Abstract

English: There has been a worldwide resurgence of academic interest in semi-arid and desert regions and South Africa has proved no exception to this trend. The lion's share of South Africa's arid interior consists of the 400 000 square kilometres of the Karoo. The Karoo is divided up among four provincial administrations and is therefore very rarely treated as a coherent regional entity in its own right by the central government, whose National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) has accorded it marginal developmental potential. Inter-provincial co-operation has also proved to be the exception rather than the rule, and this has impacted upon the Karoo's ability to present itself as an attraction on a par with Australia's Outback, for example. Until the mid-1990s the Karoo had endured several decades of being written off as a desolate, boring wasteland fit for nothing but sheep-fanning. In the 1990s, however, several major trends converged which had the effect of completely transforming the Karoo in the 'social imaginary'. These trends were the opening up of the country to international market forces and influence, consequent upon the demise of apartheid; the international reappraisal of the value of desert regions with a concomitant surge in tourism flows; the onset and rapid adoption of mobile telephony coupled with e-mail and the internet; an international revisioning of the countryside which saw primary agriculture steadily supplanted by the trappings of rural postproductivism; and a property boom which reinvigorated rural housing markets which had been stagnant for decades. Against this backdrop, at the turn of the millennium, increasing numbers of scholars sensed the emergence of a new type of individual who seemed to have evolved with a new knowledge based economy made possible by huge advances in information technology. The one constant theme running through these identifications was the concept of 'creativity' and a high premium came to be placed on the contributions of this cohort to the knowledge economy. The social order in South Africa was profoundly shaken by the combined effect of these paradigmatic changes, arguably no segment more so than that of the white community. While several hundred thousand whites emigrated, a very much smaller number, no longer able to afford coastal properties, looked with new eyes upon the potentials of small town South Africa either as prospective incomers or as sites for investment in second homes. The socio-economic chemistry of many small towns in the Karoo experienced a complete overhaul as a result of an infusion of new blood from the conurbations. This statistically insignificant but economically 'savvy' constituency then used their networks and professional expertise to set in motion what can only be described as a renaissance of the Karoo. This thesis examines aspects of this phenomenon through a lens informed by Richard Florida's influential views concerning the rise of a 'creative class'. It describes the rejuvenation of certain towns by the infusion of new social and human capital and it has considered some of the consequences of this. In-migrants have identified a wide range of 'capitals' that have been lying dormant, rather like seeds waiting for moisture. This has seen the coming-to-market of a variety of creative offerings most especially in the tourism 'value chain'. Often assisted by skillful recourse to marketing networks and to 'lifestyle media', these incomers have wrought a seachange in the social imaginary pertaining to the Karoo. The overall positive effect of this burst of industry on these small towns is proving to be both enduring and profound.

Afrikaans: Wêreldwyd is daar onlangs 'n oplewing in akademiese belangstelling in semi-ariele streke en woestyne, en Suid-Afrika is geen uitsondering nie. Die grootste gedeelte van Suid-Afrika se droë binnelandse streek bestaan uit die Karoo, wat 400 000 vierkante kilometre beslaan. Die Karoo is gedeel tussen vier provinsiale administrasies, en is dus nooit beter as 'n enkele streeksentiteit 111 sy eie reg nie. Die sentrale regering se Nasionale Ruimtelelike Ontwikkelingsperspektief het dit bestempel as 'n streek met min ontwikkelingspotensiaal. Inter provinsiale samewerking is redelik raar, en dit het 'n regstreekse impak op die Karoo se kapasiteit om te toerisme te behartig, byvoorbeeld gelyk aan Australië se Outback. Tot die middel-1990s is die Karoo gewees as 'n verlate, vervelige land wat vir niks anders as skaapboerdery kan dien nie. In die 1990s het verskeie belangrike tendense begin plaasvind, wat die Karoo begin transformeer in die publieke denke. Hierdie tendensie was gegrond op die ontsluiting van Suid-Afrika vir internasionale markte en invloed, na die aftakeling van apartheid; die internasionale herbesinking oor die nut en waarde van woestynne, veral in die konteks van toerisme; die uitbreiding van mobiele telefoonnetwerke, saam met e-pos en die internet; en nuwe internasionale benadering tot die ontwikkeling van landelijke areas, met die aanvulling van landbou deur verskeie ander ekonomiese aktiwiteite; en 'n opswaai in die eiendomsmark wat landelijke behuising baie meer aantreklik gemaak het. Teen hierdie agtergrond, veral aan die begin van die nuwe ee, het baie meer navorsers begin besel dat 'n nuwe sosiale wese ontstaan het. 'N Nuwe kategorie mens het ontwikkel in pas met die kennis-gebaseerde ekonomie wat maanlik gemaak is deur die vinnige uitbreidings in inligtingstegnologie. 'N Konstante tema is die begrip van 'kreatiwiteit', en die belangrikheid van die kreatiewe bydrae van hierdie nuwe kategorie mense.
South Africa contains some of the oldest archaeological sites in Africa. Extensive fossil remains in Makapans Cave and other locations suggest that various australopithecines existed in South Africa from about three million years ago. These were succeeded by...