

Mobility and the city improvement district: Frictions in the human-capital mobile assemblage

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Abstract

In this paper, we interrogate the role of the city improvement district (CID) in the intervention and management of mobility within the context of the South African city and the case study of the Groote Schuur Community Improvement District (GSCID), a public-private urban governance scheme situated in Cape Town's middle income southern suburbs. Using the theoretical lens of bodily-scale mobility, we investigate the CID's activation and management. This is useful, as we will demonstrate, because it is through the mobility and immobility at the scale of the body, where the CID's mandate is operationalised and it is through the control of mobility that the CID's mission, discourses and activities are linked. This work demonstrates that CIDs, as elite-driven urban renewal initiatives closely aligned with capital interests, employ exclusionary spatial practices that have the potential to shape the twenty-first century urban experience in significant ways. We conclude by theorising the co-constitutive nature of human mobilities and capital as the 'human-capital mobile assemblage' and by arguing that the CID occupies an ambivalent place in the contemporary city.

State societies are defined by apparatuses of capture ... (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 435)

Introduction

As a contemporary strategy of urban governance, the city improvement district (CID), also known as the 'community improvement district' established itself as a ubiquitous urban device in the late twentieth century. Defined as 'a form of business and landowners' organisation at a neighbourhood level, dealing with the provision of additional services in order to improve the commercial and residential areas in decline' (Didier, Peyroux, and Morange 2012), CIDs are proliferating locally and globally as urban interventions in the messy and increasingly competitive network of neighbourhoods in cities around the world. With their primary goals of security, cleansing and promotion, CIDs serve an internal constituency of property owners, residents and a particular class of visitor. Through the additional levy of property taxes, CIDs provide top-up service provision, most visibly through increased private policing and cleansing that target the chaotic uncertainties of the modern city. While recent literature critical of the CID focuses on their neoliberal character and/or their exclusionary tendencies (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Didier, Peyroux, and Morange 2012),

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