



GCRO PROVOCATIONS

#03



GOVERNING THE GCR PROVOCATION SERIES:
**INSTITUTIONALISING THE
GAUTENG CITY-REGION**

Authors: Jesse Harber, Kate Joseph

May 2018

GCRO

Gauteng
City-Region
Observatory

Partnered by:



INSTITUTIONALISING THE GAUTENG CITY-REGION

May 2018

ISBN: 978-0-6399364-0-6

Researched and written by: Jesse Harber,
Kate Joseph

Design: Breinstorm Brand Architects

Cover Image: Gareth Pon

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Published by the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), a partnership of the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, the Gauteng Provincial Government and organised local government in Gauteng (SALGA).

GOVERNING THE GAUTENG

CITY-REGION PROVOCATION SERIES:

Institutionalising the Gauteng City-Region

Governing the Gauteng City-Region: a Provocation series

The idea of the city-region is growing in international prominence. This is because the form has been hailed as a means to promote a range of agendas, including boosting economic competitiveness; fostering integrated development; building partnerships between state and non-state actors; and solving urban growth challenges by offering ways to think differently about mass infrastructure provision, environmental sustainability, and the like.

A growing amount of academic and policy work is being done on the issue of city-region governance, with many arguing that the burgeoning of thinking and practice represents a dedicated 'process of scale building' (Brenner 1999; Scott and Storper, 2003; Jonas, 2006; Harrison and Hoyler, 2014). Brenner in fact argues that the rise of regional governance can be understood as a process of 'state reterritorialization' or 'state rescaling', and that the specific form of the city-region reflects 'state spatial selectivity'. In other words this scale has been specifically chosen or assembled by the state to facilitate various processes such as economic agglomeration or competitiveness (cited in Wu 2017:1135). In other contexts, the scale has been asserted as a way to mitigate the negative effects of inter-locality competition (ibid).

Regardless of the deliberative processes behind this 're-scaling', the city-region is not a straightforward site in which to organise governance. As Storper (2014) points out, governance at this scale necessarily involves many large, contested, and intertwined issues that arise as a result of strong interdependencies *and* cleavages, combined with fragmented geographies and overlapping implementing agencies. This means that the issues that become the object of regional governance are not amenable to a 'solution' so much as a haphazard muddling-through. Similarly, Wu (2017) interprets the state spatial selectivity of the city-region form less as a proactive model to manage social provision or promote democratisation, but rather as an attempt to manage intractable crises.

The Gauteng City-Region (GCR) is increasingly recognised in official and other discourse. That said, the acknowledgement of something that can be described as a city-region has not resulted in consensus on what this means, or should mean, for planning, public investment, or governance. This series of GCRO Provocations examines different aspects of governance *of and in* the GCR. Taken together, they hope to trigger debate and dialogue on various complexities of the issue, and signal a series of priorities for consideration in thinking about the future and the fortunes of the city-region.

Abstract

The Gauteng City-Region (GCR) is an uncertain concept, but diminishingly so; it is increasingly recognised in official and other discourse. Nonetheless, this growing acknowledgement of a city-region lying roughly from “somewhere north of Pretoria to the Vaal River (and sometimes beyond); and from east of Springs to west of Krugersdorp” (Mabin, 2013, p. 4) has not resulted in a settled consensus of what this means, or should mean, for the purposes of planning, public investment, or governance.

This Provocation is the first in a series on the topic of “governing the Gauteng City-Region”, which explores prospects for a more integrated and coordinated GCR. This piece introduces a number of considerations entailed in the governance of this city-region, and discusses the prospect of institutionalising that governance. Talk of institutionalisation originated recently within the Gauteng Provincial Government and is advanced as a solution to various complexities of governance. This text will trace the development of the idea of institutionalising the city-region from inception to its current state; survey the institutions that are currently, between them, responsible for GCR governance; and explore the complexities of apportioning power and functions across a multi-layered, multi-dimensional ‘territorial’ construct, and the issues and implications that result.



Photograph by Clive Hassall

A city-region in practice and theory

At its most basic, the concept of ‘city-region’ arises from the observation that the formal boundaries of a city seldom correspond to what we might otherwise conceive of as the ‘city’. Municipal boundaries are useful for delineating the area of responsibility of this government or that (to a point—about which more later) and as a result are useful for predicting the observable products of that responsibility: water pipes, garbage-collection routes, and so on. But they are much less useful for describing the very many non-government phenomena that also constitute a city, including flows of people, natural resources and raw materials, and goods and services; spatial patterns of development; and economic activity.

By itself, this might merit calling the ‘city-region’ an academic concept, but little more; after all, inappropriately-drawn boundaries can and often are adjusted. However the propensity of cities to grow inexorably outwards, and of political-administrative boundaries to grow much slower if at all, combine to result in an unavoidable disjunction between the area that needs governing, and the congruence of the institutions tasked with governing that area.

Complicating this are certain particularities of urban governance (Storper, 2014): the ‘urban land nexus’ and the nature of urban political geographies. The urban land nexus is a land-use pattern that mediates between the many—often contradictory—requirements of the city, and manages both the overcrowding and the sprawl that urban land markets typically produce. The problems of urban political geography include the tension between the need to govern large functional areas (like an urban labour market) and demands for fine-grained control by residents of one area or another, coupled with the fact that different urban systems work most efficiently at

Photograph by Clive Hassall



different scales. Public transport systems are efficient at the metropolitan or even the city-region scale, whereas garbage collection may be most efficient when organised at neighbourhood level. In all:

There is no way, at any specific moment or over time, to separate each individual governance and public goods question into its scale and have exactly the right level... for each problem or need, or to have these different needs align in scale... and constituency with one another. (Storper, 2014, p. 121).

The city-region is therefore first and foremost a *functional* region, almost always governed by a number of overlapping, competing, and cooperating political-administrative bodies. However, not unlike Judge Stewart's view of obscenity, we may know a city-region when we see it, but defining its limits is more difficult.

A functional region is one "composed of areas of locational entities which have more interactions or connection with each other than with outside areas" (Brown & Holmes, 1971, p. 387). Brown and Holmes proceed to calculate functional regions based on commuting patterns in England, and are followed in this by, among others, Nel et al. (2008) and Krygsman et al. (2009) in South Africa, and others elsewhere (e.g. Mitchell & Watts, 2010). Commuting patterns reflect regional labour markets, and Storper agrees that "functional urban regions capture the scale at which the strong economic effects of labor and land market integration are generated via intense daily labor market interactions and a functionally integrated built environment" (2014, pp. 117–118). As the map of South Africa in Figure 1 demonstrates, there is an integrated local labour market in the area of Gauteng.

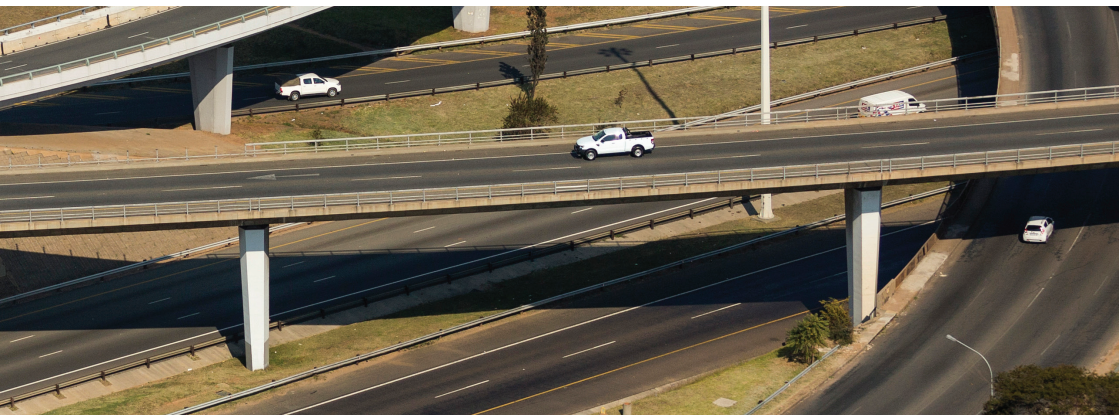
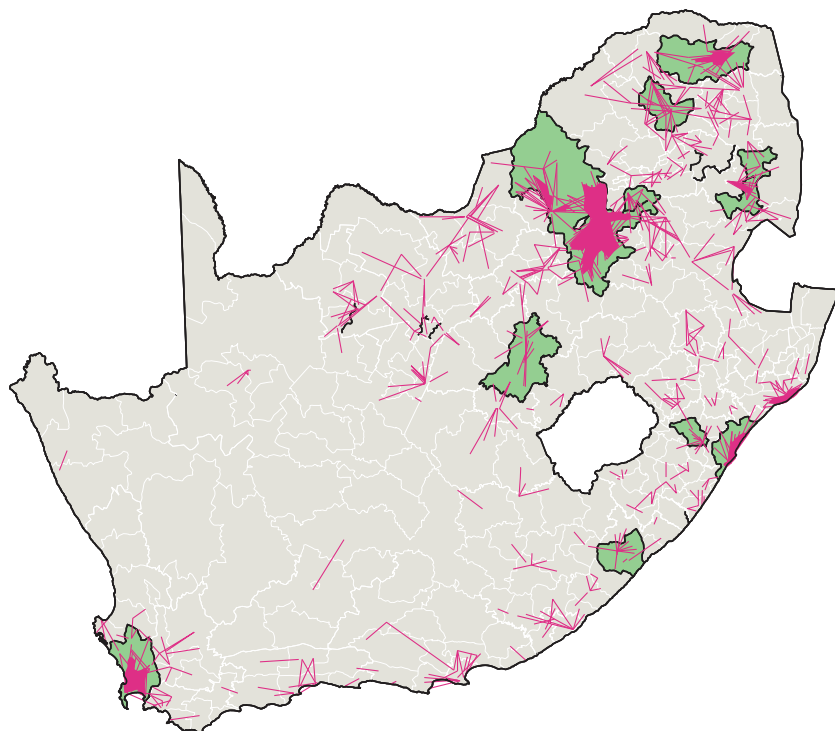


Figure 1: Short distance commuting

SOURCE: Based on Krygsman et al. 2009



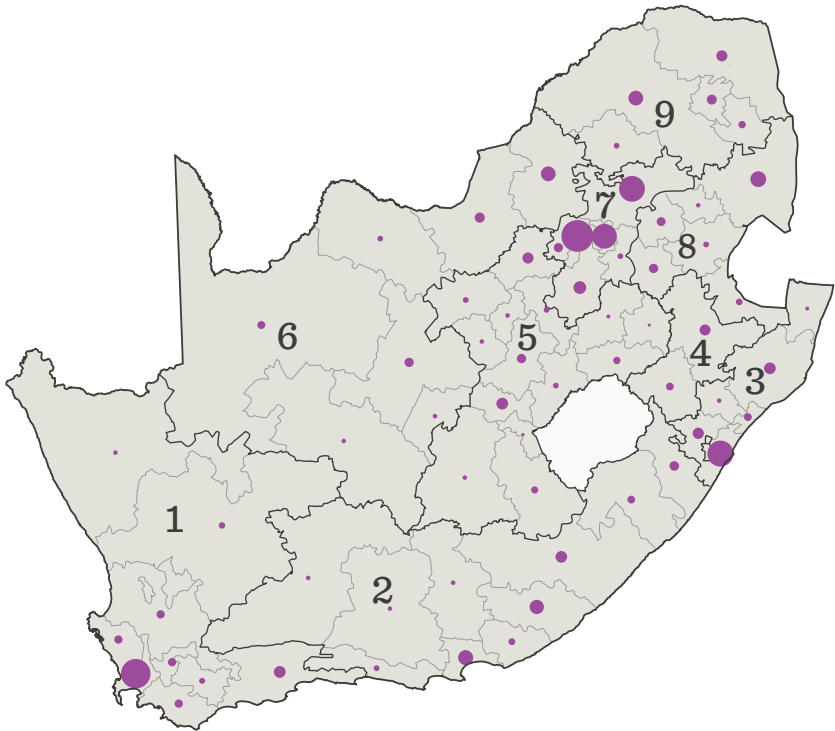
Legend

- Municipal boundaries
- Short distance travel between main places
- Functional commuter areas representing 80% of total intra-zonal interaction

Nel et al. (2008) go so far as to redraw South Africa with provincial boundaries corresponding to these local labour markets. It is clear from their results, shown in Figure 2, that their “Gauteng City-Region” only somewhat corresponds to the existing boundaries of the actual Gauteng Province, extending to the north, north-east, and south-west beyond Gauteng’s provincial boundaries.

Figure 2: Provincial boundaries corresponding to commuter functional regions

SOURCE: Based on Nel et al. 2008



Legend

- Proposed provinces based on commuter functional regions
- Relative size of the intrazonal interaction per functional region

In the words of Krygsman et al., one purpose of such exercises is “to demonstrate how functional regions differ from administrative regions (which are more than likely demarcated in terms of political or ideological philosophy)” (2009, p. 134). This is necessarily true as discussed, but does not go far enough: one functional region may also differ from another functional region.

Commuter flows and their corresponding labour markets are certainly a major factor of regional interconnectedness; but they represent at most one factor, and a holistic understanding of a city-region requires a broader view. Governance of a city-region entails governance of a number of matters, of which people and their short-term movements is just one.

For example, measuring short-term commuter flows only captures part of the picture of South African labour markets. Due to “social networks, cultural acceptance, transport systems” (Collinson, Tollman, & Kahn, 2007, p. 82) whose origins lie in the apartheid labour system, circular labour migration (that is, migration that is cyclical rather than permanent) has persisted as a major pattern of people-flow since the end of formal apartheid (Posel, 2004). Furthermore circular migrants (unlike permanent migrants) are more likely to come from distant rural areas than from nearby (Collinson et al., 2007). This implies that the labour market of the Gauteng City-Region is unlikely to be entirely defined by short-term commuter flows, and that the functional region defined by the broader labour market is large, and largely unknown, due to the difficulties of generating reliable data on the scale and nature of circular migration.

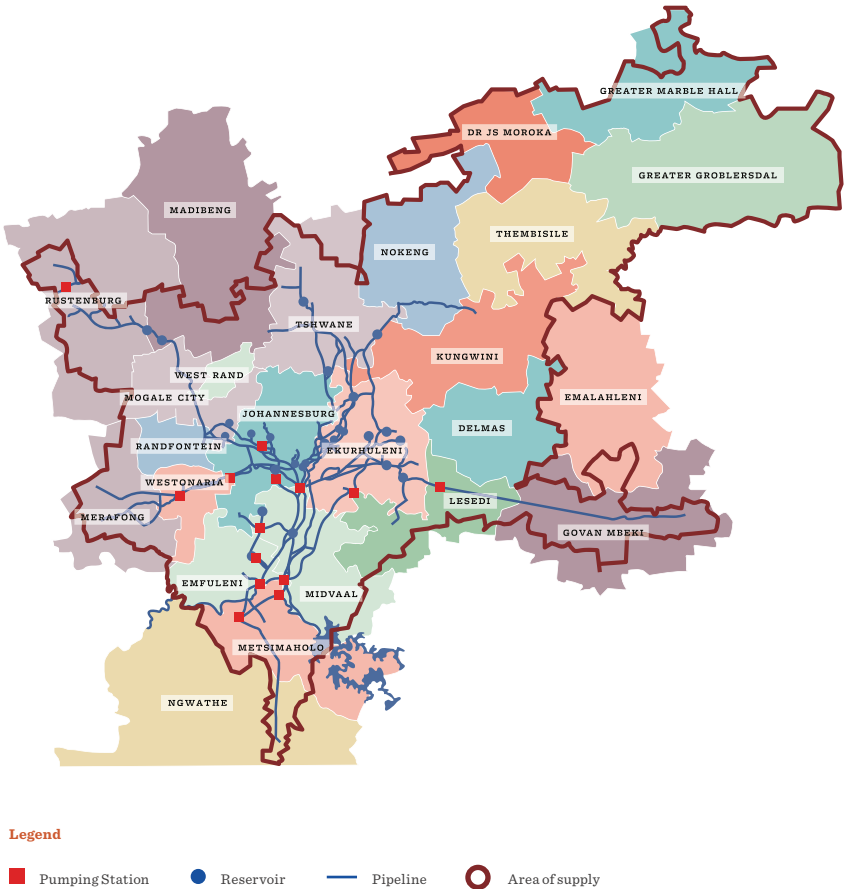
Another example will demonstrate that we need to look beyond labour markets entirely. Figure 3 shows the area of supply for Rand Water, which governs the water supply of Gauteng and some surrounding areas. This is the functional region of Gauteng with respect to piped water distribution. As for where the water actually comes from, Rand Water (and hence Gauteng) receives significant water transfers—far above its own capacity for supply—from the Tugela and Orange Rivers, and the Lesotho Highlands (Haarhoff & Tempelhoff, 2007), the catchments of which cover a fair portion of the country. Thus the functional region of Gauteng with respect to the metabolic flow of water is larger still than that of piped water. And that is before we consider the runoffs and other outflows of water from the city-region.

It should not surprise us that the administrative boundaries of Gauteng Province imperfectly (if that) define the functional city-region of Gauteng. The province itself is only one of a succession of iterative attempts to administer a changing, growing conurbation over the course of nearly a century.

“...we need to look beyond labour markets entirely.”

Figure 3: Rand Water’s area of supply

SOURCE: Based on Rand Water 2006 in Ncube, Vuyi, & du Preez, 2012



The city-region before Gauteng¹

Although the Witwatersrand was heavily settled by the turn of the 20th century—“in fact like one great township” (Transvaal Colony quoted in Parnell & Mabin, 1995)—Johannesburg itself was only formally established in 1904. Whereas other settlements such as Pretoria, Heidelberg, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg, and Vereeniging had been founded over the course of the 19th century, this meant that the establishment of municipal government in Johannesburg actually *followed* the establishment of regional government, in the form of the Rand Water Board (1902). This body brought together “nascent municipalities from the Vaal River to Pretoria as well as gold mine companies, and was responsible for planning and managing water supply across the region” (Mabin, 2013, p. 7).

Mabin (2013) credits the proximity of administrative power in Pretoria, economic potential in the gold reef, and a source of water in the Vaal River with the emergence of regional thinking in the form of the Rand Water Board. We can go further than this: it is the combination of proximity and distance that led to this proto-Gauteng. Proximity led to dramatic urbanisation, primarily through economic opportunity, and enabled it with a supply of water. But it is the distance between these three factors—60km between the main gold reef and each of Pretoria and the Vaal—that necessitated a *regional*, rather than *municipal*, administrative solution.



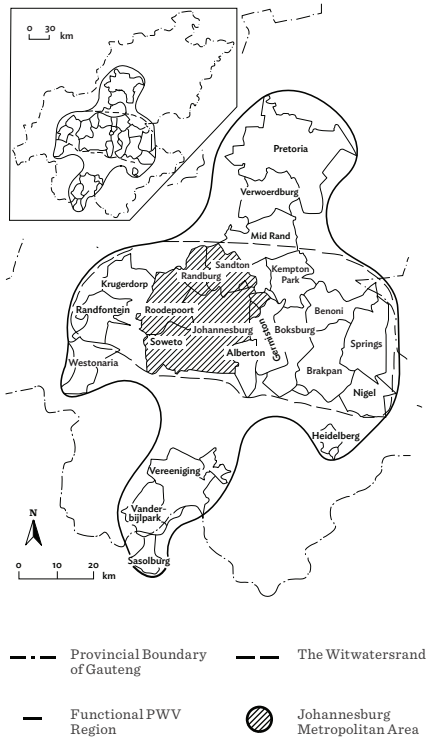
1. This section draws extensively on Mabin (2013).

Further city-region governance took some decades to appear in discourse and institutions, but by 1933 ‘regionalism’ was being specifically name-checked by the Administrator of the Transvaal, and the Witwatersrand and Pretoria Joint Town Planning Committee established to plan the region encompassing Pretoria, the Witwatersrand, and Vereeniging. From the 1950s the region was increasingly fixed, both conceptually and institutionally, starting with the influential *Planning Survey of the Southern Transvaal: the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging Area* (NRDC, 1957), following which the National Resources Development Council (NRDC) was proclaimed as the region’s planning authority—albeit with no way to enforce its decisions. This document coined the name ‘PWV’, the progenitor of the Gauteng City-Region, and was “the first major document seeking to understand and plan” the region (Mabin, 2013, p. 18). The cruciform shape of the PWV remains visible to this day in patterns of development, although it is increasingly diamond-shaped due to infill (and already was in 1957) (NRDC, 1957).



Figure 4:
Gauteng, the Witwatersrand,
and the PWV

SOURCE: Beavon, 1997



The same area today

SOURCE: Bobbins and Ballard, 2015



The city-region was further entrenched—spatially and in policy—with the construction of highways in the 1960s and 1970s, based increasingly on an explicit understanding of a city-region or ‘megapolis’ (Urban and Regional Research Unit, 1973). From the early 1970s this was directed by the PWV Consortium, a group of private consultants of remarkable power, who used road planning to shape the Gauteng City-Region into a form that it largely keeps to this day. Meanwhile the concept of the PWV was mobilised by other actors, most notably the Urban Foundation and Planact. Planact in particular advanced an influential analysis of the interconnectedness of the region’s urban settlements historically divided by apartheid, and many of its members later joined various state bureaucracies at either municipal or provincial levels (PARI, 2013). In the early 1990s the Central Witwatersrand Metropolitan Chamber convened a PWV Forum, which brought together various organisations both in and out of government to coordinate spatial planning for the city-region. In this way the concept of a city-region, in the form of the PWV, was actively and influentially mobilised in relation to the area that is now Gauteng in the early years of democratic government.

The present administrative division of South Africa into nine provinces is largely the result of the Commission on the Demarcation/Delimitation of States, Provinces and Regions, which functioned as part of the constitutional negotiations leading up to democratic rule. Although there was contestation on what criteria would be used to determine provincial boundaries, the Commission ultimately settled on the nine ‘development regions’ delineated by the apartheid government in 1981. These development regions were simply functional regions, defined by “the contours of emergent labour supply and demand areas which have become interconnected” by the various mechanisms of apartheid spatial planning (Cobbett, Glaser, Hindson, & Swilling, 1985, p. 101). ‘Region H’ was largely coextensive with the PWV although, based as it was on a more recent analysis of the functional region, it included areas not hitherto considered part of the PWV.

It is clear that there is a consistent pattern: over the history of the area that is now Gauteng, region-wide functional connections have emerged, followed sooner or later by administrative recognition and—to a greater or lesser degree—institutionalisation. Expansion of the functional region results in stepwise recognition and institutionalisation. In this way, the settlements became cities, were joined together by the Rand Water Board, then the PWV, then Region H, which was institutionalised (give or take) as Gauteng in 1994—although the name was only granted in 1995.



Photograph by Clive Hassall

The invention of the City-Region

It is significant that the city-region was institutionalised in the new constitutional order as a province rather than as a municipality, or as some sort of hybrid. Gauteng is by far the smallest of South Africa's provinces, the only one with a claim to city-region-hood, and has at its disposal the same set of powers, functions, and generic mandates as much larger provinces.

It is not that the functions available to the institutions of the city-region are inadequate for the governance of the city-region as such: it is that they are split between a generic provincial structure and generic municipal structures, each with its own electoral base, domestic and internal politics, and bureaucracy. The division of functions is justifiable on its own terms, as is the argument for coherence, rationalisation, or hierarchy.

It is in this context that we must understand the provincial government's deployment, starting in the 2000s, of the 'Gauteng City-Region' as a standalone concept, distinct (in some way) from the province of Gauteng. This was first systematised in the form of the 'GCR Perspective' (Gauteng Provincial Government, 2006), a document intended to clarify and formalise the province's understanding of, and aspirations regarding, the Gauteng City-Region. The eponymous perspective was—in short—that a) the metropolitan municipalities of Johannesburg, Tshwane, and Ekurhuleni, and the neighbouring urban municipalities of Mogale City and Emfuleni comprise a functional city-region, and that b) the Gauteng City-Region, so comprised, should be governed in a cooperative manner, "guided by common vision and purpose" (Gauteng Provincial Government, 2006, fig. 8), and institutionalised as necessary.

Table 1: Constitutional assignment of government functions in South Africa**SOURCE:** OECD, 2011

	National	Provincial	Local government	
Spatial planning	Regulation	Regional planning and development	Regional planning	Local planning and development control
Economic development	Macroeconomic policy	Industrial policy and promotion, regional economic planning	District tourism: promote economic development of community	Local tourism: promote economic development of community
Environment	Regulation	Planning and regulation	Environmental enforcement	
Transport	National roads, rail, major ports	Provincial roads and traffic, public transport	District roads, municipal public transport	Local roads, municipal public transport
Water	Bulk/dams			Bulk and reticulation, limited to potable water supply systems
Waste management	Regulation			Sanitation, limited to domestic wastewater and sewage disposal systems, stormwater, refuse and solid waste disposal, cleansing.
Public safety	Policing	Policing oversight and traffic management		Metro policing, traffic management
Housing	Regulation	Implementation and policy		Implementation
Education	Tertiary	Primary and secondary		Early childhood development
Health	Regulation	Tertiary, secondary and primary	Municipal health	Municipal health

The ‘GCR Perspective’ was significant firstly for setting an agenda that continues to inform provincial policy and thinking; and secondly for introducing both certain ambiguities that have been retained and certain clarity that has fallen by the wayside. A key example of lasting ambiguity is whether the ‘Gauteng Global City-Region’² is a description of what *is* or what *could be*. Another is the relationship between the envisaged city-region institutions and the provincial government. A key instance of the document’s clarity, which has subsequently not held fast, is that it definitively identifies the Gauteng City-Region as the area described in the previous paragraph and no more. It relegates the broader functional area—the rest of the province including local municipalities Rand West City, Merapong, Midvaal and Lesedi—to a set of “economic linkages” (Gauteng Provincial Government, 2006, p. 18) with the city-region: economic linkages that it compares to those with eThekweni!

Soon after the GCR Perspective was published, a GCR Roadmap was formulated by the Office of the Premier in the Gauteng Provincial Government. This identified 11 ‘strategic pathways’ towards a Gauteng City-Region, of which ‘Strategic Pathway 5’ was “Improved coordination, collective decision making, and resource sharing across departments and spheres of government” (Gauteng Provincial Government, 2009, p. 7). Strategic Pathway 5 argued that “as GCR strategies and operations emerge, either through blending of existing provincial and municipal strategies or through integrating the operations of provincial and municipal structures, inter-sphere structures will be needed to promote collective action” (ibid.). Subsequent planning documents and communications have broadly reaffirmed the need for greater alignment, integration, and ultimately institutionalisation. A 2016 round of workshops organised by the Office of the Premier entitled ‘Institutionalisation of the Gauteng City Region (GCR)’ may, rightly or wrongly, have given the impression that creating new institutions is the focus of major attention. Several institutions have already been created by the provincial government, ostensibly as part of the ‘GCR’ agenda. This includes the Gauteng Infrastructure Coordinating Committee (2014), the Gauteng Transport Commission (2013), the Gauteng Growth and Development Agency (2012), and even the Gauteng City-Region Observatory (2008) itself. While each engages with or involves local government in various ways, each institution is in some way a new provincial institution and reports to, is led by, or has been designed to assist provincial government fulfil its ‘city-region’ agenda.

“...planning documents and communications have broadly reaffirmed the need for greater alignment, integration, and ultimately institutionalisation.”

2. A term introduced in the very first sentence of the document, which never clarifies whether the ‘G’ in ‘GCR’ refers to ‘Gauteng’ or ‘Global’.

Institutionalising the GCR

There are two simple conclusions to be reached with regard to the prospects for institutionalisation of the Gauteng City-Region, each of which is articulated by the GCR Perspective (and its subsequent iterations), and each of which is—regrettably—complicated enormously by its details.

First, there is certainly something usefully called a city-region that is centred around the metropolitan area at the centre of Gauteng. This is complicated by the fact that there is not one but many city-regions, each defined by one or another functional domain. This is not an abstract ontological point but rather is absolutely critical: that which requires governance is not a set of functions within a territory, in the manner of a municipality or a province. What requires governance is a set of functions *each of which has its own territory*, and each of which requires governance at its own appropriate scale. The inextricable complexity of overlap, inter-relation, and change in these functions is in turn an irreducible complexity of city-region governance.

Second, there is a strong *prima facie* case for governing as a city-region per se, and for a certain measure of institutionalisation of that governance. The problem is that this is only uncontroversial because it is so vague: the introduction of any level of detail enormously complicates the question. In other words, institutionalising the Gauteng City-Region is all well and good, but *whose* functions are going to be institutionalised, in service of *whose* agenda, and *who* exercises control?

Electoral incentives

It was mentioned briefly above that Gauteng province and the individual municipalities within it each has its own electoral base. Any claim that Johannesburg, for example, should share control of its transport system and transport budget with Ekurhuleni, is a claim that it should allocate resources to a polity—the voters of Ekurhuleni, to whom the municipality of Ekurhuleni is accountable—who are irrelevant to its electoral prospects. Similarly, any claim that a municipality should cede control to a provincial authority, who may be accountable to the voters of that municipality but less directly so than the municipality itself, is a claim that that it should cede control to a polity other than itself. In other words, Johannesburg faces strong electoral incentives to spend financial and political resources within its own borders, and faces opportunity costs to spending them elsewhere. There is a legal basis for sharing of functions and associated resources across municipal boundaries, such as provisions in the Municipal Systems Act (Act 44 of 2003) for multi-jurisdictional service utilities; but these have never been used.

To be sure, the electoral base of the Gauteng Provincial Government encompasses the municipalities within it, and it does not face the same trade-offs (although it does when it comes to functions that straddle its external borders). However, as we have established, the borders of Gauteng are an extremely imperfect approximation of the Gauteng City-Region—or any given functional area understood as the Gauteng City-Region—and therefore its electoral incentives correspond similarly imperfectly to the interests of the city-region. As a simple example, the Gauteng Provincial Government has a stronger direct electoral interest in integrated transport across the metropolitan region— but it also has an incentive to extend an integrated transport network further than may be optimal (particularly for the municipalities tasked with its implementation), because the marginal electoral benefit to the Province of putting Orange Farm on the Rea Vaya network might outweigh the resources needed to do so. Another example: a municipality has to balance the benefit of a new housing development with the cost of servicing such new developments; it may draw an urban edge at the point where it judges the marginal cost to exceed the marginal benefit. The provincial government, for whom there is no marginal cost to additional development, might be tempted to draw the urban edge considerably further away. This is one way of seeing the conflict between Gauteng and its metros over ‘mega human settlements’, which satisfy the electoral incentives of Gauteng to house as many people as possible, but which also directly countervail against the ability (and need) of municipalities to manage their spatial form.

Of course, political authorities do not mechanistically serve their respective electorates; their behaviour is moderated through ideologies, political allegiances, and the idiosyncrasies of individuals. However the analysis extends to contestations over how political authorities understand their mandates: whereas ‘intergovernmental co-operation’ is an uncontroversial good, attempts to implement ‘co-operation’ on its own terms are likely to fall flat—as indeed they often have in Gauteng—unless the organisations one wishes would cooperate come to understand their institutional interests as lying in cooperation.



Photograph by Clive Hassall

Political vagueness

Proponents of the Gauteng City-Region have an answer to this, and it is clearly articulated in the GCR Perspective. In essence, it is that this is not a zero-sum game; by cooperating, the various institutions responsible for governing the GCR will deliver greater benefits to their electorates (and whatever else is driving their mandates) than would otherwise be possible.

While ultimately an empirical question, this is a reasonable case to make, and very much in line with international thinking around competitive regionalism. However, what is reasonable or uncontroversial in the abstract—cooperation will be good for everyone—may or may not turn out to be the case in the particulars, and on any given issue. If the total pooling of functions—the ultimate ‘cooperation’—were an unalloyed good then there would be no justification for the continued existence of municipalities, as all functions should be managed at a city-region or provincial level. The burden of proof is on those calling for cooperation: to show that *in this case*, for this function of city-region governance, there is a benefit to be derived from cooperation between these institutions, and that the value of that benefit exceeds the value of the institutions continuing to act independently in their own self-interest. This burden of proof can be articulated as the principle of subsidiarity, which is well-founded in South African constitutional law, and which “constrains any more encompassing or superordinate institution (or body or community) to refrain from taking for its account matters which a more particular, subordinate institution (or body or community) can appropriately dispose of” (du Plessis, 2006, pp. 209–210). Notably, the constitutional principle of subsidiarity is justified partly by concerns of functionality, comprising both efficiency and effectiveness (de Visser, 2010).

“The burden of proof is on those calling for cooperation”

Proponents of institutionalising the Gauteng City-Region have seldom if ever accepted this burden of proof. The result is that the precise degree and nature of cooperation under proposal is perpetually indeterminate. Indeterminacy of policy can be a virtue, a “typical and indispensable aspect of political thinking among decision-making elites, especially if in a particular instance the requirement to generate support overrides the requirement for authoritative semantic pronouncements” (Freeden, 2005). However indeterminacy can also cut the other way: lack of policy detail can alienate those concerned that the withheld detail would work against their own agendas, or those who simply distrust the policy’s proponents.

Calls for ‘co-operation’ in the Gauteng City-Region certainly suffer at least somewhat from the costs of indeterminacy. The municipalities have the most expansive mandate for delivery of the goods of government, risk the most electorally in the event of non-delivery, and are accordingly wary of a policy proposal the details of which remain ill-defined. Even more so when the calls are not for ‘co-operation’ but for ‘institutionalisation’, which—in light of a municipality’s wariness—are at best jumping the gun, and at worst expose that those proposing it lack faith in their claim that city-region governance could be genuinely positive-sum. It would rather seem that institutions are deployed in order to compel those partners who cannot be convinced.



Photograph by Clive Hassall

Too united vertically, too disunited horizontally

Another argument supporting those who may be hesitant is the question of *scale*. Catch-all city-region institutions may shift functions vertically to a more appropriate scale, but if we take seriously the above argument that every function has a different functional area—a different city-region—then moving sets of functions into a single city-region institution is likely to solve problems of appropriate scale only partly if at all. And if every function got its own city-region institution, the result would be an enormous proliferation of state organisations, the governance of which would be a severe challenge. The economies of scale that could accrue to city-region institutions would be partly or wholly undone by the costs (in money and capacity) involved in managing those city-region institutions. A municipality in particular risks finding itself in the worst of all worlds: losing effective control over a function or area of policy, at a similar or greater cost than before. This is in some sense an overly-rigid intergovernmental arrangement, that diminishes the autonomy of the participant organisations.

At the same time, there is arguably too much horizontal autonomy within any given level of government. The logic of transit-oriented development (TOD), increasingly adopted by metros on their own steam as well as under inducement from national government, requires ever-closer integration of functions within a municipality, in the service of a single spatial vision. The same arguments apply to integration between provincial departments and functions, but have had less observable effect. The result is that shifting functions or policy vertically out of municipalities is likely to also result in them being shifted away from the other functions of the municipality—or at least to countervail against municipalities' attempts to integrate crucial spatial functions. A closely related issue is the possibility of intergovernmental agenda mismatch: city-region transport integration is a good idea in the abstract, but if the City of Tshwane is trying to use public transport to concentrate development in particular centrally-located nodes while the Gauteng provincial government is trying to use transport systems to make distant mega human settlements viable, then the conflict between their agendas cannot be 'co-operated' away.

Goals in governing the Gauteng City-Region

The challenge of governing the GCR is partly one of pursuing a number of different goals. One such goal is orderly alignment of policy and implementation vertically among different spheres of governance. However, the Constitution rules out the subordination of one sphere to another, and jealously guards the relatively independent decision-making power of each sphere. Thus, alignment must always be contingent on separate democratically-elected structures serving different constituencies, with correspondingly varying mandates.

Another goal is the orderly alignment of policy and implementation horizontally among departments and agencies of any given sphere of government. However, the complex and interconnected nature of government functions, and increasing political recognition of that interconnection, means that short of subsuming all line departments into the office of the Mayor/Premier/President—a problematic proposal in itself—there is no way in practice, nor possibly even in principle, to prevent issue areas and line functions from being spread across the mandates of a number of departments, each with their own bureaucracies, institutional interests, mandates, and incentive structures.



Photograph by Clive Hassall

A third goal is the orderly alignment of policy between bureaucracies whose mandates are adjacent not only in function but in space: neighbouring municipalities or provinces, for example, whose borders partition otherwise cohesive settlements or areas of activity. An emergent goal of these first three goals, therefore, is the effective coordination of activity within bureaucracies and between spheres of government.

Finally, there is another goal, one which requires more attention than it could be given in this paper: that of coordinating, managing, and mediating between the myriad of nongovernmental actors who are obvious partners in the governance of the GCR.

Where does that leave the project, and the challenge, of governing the GCR? This Provocation has sought to unpick the problem so that it might be better understood, rather than provide a definitive set of answers. This piece headlines a series of Provocations to come, offering deeper analysis of different facets of the issue. They will suggest directions that might be followed. Of course, even so, these Provocations will not dispense with the foundational and irreducible problems of governing a city-region that we have identified here; these problems are large, complex, contested, and not liable to be “solved” so much as muddled through. But it is our hope that taken together these pieces will begin to show the outlines of the task of steering the future fortunes of the Gauteng City-Region.



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GAUTENG CITY-REGION OBSERVATORY

6th Floor University Corner
11 Jorissen St (Cnr Jorissen and Jan Smuts)
Braamfontein
Johannesburg
Gauteng
South Africa

tel +27 11 717 7280
email info@gcro.ac.za

