorporation of a redress imperative within the economic growth imperative can be realised within the city.

5.3 The Nature of the Entanglement of Development Imperatives

As already argued, urban development imperatives are being socially constructed such that an understanding of their interrelationship is shifted beyond that of a dualism to one in which they are interlaced and, thereby, entangled. Entanglement does not, however, imply a simple or stable relationship (Sharp et al., 2000; Nuttall, 2009). This section highlights some overarching qualities of the entanglement of development imperatives and their outcomes in PPP flagship projects.

Sharp et al. (2000) argue that, as the ‘threads’ in an entanglement overlap and interconnect, they become, at least partly, co-constitutive. However, even as they come to bear traces of each other, the threads of an entanglement retain their individual identity. These traits of entanglement are evident within that produced by actors in Durban’s PPPs as the imperatives of redress and of economic growth remain clearly identifiable within the partnerships’ development agenda and their associated discourses. For instance, even in considerations of economic growth, business and government respondents are acutely aware of the need to address the inequalities created by apartheid and all public-sector respondents give precedence to redress, redistribution and transformation as a development agenda.

However, despite being identifiable in their own right, the character of the development imperatives is shifted through their entanglement. This is most evident as the imperative of post-apartheid redress and redistribution is drawn into conceptualisations of what constitutes economic growth. Furthermore, this qualitative shift in the economic growth imperative is evident in the way that actors argued for economic growth as the central means to overcome the problems associated with poor quality of life and multifaceted inequality. In this way, the flagship projects undertaken by the PPPs, which are typically considered boosterist in nature (Swyngedouw et al., 2002; McCarthy, 2007) come to incorporate practices of redress such as Black economic empowerment, skills development and the potential allocation of profits earned by the municipal partner to social development.

Entanglement does not mean that the imperatives have equal standing within the PPPs’ urban development agenda. Economic development often remains privileged within the entanglement of imperatives. This is apparent in the ways in which an imperative of redress is typically drawn into the implementation of an economic growth agenda rather than a concern for growth being interwoven into development which privileges redress and redistribution. Thus the urban development discourses used by actors much more strongly advance economic growth than redress, such that nowhere in the data do actors argue that, if activities for redress are undertaken, economic growth will follow. Instead, the use of discourses of economic development, competitiveness and trickle-down highlight an underlying belief in the idea that boosterist activities facilitate the achievement of redress goals.
The integration of redress and economic growth and the predominant reliance on economic growth to create change in the city are evident within the suite of projects undertaken by Durban’s PPPs. The revitalisation of the Point and the Riverhorse Valley development are strongly constituted by a drive for improved urban competitiveness, economic development and growth within the city and have a limited commitment to the imperative for redress and redistribution. These projects can thus be interpreted as boosterist developments in which economic growth predominates. However, their overtly boosterist characteristics are tempered by their enmeshing with an imperative of redress through improved integration of the urban fabric, job creation and the mandated use of affirmative action during the implementation phase.

As highlighted earlier, the Bridge City development is characterised by the entanglement of redress and economic growth imperatives. Upon completion of the project, the mixed-use commercial and public service facilities in the development will serve historically marginalised townships, as well as providing linkages between urban spaces and improving their connectivity to the rest of the city. Thus, more directly than occurs in the Riverhorse Valley and Point revitalisation projects, the imperative of redress drives a stronger inclusion of activities which accomplish the redress of apartheid inequalities. However, seed money for Bridge City amounting to US$3 million was supplied from a portion of the municipal profits generated through land sales in Riverhorse Valley. The dispersal of funds from Riverhorse Valley to Bridge City within the PPP indicates how a more strongly boosterist, profit-driven development can nevertheless come to play an important supportive role in projects which include a significant component of social upliftment and transformation. Thus, the suite of projects undertaken by the PPPs reflect the concern for balance, the interweaving of development imperatives and the need for negotiation of these imperatives both within and across projects undertaken by the public–private partnership.

It should be noted, however, that, because the economic growth imperative dominates, an entangled development approach does not serve the agendas of either the public or private sectors or any particular group within these sectors in a straightforward way. This entanglement is thus accompanied by a friction between development priorities and the consequent discomfort associated with the compromises that must be sought in working with other discourses, along with the concomitant need for actors to alter their opinion or position. This is evident in the shifting prioritisation of imperatives across sectors and within the responses of individuals to the development arena of the city.

A powerful property developer who was centrally involved in the establishment of the eThekwini Municipality–Moreland Development Joint Venture highlighted the friction arising through engagements between different sectors and their agendas:

There’s a natural conflict between private sector and government. That’s just the nature of the beast. And the only time they work together is when they need each other. Private sector is full of partnerships of comfort because sometimes you have to partner with someone else even if you hate his guts, because it makes your business look better, so you do that strategically. But it’s uncomfortable for government to do that because they don’t like [the] private sector … So it’s the uncomfortable bed-fellow syndrome … you just have to make peace and understand you’ve got to give something to get something (personal interview, 4 April 2007).

The entanglement of Durban’s development imperatives is born of the necessity of
transforming a complex urban landscape and enacting this transformation through an approach to development which simultaneously accommodates the need for economic growth and improved quality of life. However, given evidence of discomfort, the underlying motivations for the discursive construction of an entangled agenda by PPP actors are worth considering. On a pragmatic level, developers draw a language of redress into their discourses, thus facilitating the smoother progress of their major economic developments. In the South African urban and national context which demands transformation, whether actors truly believe in the importance of incorporating elements of redress into their development projects or whether these entanglements are derived from a ‘necessary’ whitewashing of their capitalist interests with social justice discourses, is debatable. Furthermore, the interlinking of these imperatives legitimises these flagship projects through the inclusion of redress- and transformation-focused designs, facilities or implementation processes such that government officials will be more likely to accept and promote them.

Because of the continuing distinctiveness of the development imperatives and the inherent discomfort experienced through their entanglement, the inter-relationship of these imperatives is continually negotiated by individuals and within the partnerships. This is evident in the observations made by an urban development consultant involved in the Durban Growth Coalition.

In subtle ways, I think, you’ve had a set of tacit agreements emerge about priorities ... They are always under negotiation and renegotiation and so on and so forth (personal interview, 30 October 2006).

Here, entanglement is usually an unspoken agreement, born of a mutual acknowledgement that change needs to happen, and open to the possibilities of renegotiation and reformulation of the interrelationships between the imperatives.

Given the potential for renegotiation and change, entanglement does not imply a singular form of interrelating but a multiplicity of forms which construct a richly and variably textured interconnection of urban development imperatives (Sharp et al., 2000; Nuttall, 2009). Which strands or approaches dominate within the entanglement are not likely to be static and thus the form of the overall development approach is likely to shift over time, producing moments in which one or another of the elements (appear to) dominate (Sharp et al., 2000). Potentially, the threads can be ‘knotted’ or woven differently such that another version of the entanglement will emerge in different conditions to shift the agenda of partnerships and their urban development processes (Nuttall, 2009).

In 2012, with most of the PPP projects complete, in a context of recent national legislation which regulates how the public and private sectors might work together and with new municipal leadership in Durban strongly focused on economic competitiveness, efficiency and human capital development (Sithole, 2012), it seems inevitable that the ways in which redress and economic growth imperatives were enmeshed within Durban’s influential PPPs in the early post-democracy era will change, potentially through the strengthening of urban competitiveness as a predominant strand of the economic growth imperative. These shifts will become evident through upcoming strategic planning for Durban which will involve both public- and private-sector actors (Sithole, 2012). However, within the prospects for shifting entanglements, the fact remains that these imperatives are interwoven, with implications for the ways in which urban development occurs.
6. Conclusion

As this research shows, urban development imperatives can be socially constructed as an entanglement. This entanglement is discursively produced in a variety of ways by actors within Durban’s PPPs who are engaged in addressing competing development needs within the city. Within these PPPs, the development imperatives, although they remain visible in their own right, become interwoven and are mutually constituted by their entanglement such that they are qualitatively shifted from what they would be individually. The conceptualisation of these urban development imperatives as entangled is thus ontologically different from a dualistic approach which views the economic growth and post-apartheid redress imperatives as types of development which are competing, fixed and binary. Instead, the relational approach adopted here produces a characterisation of these imperatives in which their boundaries are unfixed and their forms are continuously being shaped by their relationship with alternative forms of development, which themselves are dynamic and porous.

Understanding the urban development agenda through the notion of entanglement reveals nuances, instability and discomfort in the way actors in cities construct and negotiate priorities for urban development. What is evident in Durban is not a city wholeheartedly adopting an external discourse and practice of development, or fending it off, but a wrestling, juggling and interweaving of ideas from which locally specific development practice can emerge. In bringing to the fore some of the intricacies which exist in a multifaceted urban development process, this analysis offers a relational conceptualisation of urban development processes which is useful for furthering an understanding of the way in which decisions to undertake particular kinds of development might be reached or why particular kinds of project persist or fail to materialise in cities. This is likely to be especially valuable in researching cities in the developing world where creative urban policy-making processes are less well theorised (Robinson, 2006).

Beyond the arguments presented here, it is envisaged that the value of an entanglements-based analysis for understanding development processes in cities can be extended through deeper engagements with the socio-political processes and contexts in and through which a relational urban development agenda is constructed. Here, the embeddedness of the discursive production of an entangled agenda within contexts characterised by particular policies, political leadership and elite networks, for instance, could be more deeply explored in a particular urban context. This would shed further light on the complex processes through which localised agendas for urban development are produced.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dianne Scott, Gustav Visser, Richard Ballard and the anonymous referees for their valuable comments at various stages of this research.

Funding

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst (DAAD).

Note

1. In this instance, ‘income-driven’ is used to describe activities which are income-generating for the municipality.

References


