

## *Sidelining Developmental Goals? Re-imagining Port Elizabeth for the 2010 Soccer World Cup*

*Gary Baines, Rhodes University*

When I lived in Port Elizabeth in the 1980s, jokes about the 'Ghost on the Coast' abounded. Despondency about the city's prospects was the dominant mood. The economic slump experienced by Port Elizabeth during the 1980s was due in part to tightening economic sanctions on the apartheid regime, and in part to the city's dependence on the fortunes of the motor industry. The PE-Uitenhage metropole's loss of primacy as a motor assembly-cum-manufacturing centre was prompted by General Motors's and Ford's disinvestment from South Africa. The militancy of the labour unions, the government's inadequate incentives and the absence of secondary industries such as steel production in the region were further constraints on the development of the sector. However, GM's selling off of its Struandale plant to Delta, a corporation of local investors/entrepreneurs, and Volkswagen's decision to remain in the country probably prevented the collapse of the motor vehicle manufacturing sector in the metropole. The lights of the city were dimmed but not switched off.

With the advent of a democratic dispensation the city of Port Elizabeth has reinvented itself. It has appropriated the name of Nelson Mandela although it has no association with South Africa's greatest icon. Greater Port Elizabeth, Despatch and Uitenhage collectively became known as Nelson Mandela Metropole (NMM) and the municipality as the NMMM. Algoa Bay has become known as Mandela (or Madiba) Bay. The recently-merged tertiary institutions in the area have adopted the name of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). And the project to erect a freedom statue in the harbour owes much to the inspiration of Mandela. Whilst the chosen design does not bear a resemblance to the iconic figure, there can be no doubt that the statue is at some level a tribute to Mandela's role as the embodiment of South Africa's peaceful political transition.

Port Elizabeth has also staged something of an economic turnaround and business confidence has picked up considerably. There are tangible signs of the buoyancy of the local economy: GM has returned to the city and, together with Volkswagen, have expanded their operations in response to increasing local consumer demand and export-oriented drives; subsidiary motor vehicle industries (such as the production of catalytic converters and tyres) have expanded; and the labour force has become more stable. More intangibly, enormous hopes are being pinned on the multiplier effect of the multi-billion rand Coega IDZ. Indeed, the latter scheme has been fêted as long-awaited 'kickstart' to grow the metropole's economy. (Perhaps the analogy of the motor bike is unsuitable for Port Elizabeth given its lengthy association with the motor industry and an electrical starter or ignition might be more appropriate.) However, Coega is no panacea and the over-reliance on the new IDZ/Ngqura harbour for economic development is indicative of Port Elizabeth's 'Cinderella complex' by which the city desires to be "saved" as opposed to forging its own path.<sup>1</sup>

Until recently, neither Port Elizabeth nor Coega had been all that successful in attracting investment.<sup>2</sup> Coupled with a shortage of skills (in both the labour force and management) and unacceptably high rates of unemployment (especially in the northern areas), the city's marketing agencies have been hard pressed to sustain investor confidence. The Mandela Bay Development Agency which is tasked with revitalising the city centre by, among other things, attracting property developers, has not been able to give the CBD the makeover it sorely needs.<sup>3</sup> Nor has there been any

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Haines cited in 'IT incubation a key to SA's economic future', *The Herald*, April 21, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> The recent announcement of a Russian-funded ferrochrome smelter and Singapore-based chlorine manufacturer might prove the catalyst that the Coega IDZ needs to attract an anchor tenant and other investors. It still awaits news of whether Alcan is committed to the establishment of an aluminium smelter, See *Sunday Times*, 3 Sept. 2006 ("Coega gets promise of tenants - at last"); *Sunday Times*, 10 Sept. 2006 ('Alcan pushed to decide on Coega').

<sup>3</sup> *The Herald*, 2 August 2007 ('Improved mindset in "not so friendly" PE will bring investors to our beautiful city').

concrete steps taken to rid the CBD of its unsightly flyovers and connect it to the harbour. Nor has there been much progress in respect of other projects such as the Mandela Bay Leisure Park.

Some of these major developmental projects fall within the scope of Port Elizabeth's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) known as Vision 2020 that "collectively, will change the face of Nelson Mandela Bay physically, economically and socially". According to the blurb on the NMB's website, Vision 2020 was "[t]he key to our future as a bold plan to drive economic growth and investment, and create the jobs that allow the poor to escape from the cycle of poverty".<sup>4</sup> The first draft of this document appeared in 2003 and acknowledged the NMMMs commitment to erect a new stadium if South Africa won the 2010 World Cup Soccer bid. After the announcement was made that the country would indeed host the tournament, planning for the event was superimposed upon rather than fully integrated with the IDP's developmental goals. Because much of the budget for the 2010 World Cup would be sourced from central government rather than from the NMMM's own coffers, it was (mistakenly) reckoned that staging the event would provide a windfall to the local treasury. This injection of capital or "new money" would provide further impetus to infrastructural development necessary for hosting the world's biggest sporting spectacle. This, in turn, occasioned the anticipation of considerable economic spin-offs. But common sense and historical precedents suggest that the 'trickle down' effect [sic] is confined to a small proportion of the populace and that the staging of major sports events is not a quick-fix solution to the city's - let alone the region's - problems of poverty and inequality.

Port Elizabeth has been awarded the right to host qualifying round games for FIFA's 2010 World Cup Soccer. Indeed, the CEO of the local organising committee, Danny Jordaan, who happens to have his roots in the Eastern Cape, has raised hopes that Port Elizabeth might stage a quarter-final

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.mandelametro.gov.za/frameset\\_business.aspx](http://www.mandelametro.gov.za/frameset_business.aspx) (accessed 14 Sept. 2006).

match.<sup>5</sup> The national treasury and NMMM have earmarked funds with which to build a new all-purpose stadium in North End to provide a suitable venue for these fixtures. And so Port Elizabeth will seek to sell itself to local and overseas soccer fans and other sports spectators as a 'sporting city'. Will the NMMM be vindicated in its claim that the hosting of World Cup games will change prevailing perceptions of Port Elizabeth as the city that is always bypassed when it comes to the hosting of high profile sports (and cultural/musical) events in the future?<sup>6</sup> Will the successful staging of World Cup fixtures provide entrepreneurs with the opportunity to counter the city's Cinderella image and promote the city as a site both suitable for and capable of holding its own with other major centres?

In spite of having reasonable sporting facilities and a sports academy, Port Elizabeth presently has no claim to be a centre of South Africa's major sporting codes - namely, soccer, rugby and cricket. It has only recently regained the right to provide a home to the Warriors in the 2007/8 season (having lost out to East London as the headquarters of Eastern Province cricket in the previous season), and struggling to convince the South African Rugby Board (SARB) that the region's franchise, the Southern Spears, deserves a berth in the Super 14 competition, let alone the Currie Cup. A recent ruling by the Cape Supreme Court that compelled the SARB to admit the Southern Spears to the Super 14 will not necessarily guarantee the resurgence of rugby in the region. But most significantly, the city does *not* have a team in South Africa's premier soccer league. And there is no guarantee that the combined efforts by sporting bodies, local authorities and sponsors will ensure that there is a team in the league by 2010. It is only as the country's 'water sports capital' that Port Elizabeth has no real competition. The prevailing westerly winds allow it to market itself as the 'windy city' and make the bay ideal for activities such as wind surfing. It has so much invested in this moniker that when a recent survey revealed that

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<sup>5</sup> *The Herald*, 29 August 2006 ('PE may get up to eight 2010 matches').

<sup>6</sup> Journalist Jimmy Matyu refers to the city's 'bypass syndrome'. See his column in *The Herald* titled 'About Town' of 12 July 2006 ("City suffers from show bypass syndrome").

Port Elizabeth no longer enjoyed the dubious honour of being the windiest spot in the country, this loss of status was lamented by the city's marketing agencies. So Port Elizabeth currently enjoys little more than second-league status as a sports centre.

However, sports people and/or tourists (and their entourages) are not necessarily single-mindedly committed to participating in and/or watching the event(s) which brings them to their destination in the first place. Port Elizabeth should be able to capitalise to some extent on its assets in marketing the city to such tourists. Her greatest assets are probably its situation in Algoa or Mandela Bay, its size, its climate, and its human resources. The people of Port Elizabeth are known for their hospitality and its reputation as the 'Friendly City' provides a marketing stratagem. The weather is usually mild and temperate (save for occasional floods). The coastline has numerous beaches that are safe for swimming and there are ample and relatively inexpensive accommodation/resorts. Shopping is on a par with larger South African cities but without the hassle of major traffic congestion. But cultural and artistic activities are limited. Night life in the city is fairly limited and dull and/or lacking in variety of entertainment. The largest recent development has been the Boardwalk complex which houses the casino. But with the prospect of the relocation of the petrol tank farm and manganese ore dumps from the harbour to Coega (situated some 30 km from the CBD) in the offing, there is the possibility of turning the harbour into a tourist attraction. It is envisaged that the construction of the aforementioned Statue of Freedom project spearheaded by the NMMM and Madiba Bay Development Agency will provide the necessary catalyst for the development of the waterfront. The Oceanarium might not appeal to environmentalists but the expansion of the Addo Elephant Park and the introduction of other species of game is an attempt to cater for the growing eco-tourist sector. The heritage and cultural tourism sector has also been catered for with the development of the South End and Red Location Museums. All in all, the greater Port Elizabeth region offers much to the visitor. But the city's inaccessibility due to the lack of an international

airport has not helped in making Port Elizabeth a first choice tourist destination.

Despite the constant shifting of deadlines to meet FIFA's schedule for World Cup preparations,<sup>7</sup> Port Elizabeth appears to be ahead of its (revised) schedule. This is probably due to the outsourcing of various projects under the overall supervision of the municipality's sport, recreation and culture business unit manager, Mbulelo Gidane. But Gidane's untimely resignation is likely to set the process back.<sup>8</sup> When the Eastern Cape Province's Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts & Culture convened a summit over the weekend of 4-5 August 2006, the (national) Sport Minister, Makhenkesi Stofile, pronounced that "Nelson Mandela Bay was one step ahead of other host cities for the 2010 World Cup".<sup>9</sup> The self congratulation was occasioned by the apparent progress made to "consolidate the efforts of the government towards the preparations for the 2010 Soccer World Cup in the province". This statement meshed with the advertisement for the summit that expressed the intention of co-ordinating the efforts of all tiers of government in providing "a good foundation upon which a solid 2010 comprehensive structure shall stand".<sup>10</sup> The 50 000 seater-stadium designed by the German architectural company CMP to be constructed at North End was projected to cost R787-million<sup>11</sup> and to be completed by December 2008. It was reckoned that the stadium would run at a profit for its first four years (2009-2012) but thereafter the summit offered no projections. It was claimed that cost estimates for the upgrading of transport routes and

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<sup>7</sup> *The Herald*, 11 September 2007 ('Countdown to new venue - a saga of shifting deadlines').

<sup>8</sup> Gidane resigned on 17 July 2006, a week after accompanying a regional delegation to Germany.

<sup>9</sup> *The Herald*, 7 August 2006, p. 1 ('Bay outruns other cities in preparation for 2010'). This spirit of self-congratulation was equally evident when Port Elizabeth's 'own son', Danny Jordaan, was acclaimed for having won the 2010 nomination bid.

<sup>10</sup> *The Herald*, 3 August 2007.

<sup>11</sup> This estimate has since been revised to R1,1 billion. See *The Herald*, 11 Sept. 2006 ('Bay stadium estimated to cost R1,1 bn').

signage in the province had already been undertaken.<sup>12</sup> The overriding impression gleaned from press reports of the summit is that meeting key FIFA deadlines was all important; that little or no attention was paid to whether such targets coincided with the province and/or city's developmental plans; that priority was to be accorded to the convenience, comfort and security of visiting soccer fans rather than the needs of the local populace. In short, there was no concern that legacy of the World Cup might leave Port Elizabeth (and the province) with an unserviceable debt and an under-utilised stadium.

Although I, like many Nelson Mandela Bay residents,<sup>13</sup> have confidence that the city will have the stadium ready in time for the 2010 World Cup, I do have some reservations about the prioritisation of the project. These reservations can be expressed in the form of questions such as: Has Port Elizabeth embraced the hosting of World Cup games for the right reasons? Has it done so in order to re-image itself as "the next big city" or "a world class city"? Or has it seized the opportunity to address the needs of its ratepayers? Most importantly, will the hosting of World Cup soccer games further the city's integrated developmental plan (IDP) known as Vision 2020? The staging of matches in the city promises long-term benefits such as transport and infrastructural development, as well as short-term job creation. But are long-term developmental goals likely to be sidelined by the public spectacle of staging a once-off event for a few? Do such big events divert capacity and capital from realizing less conspicuous and 'sexy' tasks such as providing services to all the city's ratepayers. Specifically, is the NMMM likely to meet its commitment to the provision of free basic services to all indigent households by 30 June 2010?<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *The Herald*, 7 August 2006, p. 4 (2010 World Cup Stadium: Latest on Development Plans').

<sup>13</sup> *The Herald*, 11 Sep. 2006 ('Bay's residents confident 2010 stadium will be ready').

<sup>14</sup> See Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, *Towards 2020* (1st edition, 2003), p. 48.

South Africa will undoubtedly derive some benefits from hosting the 2010 World Cup. But officials and politicians must be wary of creating unrealistic expectations about its long-term economic benefits or otherwise government will find itself facing an unwanted legacy: managing disillusionment and even anger. The World Cup might also prove to be a mixed blessing or even counter-productive if visiting officials or fans become victims of violent crime. But my chief concern is that the World Cup might hamstring the efforts of local authorities such as the NMMM to achieve their developmental goals. This is not simply another Afropessimistic refrain. Nor is it scepticism for its own sake. Rather it is a genuine expression of concern that situates itself within the discourse of social justice.