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## **DECOLONIAL THINKING AND PRACTICE, TOWARDS SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**By Y. Luckan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper explores the effects of colonial systems on spatial inclusivity in Global South communities, with a focus on the South African built environment. The aim of the study is to critically review predominant modes of curricula, pedagogy, and practice, to identify possibilities for inclusive approaches towards transformative spatial thinking and practice. The main question guiding the study is, how can an alternative system facilitate inclusion in the spatial transformation of historically marginalised communities? Decoloniality, socio-economic emancipation and pedagogic inclusion define the theoretical framework of the paper. This qualitative study is supported by a phenomenological paradigm. The research methods include a literature review, precedent study, and refers to the South African context as a case study. It must be noted that the paper is written in a decolonial style that draws on the author's lived experiences in a marginalised South African community. The study proposed an alternate dispensation in the form of a conceptual framework for spatial transformation defined by transformed modes of built environment, thinking and practice facilitated through the formation of an inclusive, critical learning community.

**KEY WORDS** Built Environment, Critical Learning Community, Design Thinking, Decoloniality, Socio-economic Emancipation, Spatial Transformation

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## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

Post-colonial / post-apartheid societies seem unable to progressively break out of the systemic shackles of colonialism, leaving them in a state of constant vulnerability, exploitation, and dependency. In South Africa, various transformative frameworks in higher education and the built environment have been promulgated, during the post-apartheid / democratic dispensation, however marginalised communities continue to face deprivation and inequality. The built environment has been flagged as vital to the healing and socio-economic emancipation of marginalised communities as evident in the *Comprehensive Rural Development Programme* (Republic of South Africa 2009); the *National Development Plan 2030* (Republic of South Africa 2013) and the *National Spatial Development Framework 2050* (Republic of South Africa 2020). Despite such facilitative mechanisms, spatial thinking and practice continue to rely on colonial processes, methods, and the assumptions of reality, which are generally amiss of the nuanced complexities of Global South communities. Global South, in the context of the paper, refers to developing countries that face various socio-economic challenges due to the influences of colonialism and global capitalisation. This paper argues that while colonialism may have been overturned by post-colonial governments, coloniality perpetuates through modes of knowledge production, interpretation and knowledge transfer that continue to socio-economically prejudice marginalised communities. Coloniality has become so deeply entrenched that even previously disadvantaged communities, including rural communities, implicitly rely on it to solve their own problems.

A review of the prevalent approaches to built environment thinking and practice reveals deeply entrenched systemic problems that are counterintuitive to socio-economic redress and spatial

transformation. Urban analysis, urban design and architecture continue to depend on methodologies confined within predetermined knowledge systems based on norms that assume social homogeneity, thereby indifferent to the various nuanced complexities of Global South contextual realities. Furthermore, most of the contemporary approaches to built environment practice had developed as a consequence of rapid industrialisation, in the Global North, which migrated to the Global South through colonialism and global capitalisation. These systems and approaches have, however, been efficient in responding to the mundane needs of industrialising societies and, over time, have become the benchmarks against which education and practice quality is measured.

The problem with these 'efficient' systems is that they are defined by knowledge capitalisation and intellectual capitalisation (Bjornes 2012). Key decision-makers, policymakers, practitioners and educators would have been 'schooled' through such system – this is evident in the prevalent curricula at higher education institutions. Their ideas and strategies are adopted and become the drivers of curriculum reform towards socio-economic and spatial transformation. What manifests, however, is a system of unfair gatekeeping through the pedagogic exclusion of marginalised communities. Place-based, indigenous knowledge finds no place in the curriculum; the voices and experiences of people that lived and adapted to their environments through layered, evolved interdependencies are generally disregarded.

The paper therefore sets out to explore different ontological and epistemological positions, through the theoretical framework, to define an alternative proposition for built environment thinking and practice.

## 2. COLONIALY ENTRENCHED KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

A critical review of the evolution of knowledge systems is necessary, to trace the causes of disconnected thinking and practice, while exploring possibilities for transformative alternatives that could translate into the socio-economic emancipation of marginalised communities in South Africa. It is to be noted that socio-economic disparity and inequality is largely due to the segregatory spatial devices of the apartheid model (Luckan 2021b) and, therefore, built environment practice is vital to spatial transformation. The ontological and epistemological positions that express through spatial practice consequently forms a key area of focus of the study.

It is elucidated that the epistemological problem of disconnection between the knowledge society and the ontological realm of being in place did not originate in the Global South, however, it can be traced to paradigmatic shifts in learning and practice in the North, and the influences of colonialism on the South. Through a system of sustained entrenchment, colonialism would translate into coloniality in the form of knowledge production and transfer as a means of psycho-social conditioning. It is argued that coloniality has so deeply impacted the evolution of thinking and practice that a cyclical re-emergence of the politics of knowledge continues to prejudice and oppress post-colonial societies. Through a process of systematic colonisation, the frameworks and methods of the North have become instituted across the entire academic world, effectively reforming worldviews. In this regard, Hart (2010: 4) elucidates the extent of the influence of Eurocentricity by reference to Battiste & Henderson (2000) and Blaut (1993) who stated "Indeed, Eurocentric thought has come to mediate the entire world to the point where worldviews that differ from Eurocentric thought are relegated to the periphery, if they are acknowledged at all". This deliberate and 'progressively' instituted universal

worldview, framed by Eurocentricity and disregard of other ways of knowing, promotes dependency through singular worldviews in post-colonial societies, which ultimately deprives them of their inherent potentiality. While colonial systems annihilate indigenous knowledge systems and practices, they are also concurrently able to 're-code' the same indigenous communities into dependency on such colonial systems. In this way the ontological and epistemological dispositions of indigenous communities are disrupted, dismantled and replaced. Such inherent disregard of other knowledge systems through the imposition of colonial systems is therefore interrogated to investigate the primary intentions and instituted systems of the exploitative coloniser, to which marginalised communities unwittingly subscribe.

Césaire (1972) extensively expounds the prejudicial and divisive means of the colonial exploiter that cunningly invoke inferiority complexes in communities who would then become conditioned to, and dependent on colonial systems and strategies in determining their self-worth and economic potentiality. Through systematic psychological conditioning, the worthiness or value given to certain types of knowledge and practice, and the domains in which they are acquired, become the quality benchmarks to which marginalised communities themselves aspire. The effect of this is that these communities implicitly validate the very systems that exclude their nuanced knowledge systems and practices, thereby surrendering to the devices of the cunning gatekeeper for their mundane intellectual needs. These needs counterproductively focus on skills acquisition for industrial exploitation rather than the expansion of the mind for individual and collective progress. It is evident that at the centre of the problem of a globally dominant knowledge system is the wide prevalence of singular worldviews which have defined ontological and epistemological positions through colonisation of the mind. Wane (2008) affirms this condition as an outcome of colonisation through

which the destruction of indigenous knowledge systems becomes possible through the colonisation of the mind; it strategically reforms the epistemological dispositions of diverse communities, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Santos (2016) refers to such exclusive, oppressive condition as 'epistemicide' whereby other knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledge systems based on organically evolved social and ecological interrelationships, are destroyed through the dominance of coloniality.

This paradigm in which a dominant worldview negates, disregards and suppresses alternative knowledge systems is referred to by Salama and Crosbie (2020) as the 'legacy model', whereby the systemic entrenchment of North worldviews, through the process of colonization, penetrates deep into the human psyche resulting in dependence on the 'wisdom of the educated'. This translates into the systematic destruction of the intellectual confidence of local communities and the exploitation of undermined, limited skills for capitalist exploitation. Coloniality and colonial mechanisms thereby 'successfully' play out in the global economy whereby certain nations can economically profiteer while others are deprived and exploited through capitalist devices. The problem of colonial entrenchment in current global South societies is therefore critically linked to a discursive division between the global North, and South through exploitation and dominance whereby the disparity between the wealth of nations widens through a validated rhetoric of internationalism (Bhabha 1994). This paper affirms that dependence on the 'wisdom of the educated' also leads to a 'psychological paralysis' in marginalised communities who unwittingly further validate the rhetoric through unquestionable acceptance of legislative frameworks governing their education and training.

The South African context has been intensively impacted by European colonialism, mainly through the arrival of British and Dutch settlers. While

the adverse effects of colonialism and apartheid have been widely acknowledged, the said validated rhetoric of universal benchmarks, remains a key factor contributing to the post-colonial nation's struggle to overcome socio-economic and spatial disparity. While colonisation is often referred to as a moment or specific moments in time, coloniality cannot be considered as an event in time, however, it is a process of gradual and systematic entrenchment which seems to progress continuously in a sort of perpetual motion. Policy changes and legislative frameworks therefore cannot have much impact nor any significant counter-effect, albeit that they may have been designed to initiate progressive legislative reform, such as the case in South Africa, if they are founded on a system that validates dominance and exclusion.

It is reaffirmed that the challenges facing Global South communities are not merely due to colonization, they are rather due to coloniality that instills universally validated systems through the process of colonization. A significant influence on the trajectory that shaped the dominant worldviews in the South, is global capitalization through Global North economic expansion. The paper therefore explores the role of global industrialisation in entrenching certain modes of education and training, as well as the perceptions of, and attitudes to knowledge worthiness and value.

### 3. THE INDUSTRIALISED CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIC EXCLUSION

While colonialism entrenched epistemological positions for socio-economic exploitation and control, the destruction of place-based knowledge systems can be traced to expanding industrialisation in the global North. Within the domains of the colonisers themselves a strong economic rationale catalysed the replacement of their former indigenous knowledge systems, whereby education would start to become increasingly institutionalised. Bussey (2010) aptly attributes such

reality to the rise of institutional modernity in Europe, during the 18th century, that shifted education from social and informal settings to state-controlled institutions. This paradox in the evolution of education (Bussey 2010) defined a watershed moment in the place of knowledge in society. Learning began to move out of societal place, and the nuanced complexities therein, towards standardised curricula and modes of practice, drifting further away from culture and humanity, towards institutionalised standardisation. The advent of the first industrial revolution, in the 19th century, legitimised this system whereby education became a form of social engineering to serve the needs of rapidly growing industries.

Consequently, an industrially focussed curriculum supported by defined learning spaces, would systemically replace contextually rooted curricula, to rapidly develop skills and processes to service the needs of growing industrialisation. Luckan (2017) refers to this system as 'industrial pedagogy' wherein all learning is focused on specific outcomes defined by disciplinary silos to serve industry, and with the promise of employability. Education and training would become increasingly streamlined, informed by the needs of industry for profitability, not for the advancement of society. The significance and scale of industrial activity and the expansion thereof to the global economy would thereby define a critical moment in the wealth of nations. The consequent reliance of Global South communities on global capitalism would have them bound within a system of disparity, manifesting as privilege and deprivation, wealth and dependency.

Hoadley and Jansen (cited in Saidi, 2005) affirm the severity of the impact of the global economy whereby centralised / universal curricula would fuel economic disparity wherein dominant groups would benefit while others become socio-economically vulnerable and dependant. Luckan (2021a) investigates the entrenched devices of pedagogic exclusion to critically look at their impact on marginalised communities. This

reality translates aptly to the spatial and economic disparity in the marginalised communities of South Africa, for example, whereby communities in need cannot transform themselves due to centralised norms that govern post-secondary education, leaving them vulnerable; ultimately compromising redress and spatial transformation.

Luckan (2021a) refers to a definitive, entrenched professional education system confined in silos, also known as Mode 1 by Gibbons et al. (1994), that continues to characterise the institutions of higher learning. Within such system, traditionalist approaches place unjust restrictions on historically marginalised communities who can neither access nor articulate through higher education and training to better their livelihoods, thereby fuelling the constant undermining of place-based knowledge systems while widening economic dependency and severely compromising the spatial transformation of their own communities. He attributes this condition to pedagogic exclusion - an inherent part of the prevalent centralised / institutionalised systems of education and training - whereby the lived experiences of people in place over time are disregarded. Within such system, knowledge is confined to disciplinary silos and definitive ways of thinking based on universal norms, canon and generalised acceptance of what may be judged as quality in curriculum and pedagogic practice, primarily focused on promulgating an industrialised pedagogy. It is generally supported by an intellectual traditionalist curriculum (Schubert, 1997) that relies on canon and widely accepted textual references, further entrenching the associated hegemonies.

This system of 'efficiency and standards' however alternatively promotes a 'flatland mentality' that fails to perceive or value other ways of knowing and learning, thereby pedagogically excluding multiple intelligences and experiences, ultimately stifling the self-sustainability and socio-economic advancement of communities. Unfortunately, even those members of marginalised communities who had the

privilege of advanced education and training seem to be laden with an inertia that stifles their ability to transform their own communities. Salama (2005) refers to this industrially focussed system as a mechanistic paradigm in which education is not holistically considered nor conceptualised as part of a contextually connected process. He therefore argues for an alternative system that draws and builds on the complex incidental interrelationships and interdependencies of a range of indeterminate factors. His elucidation alludes to an agile curriculum that could promote thinking and practice for self-sustainable communities. Such system however challenges the prevalent industrialised pedagogies and institutional domains of surveillance in which centralised modes of thinking and practice are channelled for the benefit of capitalist profiteering.

Sarkar's (1992) progressive utilisation theory interrogated the problem of centralisation and the consequent economic deprivation of communities, including rural villages, whereby the adopted universal modes of thinking and practice fail to advance their socio-economic prosperity, resulting in deprivation and vulnerability to exploitation for industrial profiteering. He affirms that decentralisation, however, does not suit the profit / capitalist driven agendas of the global economic powerhouses, as capitalist production exists to maximise profits whereas decentralisation is about activity for local consumption and use; it empowers people through self-sustainability and socio-economic emancipation (Sarkar 1992).

Sarkar further expounds on how capitalists have always adapted their strategies and cunning devices to control intellectuals, through their devious forms of exploitation for profiteering, and so use them as tools of socio-economic exploitation to suck the vitality out of societies. The resultant intellectual inertia of those who could challenge hegemony to effect change thereby work to the advantage of rapacious capitalists. He refers to this psycho-economic

exploitation as a form of dangerous and all-devouring capitalist exploitation which first weakens and paralyses people psychologically in various ways, and then exploits them economically – a condition he refers to as ‘intellectual capitalism’ - whereby the educated and trained middle class themselves become dependent on the system of economic exploitation through their limited education. Consequently, even the educated and trained persons from marginalised communities are unable to challenge or pose any significant counter-position to the entrenched norm, thereby leaving their own communities vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation. Sarkar refers to this situation as the ‘psychology of the pathetic and elitist class’ who would rather guard their comfort zones than work for the welfare of society. The effect of this type of psychology, wherein the fortunate members of marginalised communities take no interest in the welfare of their own communities, fuels a special type of intellectual capitalism which manifests in multiple ways that oppress marginalised communities; this includes:

- The underdevelopment of literary skills.
- Suppressing the socio-economic consciousness of indigenous people.
- Instilling inferiority and fear complexes.
- The hinderance of intellectual and moral development, whereby irrationality becomes rampant in society.
- Narrow sentiments such as geo and socio sentiment that create destructive dis cohesion in heterogenous societies.

Very importantly, while Sarkar advocates for decentralised social units, he cautions against narrow, geo and socio sentiments that could lead to social dis cohesion in heterogenous societies. This position is vital to transformative thinking and practice in the contemporary context, suggesting an inclusive approach to

social progress and wealth creation.

It is therefore argued that inclusivity is a vital ingredient for decolonial, progressive thinking and practice, which also has spatial implications. While an inclusive knowledge system will draw on place-based systems, an inclusive paradigm in heterogenous communities such as urban centres would require a complex integration of dialogical different worldviews through different lived experiences. The prevalent system of education and training, including those aiming for transformation of the built environment, is however confined to an alternate reality defined by disciplinary silos and convenience. This raises an uncomfortable question to contemporary education and practice in the Global South: How can academics and practitioners, often bound by intellectual inertia and stagnancy, be able to transcend their comfort zones as the privileged beneficiaries of advanced education and training to become the agents of change?

The preceding discussion revealed the systemic problems, that have shaped thinking and practice in the South, primarily due to the influences of colonialism and industrialisation. While colonialism, in the South African context, resulted in a continued reliance on Global North approaches to thinking and practice, the reality of global industrialisation meant that education and training, hence practice, would adopt curricula and pedagogies for industrial exploitation. It is therefore not entirely due to colonialism, nor apartheid that the prevalent modes of thinking and practice are so disconnected from society. The current problems facing redress and spatial transformation are critically linked to the Global Economy through universal / centralised ways of thinking and practice that continue to disregard socially rooted knowledge systems. A serious impact of coloniality is that the so called reformed ontological and epistemological positions, continue to be defined by a dominant universal worldview that have influenced Global South communities to an extent

where they have become dependent on these as the quality benchmarks for progress. It is why post-colonial / post-apartheid societies struggle to implement their transformative legislations and frameworks for redress and transformation of marginalised communities.

While past injustices are acknowledged, the current injustices that play out through policies, frameworks and approaches subtly reinforce the status quo of deprivation, dependency and vulnerability. An intellectual inertia prevails, upon those who could effect progressive societal change, that allows such circumstances to perpetuate; social injustice and capitalist exploitation thereby continues. Marginalised communities continue to face oppression, albeit much more subtly through institutionalised devices that promulgate barriers to access as well as curricula and pedagogic exclusion; this is a serious challenge in the South African higher education context.

A review of built environment thinking and practice in South Africa reveals top-down, intellectually inert approaches whereby marginalised communities become the subservient recipients of external, profit-driven proposals for their spatial transformation, often in the form of infrastructure such as social facilities and economic facilities. These, albeit presented as key infrastructure projects to benefit communities, are most often destructive to the resilient socio-economic systems that evolved in place over time. Infrastructure projects for the spatial transformation of marginalised communities, almost entirely depend on the importation of knowledge and skills from outside these communities to serve their needs, resulting in an outflow of community capital. The key policymakers, implementors, educators, practitioners and deliverers of spatial transformation projects are thereby all paradoxically complicit in the continued deprivation and vulnerability of marginalised communities. It is evident that there is a critical need for an alternative, methodical system, for the

upskilling of marginalised communities for meaningful spatial transformation – a decolonial approach.

#### **4. A DECOLONIAL PROPOSITION FOR DESIGN THINKING TOWARDS SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION**

The decolonial proposition is premised on the concepts of socio-economic emancipation and self-sustainability of communities. While emphasis has been on the value of indigenous / place-based knowledge and practice in the spatial transformation of the built environment, it is affirmed that decoloniality is about inclusivity and not exclusivity; it is complex and involves expanding opportunities by freeing up access to all knowledge sources, while building and drawing on the nuanced relevance of indigenous knowledge systems. It therefore cannot be founded on a purely self-referential paradigm. A decolonial proposition would alternatively be founded on a system in which the local economy would be supported / nurtured while not entirely discarding the value of certain necessary imports, this also applies to knowledge production and acquisition. A critical balance between place-based knowledge and practice and the relevant approaches that would have developed in the Global North – where various methods and strategies for built environment practice evolved in response to the expanding global economy – would therefore be essential for a decolonial turn.

Decolonial thinking requires the expression of the hidden curriculum rooted in place and time to be able to catalyse a critical systemic reconstruction. This notion challenges the prevalent system to consider different worldviews and the ontological positions of people; it is an inconvenient necessity fundamental on the moral codes for societal welfare and advancement. This has immense bearing on built environment practice for the spatial transformation of marginalised communities. A decolonial position, fundamental on socio-economic

emancipation, would therefore require transformation of the 'wealth cycle' in the production of the built environment. At the core of the decolonial agenda, consequently, is the harnessing of the knowledge and experiences of local people for the overall welfare of the community, which Sarkar (1992) refers to as the socio-economic unit, within which there is no place for psycho-economic exploitation. Morality and respect of the collective for effective transfer of power towards socio-economic emancipation emerge as key values required for a decolonial turn. Academics and practitioners alike, who benefitted from an exclusive system therefore have a tacit moral and ethical duty to society. Within an entrenched / institutionalised system of exclusion, how then could academics and practitioners overcome their intellectual inertia to become agents of socio-economic reconstruction through built environment practice?

Within the wealth cycle of the built environment, at the beginning is always a socially contextualised problem. It is therefore argued that the society in which such problems exist be intrinsically involved in the process of the decisions, processes and spatial transformation of their built environments. Such proposition is dependent on the ability of communities to leverage their knowledge and skills sets, supported by their lived experiences, for the emancipation of their own communities. However, a continuing challenge facing marginalised communities that stifles their self-sustainability is the underdeveloped, limited skills sets due to past and current injustices that excluded and continue to exclude them from opportunities for upskilling to be able to address the complex realities of their environments.

Alternative systems and approaches are required, whereby transformative curricular and pedagogic inclusivity fundamentally challenge the bases of an exclusionary system in which knowledge is confined within the silos of institutions. The main proposition of this paper is that a decentralised approach to education and training be considered, for

the socio-economic emancipation and spatial transformation of marginalised communities, to be able to advance skills sets while drawing on place-based knowledge and knowledge gained through diverse learning pathways. Luckan (2021a) elucidates that decolonial thinking for the transformation of societies cannot be possible without including the multiple intelligences and experiences of those very communities in the curriculum. He emphasises the need for alternative / inclusive curricula and pedagogic inclusion, that are critical for socio-economic emancipation and spatial transformation to materialise. Alternative learning pathways such as the recognition of prior learning (RPL) are critical in this regard, as transformative strategies to mitigate the disparity between privilege and deprivation. The work of Luckan (2021a) expounds on RPL for socio-economic redress and transformation of the built environment.

While the recognition of knowledge and skills within communities must be harnessed, there also needs to be support structures for marginalised practitioners to upskill; mentorship is critical in this regard. Support through mentorship will require various approaches and possibilities for collaboration between learning sites and industry practitioners with advanced skills. This could naturally transform and decentralise learning spaces that are confined within the silos of institutions. Support is, however, no longer confined to physical space, as previously excluded communities now have various opportunities for upskilling due to the advances of the fourth industrial revolution, whereby dislocated communities can experience different contexts through augmented reality while being able to connect with the global knowledge society. As a result, society, even community itself, is becoming increasingly pedagogically heterogeneous largely due to the world wide web, open access and platforms such as MOOCs that allow for the expansion of the mind through access to a vast body of knowledge. Learning therefore can happen just about anywhere and anytime, out of the formality and

hegemony of institution, while enhanced by connectivity and support through global networks. Within such paradigm, conventional, institutionalised learning spaces are naturally disrupted. This era seems abundant with opportunities for learning and the creation of new industries and networks for business; it simultaneously affords opportunities to express different knowledge systems and ways of thinking. How then can this be harnessed to advance decolonial thinking for spatial transformation?

Luckan (2021b) criticises the dominant methodologies, to propose alternative approaches for spatial transformation. He affirms that designers have relied overtly on abstract methodologies in the analysis and conceptualisation of space, thereby compromising the extent to which their designs can respond to nuanced complexities. The risk of such overt reliance, in relation to upskilling community-based design practitioners through pedagogy and mentorship, is that the prevalent and predominant approaches may be further reinforced, which would be counter-intuitive and counterproductive. It is therefore proposed that lived experiences extend to the contextualised experiences of the designers themselves. To be able to propose meaningful and real transformative solutions, designers would require a change in approach to include their own lived experiences in the spaces within which they are charged respond to through design – a conscious dwelling in place and time is vital.

Design thinking therefore would require a level of disruption, decoding, uncoding and recoding to be able to respond to contextually situated complexities. The works of architect / mathematician Christopher Alexander (1964 & 1966) provide invaluable references in this regard. Alexander probed and expounded the interpretation of place through a complex integration of mathematical analysis with phenomenological interpretation of place. His work consequently challenges the foundations of rationalistic approaches to urban / architectural design that question the

predominant techniques and methods of designers. While designers adopt various techniques and tools to rationalise the reality of place, there are the irrational qualities that cannot be coded or quantified; a spirit of place that seems latent yet expresses a vitality beyond tangible layers. A phenomenological reality through the ontology of being and dwelling in place always exists, yet how do we interpret such and ethically respond as designers?

To meaningfully respond to such phenomenological reality, one must firstly engage both the analysis / observation with tangible phenomena as well as the intangible layers of interpretation through conscious engagement to be able to understand the nuanced vitality of place. The engagement with observable phenomena has been given ample consideration, resulting in various techniques and methods of urban analysis, the intangible phenomena however, seem much less considered. While social and economic activity may be considered as intangible phenomena in the built environment, a deeper connection through psychospiritual experience of place to tap into the latent rhizomic energy of its *genius loci*. To do this, the designer would need to spend time, various moments of time, in place is required. It is only through being in place over time that observation, perception, thinking and practice could transcend the understanding of place beyond its physical phenomena. The upskilling of community-based practitioners therefore must stimulate the expression of spatial interpretation through memory; it is argued that the memory of place built over time cannot be replaced by analysis in quick time regardless of the complexity of methods and tools used for such.

Such alternative approach to pedagogic transformation could be considered radical in the current context of education and practice. Radical alternatives, however, may be unattainable, at least at the outset, and it is therefore proposed that certain tried and tested existing / acquired procedures, techniques and methods of analysis and design

be reconsidered or reinterpreted to understand the deeper complexities of place. One of the most widely used tools in design is scale and as such it forms a good basis as an example to explain how to reinterpret a valid and reliable tool in the interpretation of space and place. Scale is generally used for quantifiable measurement of proportions and distances, however, Luckan (2021b) reinterprets scale at deeper layers of dwelling and time. His inquiry revealed a critical aspect of scale, beyond physical measurement tools to interpret the scale of built form, including open space. Scale is thereby reinterpreted as a spatial concept in the context of the paper. Reference is made to the most acknowledged proponents of universal scale beyond finite measurement - Da Vinci and Fibonacci - to interpret human and / or natural and / or divine proportions. Da Vinci's 'Renaissance Man' as a representation of human physical proportion, and the golden ratio as psychologically and aesthetically pleasing or harmonious proportions attest to the great works from the ancient Greeks, to the Renaissance, and architecture in Africa, India and other parts of what is now known as the developing world. So, the concept of scale and proportion has at once a finite physical manifestation, psychological influence and a cosmic relationship.

The symbols of cosmic / human scales, however, form different perceptions of scale in space, that are contextually interdependent. In this regard the symbol of Da Vinci's Renaissance man interpreted in a dialogical relationship with the Indian Nataraja figure expresses different attributes related to scale, proportion and time. While the former expresses elements of symmetrical balance and order, the latter is rather fluid, asymmetrical and in dynamic balance – an ever-changing / re-ordering of different relationships through various proximities and interdependencies. The psychospiritual aspects of scale, as evident, are not new, however, this paper explores the critical importance of scale in alternative ways of interpreting place through the psychospiritual experience

of space through time.

The first aspect of scale could be defined as a phenomenological scale for the definition of urban proportion. This scale is not defined by fixed proportions entirely, however, it is formed by the dynamic proximity of the human to urban elements – the scale of psychospiritual experience through being and dwelling that constantly transforms through time. This suggests that even built form and architectural detail are not quite static. Dovey (2010) refers to this quality of space as in continuous flux, yet thinking about space seems static. While built form may be fixed and formed in stone or plaster, for example, it constantly presents differently through physical and psychospiritual / conscious proximity of the human to such form and detail. However, a further layer of this psychospiritual experience of built form is defined by the filters of collective activity and memory in place. Therefore, one's own conscious experience of place and built form is constantly reformed by the collective human activity within and around such place. Time is the second aspect of scale that forms the psychospiritual experience of place. Time is naturally dynamic as it is in constant motion, however it is mostly defined by fixed units of measurement from seconds to minutes, days, weeks, months, seasons, years etc. To be able to understand the value of time in the interpretation or perception of place, however, time would deconstruct itself into a series of dynamic and indeterminate moments through space. This scale of time is defined by variable moments through various physical and psychospiritual encounters forms perceptions of place – the scale of the moment (Luckan 2021b). Such constant interaction of consciousness and collective consciousness in place through time is what ultimately expresses the spirit of place – its *genius loci* – through layers of activity and memory.

The discussion above, highlights an important aspect of scale that builds depth of understanding and interpretation of place through layers of activity and

memory in time. Referring back to the predominant modes of thinking and practice, the people / practitioners resident in marginalised communities, who would have developed a deep understanding of their place through layers of perception and memory over time, are excluded from the process of the spatial transformation of their own communities. Their lived experiences are excluded and any attempt to upskill such persons may run the risk of replacing such attributes with simplistic / a-contextualised methods and procedures. These persons therefore remain pedagogically excluded.

A shift from coloniality towards a decolonial paradigm would necessarily challenge dominant modes of spatial thinking and practice, however, it is inclusive rather than rejectionary. Given the evolution of processes, procedures and methodologies in the built environment professions, which developed over centuries, reform and redefinition would be necessary for a progressive alternative. In turn, such reformation must necessarily and deliberately spark curricular and pedagogic transformation and as such the entrenched hegemonies that define higher learning, and their associated spaces, can be dismantled by allowing hidden curricula and alternative worldviews into the system – it requires the inclusion of lived experiences from the very communities that need transformation.

Decentralised learning spaces such as informal and non-formal learning spaces situated in communities, therefore require much more consideration to be able to create effective synergies between academics, practitioners and the community; the formation of a synergistic critical learning community (Luckan 2021a) in contextually rooted learning spaces is vital. Informal and non-formal learning spaces naturally offer alternative, inclusive pedagogies and nuanced / hidden curricula that challenge the dominant methodologies of practice which are generally detached from society / place.

The paper therefore argues that for spatial transformation to be effective, there must be a more considered approach that draws on the humanistic complexities of place through widely inclusive approaches. An investment in skills capacity building within communities through pedagogic inclusion is therefore vital, to avoid capital outflow, through the utilisation of local skills within marginalised communities for their own spatial transformation, their spatial justice.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The paper explored a crisis in thinking and practice, defined by colonial systems, that continues to marginalise, deprive, and exploit global South communities. While various legislative policy and framework transformation are evident in post-apartheid South Africa, marginalised communities continue to face barriers of exclusion, not just difficulty in accessing higher education / skills development but also through pedagogic exclusion. The paper therefore argued that coloniality continues to manifest through thinking and practice, through knowledge production and transfer. A theoretical framework, founded on decoloniality, socio-economic emancipation and pedagogic inclusion, formed the basis for an inquiry into the status quo and devices of colonial oppression that prevail.

It was found that an epistemological problem of disconnection between the knowledge society from the socio-economic and cultural contexts could be traced to the paradigmatic shifts in education in the global North itself, due to a rise in institutional modernity in 18th century Europe, that moved the knowledge society out of place / cultural contexts and into centrally controlled institutions. This system of a-contextual education would be instituted in global South communities through the process of colonisation. However, the system of industrialised pedagogy and curricula to serve the needs of rapidly expanding industries in the global economy meant



that education itself became a device of exploitation and oppression through the cunningness of colonial oppressors.

Within such system there is no place for other knowledge systems, promulgating a discursive division between the global North and South whereby the rhetoric of internationalism would validate disparity between the wealth of nations. The problem of centralised education systems and centralised approaches to the economy ignored the nuances of place in time thereby stifling the economic prosperity of communities, increasing deprivation and dependency which weakens marginalised communities and making them vulnerable to exploitation. It was found that those members of marginalised communities who had the privilege of higher education would succumb to the system through 'intellectual inertia' leading to a disregard of the collective welfare of their communities. Such psychological conditioning through exclusive strategies was found to fuel intellectual capitalism, widening socio-economic disparity and vulnerability of marginalised communities. Paradoxically, within such system, the very marginalised communities themselves, become conditioned into dependency on the colonially inherited, industrialised modes of education and training. A system that excludes their own inherent, place-acquired knowledge and skills through lived experiences in challenging socio-economic and built environment contexts.

The elucidation highlighted a reality in curriculum and pedagogy – the norms, methodologies and techniques of the Global North continue to dominate thinking and practice about the built environment, which are limited to measurable or objectively quantifiable attributes of built form. The paper therefore explored alternative curricular and pedagogic strategies for the inclusion of a wider range of intelligences and lived experiences in the knowledge society, with the aim of broadening and advancing the skills sets within marginalised communities towards self-sustainability

and socio-economic expansion. The techniques and methodologies of design thinking were critically reviewed and alternative approaches to built environment analysis, perception and practice would emerge. Importantly the paper elucidated that decoloniality is an inclusive process that would not merely disregard colonially inherited / Global North approaches and methods. The concept of scale in built environment practice was used as an example to illustrate how a universally accepted and defined instrument for spatial analysis and design could be adapted to interpret non-physical dimensions through layers of dwelling in place through time. The phenomenological scales of place and time beyond the quantifiable units revealed new possibilities for understanding and enhancing the *genius loci*.

The paper proposed a conceptual framework for alternative ways of thinking and making of built form towards redress and spatial transformation, that raised critical questions of academia and practice. It was found that spatial transformation could be effectively achieved as long as the built environment skills sets within the communities themselves could be advanced and harnessed to spatially transform themselves. Mentorship and sharing of skills and knowledge through collaboration was found to be critical to advance knowledge and skills that responded to the nuanced realities of heterogenous communities. This necessitated a redefinition of learning space, a deconstruction of the formal learning space and to include informal and non-formal learning settings to bridge the divide between academia and society towards socio-economic emancipation, self-reliance to heal spatial injustice through reform in built environment thinking and practice.

The core of this decolonial proposition is founded on deliberate investment in the formation of a critical learning community that is rooted in nuanced place. Such learning community would demand a change in values, from self-centred

profiteering and intellectual inertia, through morality and respect, towards ethical social practice for the economic advancement and the welfare of the individual as well as the collective. Within such alternate paradigm, transformed modes of thinking, and consequently practice, could realise socio-economic emancipation through spatial transformation of diversely nuanced South African built environments.

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