Trading Places

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Foreword

Trading Places is an inspired culmination of nearly a decade of careful research and policy advocacy by the Urban Land Markets Programme Southern African (Urban LandMark). The book is succinct and persuasive in the presentation of the approach developed by Urban LandMark, but it has also retained the sense of depth and complexity that characterises the work of the programme.

Urban LandMark has already had a significant impact on policy development and scholarly work in southern Africa, influencing, for example, South Africa’s National Development Plan, and new policy initiatives within metropolitan municipalities, including the City of Johannesburg. However, the message and influence of Urban LandMark must be spread even more widely, within and beyond southern Africa. Hopefully, this book will be an effective instrument of propagation.

Urban LandMark is boldly pro-poor in its approach and intentions. In its analysis and recommendations Trading Places offers a way out of a current development impasse. It mediates across, and offers a meaningful alternative to free-market deregulation, romanticised notions of self-help by the urban poor, and state-driven attempts to resolve inequity purely through formal planning and regulative processes. It accepts the prevalence of transaction-based activities in urban life (‘the market’), and acknowledges the role of the state in mediating access to the land, but it does so without naivety. It reveals, for example, how state interventions often flounder against byzantine complexity of cities and how the functioning of land markets frequently marginalises the poor. Most importantly, it shows how conventional market or state perspectives ignore the extent to which the urban poor transact and create markets within the city.
Trading Places provides an analytical perspective that is rigorously informed by detailed empirical work, and offers policy advice that is pragmatically grounded in the realities of governance and everyday urban life. Trading Places provides no quick fix, but rather a perspective that allows us to ‘cope with complexity’, and a set of proposals to progressively re-shape the relationship between the market, the state and the urban poor. It requires us to be ‘more nuanced, more incremental, more patient’, but offers us the hope that this approach will lead to land markets that will work more equitably, and to state interventions that will be more responsive to the lives and needs of the urban poor.

Trading Places provokes us to think differently, but also leaves us with a new sense of optimism. I congratulate Urban LandMark for this publication, and for the many other contributions it has made over the past seven years. May its influence expand, and may this lead to real change in the lives of those presently living in poverty in cities across Africa.

Philip Harrison

1. Prof. Philip Harrison is the South African Research Chair in Development Planning and Modelling at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He also serves on South Africa’s National Planning Commission. He holds a doctoral degree from the University of KwaZulu–Natal (Durban) and a masters degree in urban planning from the same institution. He is a registered member of the South African Council of Planners (SACPLAN) and the South African Planning Institute (SAPI).