

Spatial Economic Attributes of O. R. Tambo Airport, South Africa

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Abstract : Across the world, different planning models of the so-called airport-led developments are becoming bandwagons hailed as key to the future of cities. However, in the existing knowledge, there is paucity of empirically informed description and explanation of the economic fundamentals driving the forces of attraction of airports. This void is arguably a result of the absence of an appropriate theoretical framework to guide the analyses. Given this paucity, the aim of the paper is to contribute towards a theoretical framework that could be used to describe and explain forces that drive the location and mix of airport-centric developments. Towards achieving this aim, the objectives of the paper are: one, to establish the type of economic activities that are located on and around O.R. Tambo International Airport (ORTIA), and analyse the reasons for locating there; two, to establish changes that have occurred over time in the form of the airport-centric development of ORTIA; three, to identify the propulsive economic qualities of ORTIA; four, to analyse the spatial, economic and structural linkages within the airport-centric development of ORTIA, between the airport-centric development and the airport, as well as the airport-centric development's linkages with their metropolitan area and other regional, national and international airport-centric developments and locations. To address the objectives above, the study adopted a case study approach, centred on ORTIA in South Africa: Africa's busiest airport in terms of passengers and airfreight handled. Using a lens of location theory, a survey was adopted as a main research method, wherein telephonic interviews were conducted with a representative number of firms on and around ORTIA. Other data collection methods encompassed in-depth qualitative interviews (to augment the information obtained through the survey) and analysis of secondary information, particularly as regards establishing changes that have occurred in the form of ORTIA and surrounds. From the empirical findings, ORTIA was discovered to have propulsive economic qualities that act as significant forces of attraction in the clustering of firms. Together with its airport-centric development, ORTIA was discovered to have growth pole properties because of the linkages that occur within the study area, and the linkages that exist between the airport-centric firms and the airport. It was noted that the transport-oriented firms (typified by couriers and freight carriers) act as anchors in some fellow airport-centric firms making use of elements of urbanisation economies, particularly as regards the use of the airport for airfreight services. The empirical findings presented in the paper (in conjunction with results from other airport-centric development case studies) could be used as contribution towards extending theory that describes and explains forces that drive the location and mix of airport-centric developments.

Keywords : airports, airport-centric development, O. R. Tambo international airport, South Africa

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