



**TOWARDS FUNCTIONAL CROSS-BORDER SPATIAL PLANNING: A
CASE STUDY OF SETSOTO LOCAL MUNICIPALITY IN THE FREE
STATE PROVINCE-LESOTHO BORDERLAND**

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

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Debrecen, 2025

Hereby I declare that I prepared this thesis within the Doctoral Council for Natural Sciences and Engineering, Doctoral School of Earth Sciences, University of Debrecen in order to obtain a PhD Degree in Natural Sciences/ Engineering at Debrecen University.
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PROVINCE-LESOTHO BORDERLAND**

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the doctoral (PhD) degree
in Earth Sciences

Written by Thato Lorraine Maila certified Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP)

Prepared in the framework of the Doctoral School of Earth Sciences of the University of Debrecen
(Human geography – regional development programme)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The political, economic, and cultural differences between adjacent border sites influence the daily lives of borderland communities, which in turn contribute to shaping the borderland itself. Borderlands function as spaces where central authority is asserted, and national identity is simultaneously constructed and contested (Zhurzhenko, 2012). Residents in borderland tell their side of the story of the state formation (Zeller, 2015), and the central state also has its administrative structures and forms of governance that enforce sovereignty and jurisdiction of borders (Diener and Hagen, 2012), which give meaning to the border spaces. The polarised views of borders between local people in borderlands and the national state raise conflicting ideals. The mandates of the national state often do not align with the needs of communities in border regions. For Passi (2022), various actors, including individuals and institutions like politicians, civil servants, and legislators, actively engage with borders, shaping their organisation, governance, and regulation in ways that often lead to conflicting aims. The intertwined relationship between society and the border affects their livelihoods, identities, and perceptions across various scales.

The extent and nature of interactions with the border shape differing perceptions of its significance. Häkli (2012) asserts that national government priorities differ considerably from those of borderland communities that interact daily with an environment marked by specific physical and social characteristics. Peña (2007) observed that there was a mismatch of priorities between different levels of government in cross-border planning at the U.S.-Mexico border, in which the local authorities were more concerned with issues of transport and urbanisation and less concerned with security, which are federal government priorities. Local governments lacked the authority to influence policy agendas at the national and state levels, leading to divergent perceptions of border issues and unaligned priorities. Peña (2007) concluded that cross-border planning should be viewed as a long-term process that requires ongoing collaboration and coordination between different actors and institutions. Thus, the discrepancies between the expectations of the locals and the practice of spatial planning in border regions are hard to ignore.

The mismatches of cross-border cooperation (CBC) priorities are even more complex in the European Union (EU) context. Although the EU CBC development projects have also been shown to have successfully integrated border regions, improved the member states' quality of life, and reduced economic deterioration (Castanho et al., 2018). Bürkner (2020) criticised the EU top-down integration and de-bordering policies for being detached from the everyday experiences of communities in border spaces. Bufon (2011) further points out that the local communities for which the INTERREG programmes are intended have 'no say' in decision-making processes. Instead, provincial, regional or central national authorities mostly make decisions for communities within whose territory 'Euroregions' are located. These, in turn, may create discontentment and resistance against a rationale of integrating and reuniting heterogeneous populations (Bufon, 2011). Durand and Decoville (2020) allude that inconsistent results in CBC in the EU have opened a concern about whether cooperating across borders has become an end goal rather than a means of solving common problems.

South African borderland communities face various challenges, including economic struggles, isolation, crime and clashes with migrants (Mamokhere and Chauke, 2020). Despite the grandiose national development initiatives, the day-to-day struggles in borderlands often go unnoticed in spatial planning and development initiatives. Moreover, planning practices are often confined within administrative boundaries, with limited consideration for spatial processes that extend beyond them (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016). This neglect forces border residents to contend with a complex web of issues arising directly from their proximity to international boundaries. The top-down development approach can exacerbate this plight by prioritising national cross-border regional development mandates such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) that may misalign with the local development vision of municipalities in border regions and neglecting the valuable input of border residents. Consequently, many cross-border development efforts often fall short of addressing the unique challenges of peripheral areas or meeting the needs of border residents. While certain initiatives in border regions may yield economic benefits at the national level, they may still fail to significantly enhance borderland communities' lives and remain largely detached from grassroots realities. For instance, the N4 Maputo Development Corridor (MDC) transport project connecting Pretoria in South Africa with

Maputo in Mozambique, was hailed as a triumph cross-border collaborative effort, yet Lundin and Söderbaum (2002) reveal that communities along the corridor, particularly in the precinct, were side-lined in decision-making processes, in fact, the MDC inadvertently escalated transport costs for affected communities, highlighting the unintended consequences of such endeavours. Jacobs (2016) sheds light on similar instances in the European context where initiatives like the Trans-European Networks (TEN-T) in which cross-border infrastructure development took place but overlooked the specific needs of border areas. Friedmann (1993) argues that while national and transnational planning is significant, greater emphasis should be placed on regional and local planning, as these spaces are integral to everyday life.

National government actors play a pivotal role in shaping spatial planning within cross-border regional development initiatives; however, they frequently overlook the day-to-day challenges encountered by borderland communities. Conversely, at the local government level, municipal actors often lack the capacity or resources to effectively address spatial planning challenges in these areas. Thus, this research argues that there are significant discrepancies in the priorities and approaches to spatial planning and development among state actors across the three spheres of government—local, provincial, and national—as well as between these actors and the community members residing in South Africa’s border regions. To investigate this, the research adopts a case study approach, focusing on the Setsoto Local Municipality (LM) border region, situated along the South Africa (Free State Province)-Lesotho border.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

Municipalities and border regions offer unique and valuable research opportunities due to their role as critical junctures where political agendas, institutional frameworks, and local development narratives converge and are shaped by the actions and decisions of multiple stakeholders (Jakola, 2019). Despite the vast body of literature on cross-border spatial planning (Durand, 2014; Frank et al., 2017; Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016), much of the research is predominantly Eurocentric, focusing on the European Union’s (EU) integration and development models (Korhonen et al., 2021). This concentration on Western experiences limits the understanding of spatial planning rhetoric in other parts of the world, particularly in post-colonial states like South Africa, where historical, social, and political conditions differ significantly from those in Europe.

There is a pressing gap in the literature regarding case studies outside the Western context, especially in Africa, where borders are often legacies of colonialism, and their governance is shaped by unique socio-political challenges (Lesaffre, 2020; Newman, 2011). As Peet and Hartwick (2015) argue, scholars from the Global South have long critiqued the uncritical adoption of Western ideologies in research, particularly in fields like spatial planning, where local realities are often overshadowed by imported models. Borders, being complex and multifaceted, demand context-specific approaches that account for the diverse historical and social fabrics of each region.

Moreover, Cappellano and Kurowska-Pysz (2020) suggest that future research should explore the roles of various stakeholders in cross-border regional planning, including local governments, non-governmental organisations, and community groups. This study is both timely and relevant as it examines existing practices and decision-making processes that shape spatial planning and development in border regions, with a particular focus on the tensions and alignments between different spheres of government. Additionally, it explores the lived experiences of border residents, providing insights into how spatial planning decisions impact their daily lives. The Setsoto LM serves as a compelling case for analysing the complexities of border planning and governance within the African context. By focusing on a border municipality, this research addresses a gap in the literature while highlighting the specific challenges faced by borderland communities in postcolonial states.

The research contributes to a deeper understanding of how local, provincial, and national actors navigate spatial planning and development complexities in border regions, negotiating the interplay between spatial planning policies and grassroots realities. It highlights the diversity of interests, motivations, and strategies that stakeholders employ to shape the development trajectories of border regions. By focusing on the South African side of the border it provides a nuanced, localised perspective on spatial planning challenges, offering insights that can inform more contextually relevant models of border region planning and governance in post-colonial settings.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

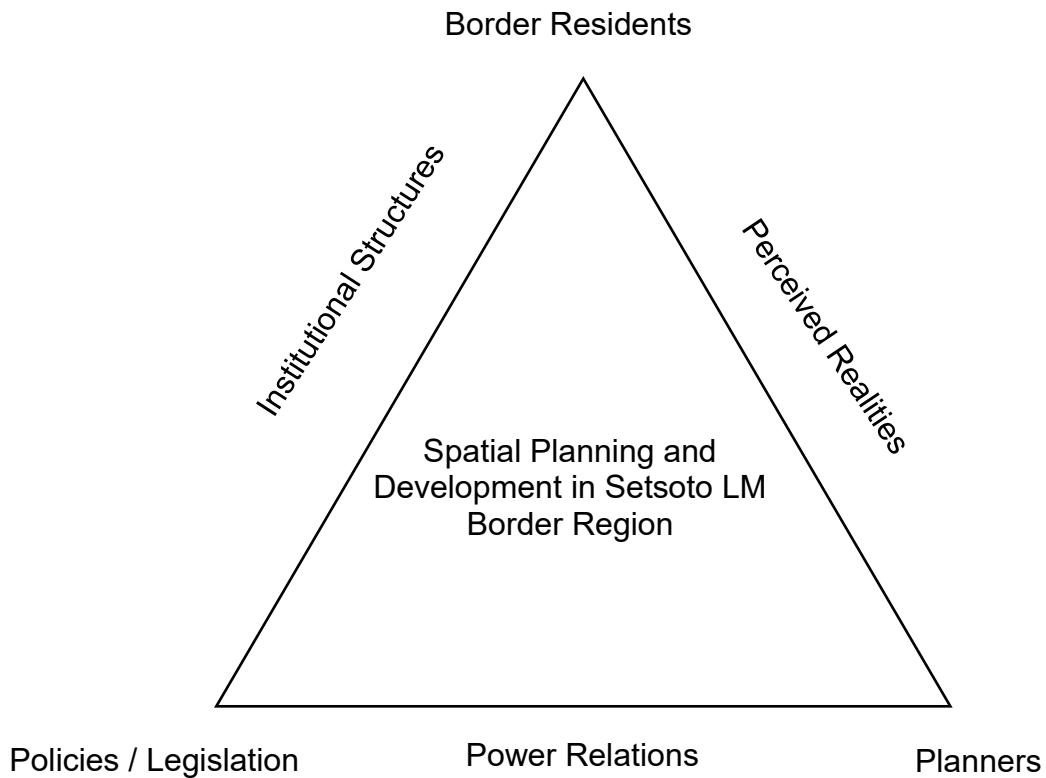
The aim of this research is to examine the lived experiences of communities and the roles of planners in different spheres of government (municipal, provincial, and national) in shaping spatial planning and development processes in Setsoto LM, a

cross-border region in South Africa. This research seeks to uncover the unique challenges and opportunities associated with spatial planning and planning in a border region and to propose strategies and policy recommendations that enhance community participation, improve governance, and support effective spatial planning and development in such contexts (Figure 1). The main research question:

How do the lived experiences of borderland communities and the collaborative practices of planners across different spheres of government shape spatial planning and development in Setsoto LM?

The following are the research objectives:

1. To document the perceptions and lived experiences of borderland residents in Setsoto LM and assess the implications for spatial planning and development.
2. To explore planners' perceptions of roles and engagement across the municipal, provincial, and national spheres in shaping spatial planning and development processes in Setsoto LM.
3. To analyse how current spatial planning and development practices address challenges and opportunities arising from the cross-border context in Setsoto LM.
4. To propose recommendations to enhance community participation, intergovernmental coordination and institutional capacity in border-region planning.

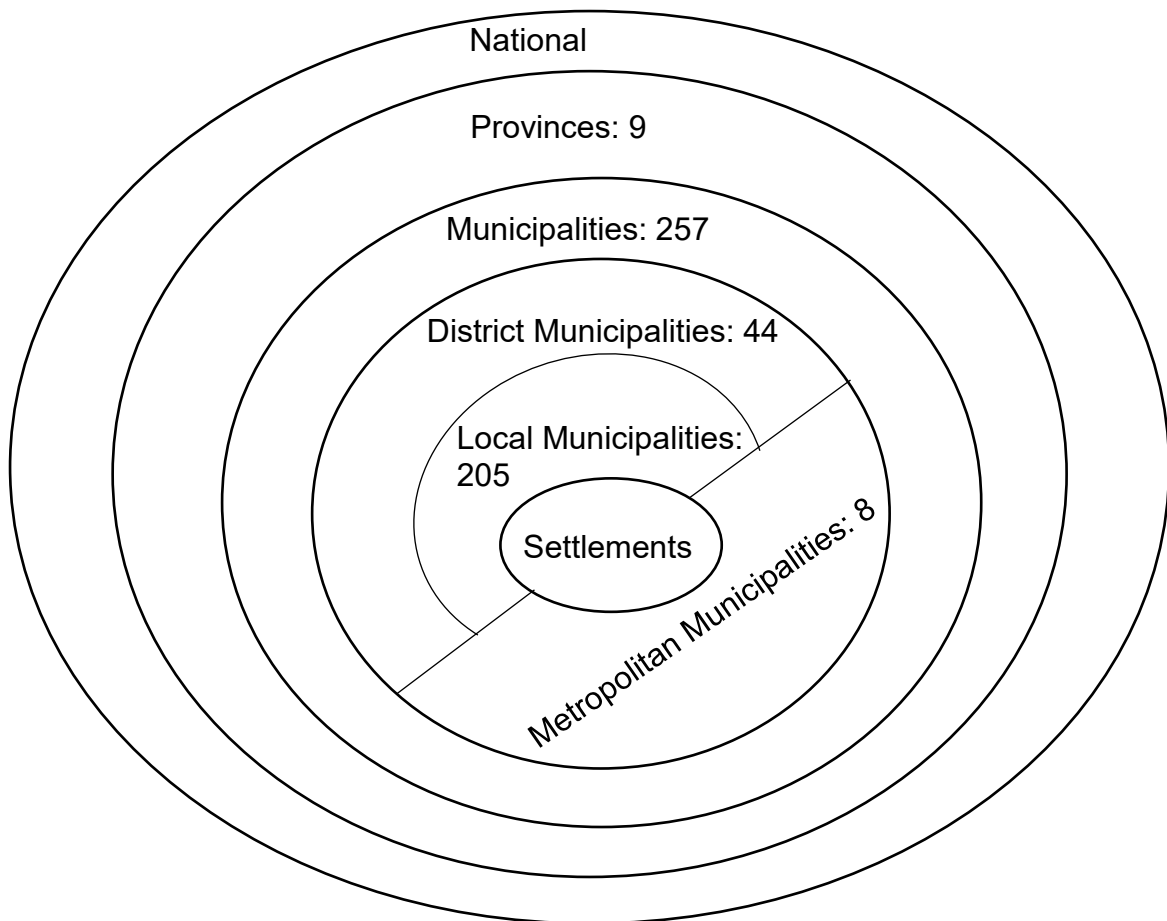


Source: Author's own

Figure 1: Simplified structure of the research aim and objectives.

1.4 Study Area

South Africa's administrative boundaries and governance structure are divided into three spheres: national, provincial, and municipal government (Figure 2). The country is divided into nine provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West, and Western Cape. As of August 2022, South Africa's total of 257 municipalities comprises eight metropolitan municipalities, 44 district municipalities, and 205 local municipalities (including Setsoto LM) (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2022). Metropolitan municipalities function independently, while local municipalities are managed under district municipalities.



Source: Author's own

Figure 2: Division of South Africa's administrative boundaries.

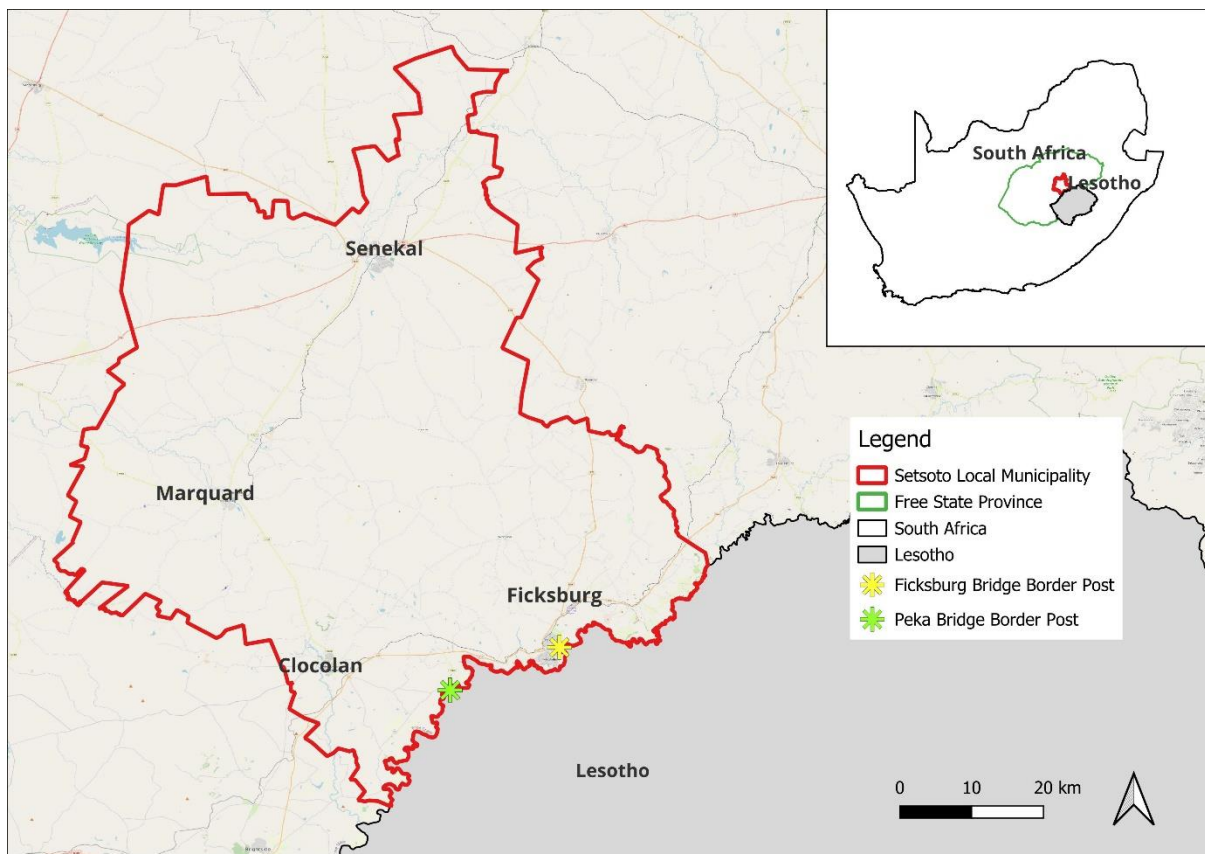
South Africa shares international land borders with Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and eSwatini, while Lesotho—the world's largest landlocked enclave country, shares a border with three South African provinces: Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape. The Free State-Lesotho boundary stretches 450 km (Steinberg, 2005), where six of the Free State municipalities line the border: Mokhotlong, Mantsopa, Setsoto, Dihlabeng, Maluti-a-Phofong, and Mangaung.

South Africa has 53 land border posts with its neighbouring countries, 19 of which are designated for commercial trade. The six busiest border posts for commercial traffic are (Cross-Border Road Transport Agency, 2023, p. 28):

1. Beitbridge border between South Africa and Zimbabwe;
2. Lebombo border between South Africa and Mozambique;
3. Maseru Bridge border between South Africa and Lesotho;

4. Ficksburg border between South Africa and Lesotho (in Setsoto LM);
5. Kopfontein border between South Africa and Botswana; and
6. Oshoek border between South Africa and eSwatini.

Setsoto LM presents an unparalleled context for examining cross-border spatial planning and development due to its unique geographic, economic, and historical attributes. It comprises four main towns: Ficksburg/Meqheleng/Caledon Park, Clocolan/Hlohlolwane, Senekal/Matwabeng, and Marquard/Moemaneng (Map 1).



Source: Author's own

Map 1: Setsoto LM study area locality.

This municipality lies along the South Africa-Lesotho border and includes two border posts: Peka Bridge and Ficksburg Bridge. The latter, as a commercial border, operates 24 hours a day and is the second busiest border post in the Free State Province, while Peka Bridge is open from 08:00 to 16:00. The high volume of commercial traffic through Ficksburg Bridge highlights its role in trade, labour migration, and social connections between South Africa and Lesotho, particularly with the neighbouring

town of Maputsoe. The concentrated flow of goods and people through these border posts enables a nuanced exploration of border dynamics and their implications for local planning and governance.

Setsoto LM bears the legacy of apartheid-era spatial planning, which entrenched socio-economic inequalities and marginalised border communities. Historically, the Basotho ethnic group, who now reside on either side separated by political boundary along the Caledon/Mohokare River, represent a once-unified cultural group. Thus, this region's socio-cultural and historical context also sheds light on issues of identity and belonging and also provides a unique opportunity to investigate postcolonial borders and apartheid spatial injustices that continue to shape contemporary planning, resource allocation, and development policies in the border region. Setsoto LM, as a case study for this research, draws on a site that encapsulates the complexities of a rare blend of cultural identity, geographic significance, historical depth, and policy relevance. This context allows for a nuanced understanding of how local communities' daily lives intersect with cross-border space and governance, highlighting the broader implications of spatial planning and development strategies in border regions.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research, providing an overview of the background specific to Setsoto LM and its border dynamics. It outlines the main research question, articulates the research objectives, and presents the rationale for the study. The chapter emphasises the significance of understanding cross-border interactions in the context of postcolonial settings and sets the stage for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature on border governance, spatial planning, and the socio-spatial realities of border communities. It examines key concepts and theoretical perspectives, such as Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, Michel Foucault's notion of power, and Edward Soja's third space. These frameworks are applied to understand the complex intersection between local, provincial, and national planning and governance in border regions. The chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for analysing the practices shaping spatial planning and development in Setsoto LM.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter details the research methodology employed in the study. It outlines the qualitative and quantitative approaches used to gather data, including participant selection criteria for interviews. The chapter describes the design of the data collection procedure tailored to capture participants' unique perspectives. Additionally, it explains the data analysis methods employed, such as thematic analysis, and discusses the ethical considerations taken into account during the research process.

Chapter 4: Synthesis of Findings and Discussion

Chapter 4 provides a detailed report on the findings of the research. It synthesises data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis, presenting key themes and patterns. The chapter discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical framework and research questions, offering critical insights into the challenges and opportunities of spatial planning and governance in Setsoto LM. It highlights the lived experiences of border communities, planners' perspectives, and the implications.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings and their implications for theory, policy, and practice. It revisits the research objectives, providing a cohesive response based on the evidence presented. The chapter offers practical recommendations for improving the border region's spatial planning, development and governance in Setsoto LM and South Africa as a whole. It also identifies areas for future research, contributing to the broader discourse on border planning and governance.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Borders and Borderlands

Borders and borderlands have often been underexplored in traditional planning debates, where the focus has been on territorial political units and state sovereignty (Jacobs, 2016; Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016). However, regions such as Setsoto LM, where national, provincial, and local governance intersect, require a more nuanced approach to spatial planning. These areas present complex spatial, political, social, and economic nexus that traditional planning frameworks fail to fully capture. This chapter engages with multidisciplinary perspectives from border studies and spatial planning theory to build a framework that examines the interaction between governance structures and communities in border regions, shaping spatial planning and development in Setsoto LM. By conceptualising borders as both social constructs and physical realities and recognising space as socially produced, this chapter provides a foundation for exploring the spatial planning challenges and opportunities in border regions within the context of current spatial practices.

Borders are not merely physical demarcations; they represent complex socio-political, economic, and cultural processes. Scholars from various disciplines have proposed diverse ways of understanding borders, yet there remains no consensus on their definition, as borders are inherently context-dependent (Newman, 2011; Paasi, 2011) and are influenced by historical developments, political decisions, and economic considerations, shaping the lives of people who live near them. In an attempt to describe and define borders, Diener and Hagen (2012) highlight borders as features that delineate the jurisdiction of states, affecting trade, migration, and the management of natural resources. Mechlinski (2010) adds that borders are socio-economic formations that reflect interactions between people, goods, and cultures across national lines. For Wastl-Walter (2011), borders are complex spatial and social phenomena, constantly evolving and shaped by the lived experiences of those who interact with them. Paasi (2005) furthers this understanding by describing borders as social and political constructs shaped by human agency, thus linking them to broader identity formation and power processes. These perspectives collectively illustrate that borders extend beyond mere physical boundaries; they are shaped by diverse social,

economic, political, and cultural forces and are closely connected to human experience and identity.

Moreover, the ambiguity of borders gives rise to the concept of *borderlands*—areas in close proximity to physical borders that serve as transition zones between countries (Newman, 2011). Rooted in Hansen’s work (1981), Zartman (2010) defines borderlands as “*sub-national areas whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary*”. The phenomenon of territorial bordering is not natural but rather socially constructed, with Diener and Hagen (2012) alluding that borders exist only insofar as they are perceived as meaningful by people. Thus, borders are integral to human experiences.

Border regions, shaped by their proximity to political boundaries, exhibit multifaceted characteristics that complicate conventional planning approaches. These areas are often distinguished by unique socio-economic conditions, cultural hybridity, and layered governance structures. Effectively addressing these challenges requires tailored planning strategies that account for both the material realities of borderland living and the symbolic significance of borders. In Setsoto LM, where the border context plays a defining role, spatial planning and development must navigate the profound impact of border-related constraints and opportunities.

2.1.1 Border as a Process

Conceptualising borders as processes offers a perspective that challenges state-centric approaches that perceive borders as static territorial demarcations, instead highlighting their continual (re)construction through legal, administrative, socio-political, and economic processes (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 1999). Van Houtum and Van Naerssen (2002) theorise borders through the interrelated processes of *bordering*, *ordering*, and *othering*, providing a lens to examine how borders function both as sites of state intervention and as spaces of everyday negotiation. These processes are particularly relevant to Setsoto LM, where the border serves as a spatial mechanism that simultaneously enables and constrains planning strategies, economic activities, and social relations.

Bordering refers to the ongoing institutional and discursive practices that legitimise, demarcate, and regulate borders. It extends beyond the mere drawing of boundary lines to encompass legal frameworks, security enforcement, and infrastructure

development that sustain territorial divisions (Scott, 2012). In Setsoto LM, bordering can materialise through the administrative actions of local, provincial, and national governments in regulating trade, security, and cross-border movement. The policy framework governing the South Africa-Lesotho border, including migration control and economic trade zones, reflects the state's attempt to exercise sovereignty through spatial interventions. However, the effectiveness of bordering is contingent upon enforcement capacity and local socio-economic realities. Weak institutional oversight, informal economic networks, and cross-border kinship ties often challenge state-imposed border regulations, illustrating the disjunction between formal governance and lived spatial practices (Wilson and Donnan, 2012).

Ordering involves structuring socio-spatial practices within bordered spaces, wherein governance mechanisms establish normative frameworks that regulate human mobility, economic transactions, and spatial development. This process is integral to the state's ability to control borderland regions, shaping both formal and informal spatial planning strategies (Brunet-Jailly, 2005). In Setsoto LM, ordering can manifest in local authorities enforcing spatial planning policies and developing border infrastructure. The prioritisation of certain spatial interventions reflects broader national imperatives, often disregarding the adaptive strategies of borderland communities. While state actors impose spatial ordering to maintain regulatory oversight, local populations engage in counter-ordering practices, such as informal trade, unregulated border crossings, and the repurposing of land (Lund, 2016). These contestations reveal the tensions between top-down spatial governance and grassroots spatial practices, highlighting the need for more context-specific planning approaches.

Othering refers to the discursive and material practices constructing borderlands as peripheral spaces, reinforcing distinctions between national cores and marginal frontiers. This process is deeply embedded in state narratives, wherein border regions are often framed as security risks, sites of economic vulnerability, or zones of administrative neglect (Paasi, 1999; Van Houtum, 2010). In the case of Setsoto LM, national and provincial governments may perceive the border as a geopolitical periphery, prioritising securitisation and economic regulation over local development needs. However, for those residing within the municipality, the border is not an intangible territorial limit but a central determinant of economic survival, social

networks, and cultural identity. The imposition of state-centric planning frameworks that disregard these lived realities risks exacerbating marginalisation, as seen in instances where restrictive border controls disrupt local livelihoods without offering viable economic alternatives (Flynn, 1997). Consequently, spatial planning in border regions must account for the socio-political complexities that shape local agencies, recognising that border communities actively navigate, resist, and appropriate imposed governance structures.

Outlining borders as ongoing processes reveal the inherent contradictions in planning and governance strategies that seek to regulate border spaces while underestimating the agency of local populations. Borders are not passive geographical markers but actively shape and are shaped by, institutional policies, economic flows, and community adaptations. Recognising this interplay is essential for developing spatial planning approaches that align with both state objectives and the socio-economic realities of borderland inhabitants.

2.1.2. Borders are both Real and Imagined

Borders represent complex spatial and social constructs that can manifest in both material and non-material forms. Physically, they may appear as barbed-wire fences, brick walls, gateways, or heavily armed personnel, categorising components of belonging and exclusion (Wastl-Walter, 2011). In contrast, non-material manifestations emerge through control and surveillance infrastructures in today's globalised world, where the movement of people, ideologies, and goods is constant. Although often invisible and diffuse, these borders extend beyond traditional physical barriers, functioning as more than mere boundary walls (Paasi, 2011). They serve as historical markers and symbols reflecting global, national, regional, and local relations shifts.

The late 20th century paved the way for the globalisation of borders alongside the rhetoric of a "borderless world", characterised by increasing interconnectedness, global trade, and the movement of goods, labour, and ideas. However, following the 9/11 terrorist attack in 2001, there was a pronounced shift towards securing borders, with a heightened emphasis on protecting against dangerous goods and individuals (Bates-Eamer and Hallgrímsdóttir, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, declared a global emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020, led to

widespread border closures and policies aimed at containing the virus, reigniting academic discussions on the intersection of borders and health threats. These historical shifts demonstrate that borders are not only outward-facing barriers but also internal mechanisms that regulate security, public health, and mobility, highlighting their fluid and adaptable nature in response to global crises and evolving threats. Understanding borders as dual entities encompassing physical and invisible dimensions is crucial because a one-sided approach overlooks the inherent dual complexities of borders, simultaneously real structures and imagined mental constructs.

Borders are inherently symbolic and embedded within social and historical contexts. While the bordering process of nation-states has traditionally been viewed as a political phenomenon characterised by power and demarcated by lines on a map, it is increasingly recognised as a social construct that permeates everyday life (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). Paasi (1996) argued that borders are increasingly understood as expressions of social and cultural practices, discourses, and identities rather than mere physical manifestations of territoriality and state sovereignty. In instances where borders were imposed on previously unified cultural landscapes, individuals on either side often maintain affinities with each other and, at times, even more than with the majority population of their own country, with whom they may lack a common religious, cultural, or linguistic past (Newman, 2011). Those living in borderlands, sharing common histories, tend to form distinct social structures that differentiate them from those outside these spaces, thereby creating boundaries (Paasi, 2009). Thus, the perspectives of individuals inhabiting border regions are profoundly influenced by their lived experiences, shaping their understanding of the border not merely as a geopolitical boundary but as a social construct embedded in everyday life.

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work conceptualises the border as a site of hybridity, where physical, cultural, and psychological boundaries intersect, describing the U.S.-Mexico border as a "1,950 mile-long open wound" a metaphor that captures the violence and division imposed by geopolitical boundaries while also highlighting the resilience and creativity of those who inhabit these spaces. For Anzaldúa (1987), the borderland is an "in-between" space where identities are fluid and constantly negotiated. This perspective challenges the notion of borders as fixed or static, instead framing them as lively spaces where multiple identities, languages, and cultures coexist and clash.

Similarly, Martínez (1994) demonstrates that border regions are often characterised by a unique blend of cooperation and tension as communities negotiate their shared histories and divergent political realities. Martínez's analysis reveals how borders function as both barriers and bridges, simultaneously dividing and connecting people (Martinez, 1994). This duality contributes to understanding the complex social fabric of borderlands, where the interplay of local, national, and global forces shapes the experiences of those who live there.

Furthermore, Paasi (1996) demonstrates that a socio-spatial consciousness is cultivated over generations through continuous social practices, fostering shared identities and traditions that distinguish one community from another, ultimately creating an "us" versus "them" affiliation. This consciousness is manifested through various mechanisms, including politics, administration, economics, cultural practices, discourses, and identities, extending beyond their physical manifestations. Notably, the significance of a border may persist even after its physical removal. Struver (2005) attests that a society's collective memory, expressed through self-identification, (re)produces borders. Consequently, borders are not confined to border areas; rather, they are embedded in broader social practices and discourses, permeating societies and global contexts (Paasi, 1996). The identity formation in border spaces is deeply rooted in daily life, both consciously and unconsciously (Struver, 2005). Therefore, borderlands are not merely peripheral spaces; they can also serve as central arenas where national identity is constructed, negotiated, and contested.

2.2 Space, Border and Planning

Engaging with space in planning is inherently complex, involving multiple layers of features, people, and functions that resist simplification (Hagens, 2016). The spatial turn of the late 20th century ushered in a heightened awareness of space, catalysing a shift in academic discourse. The ideas of critical thinkers (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986; Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1993; Soja, 1996) gained prominence, influencing both theory and practice. This period saw planning grappling with a paradigm shift—from an absolute conception of space to a relational one—as the interplay of social relations across space and time moved to the centre of inquiry. This transition marked a departure from the Newtonian view of space as fixed and measurable to an Einsteinian perspective, where space is dynamic and relational (Graham and Healey, 1999). The distinction between absolute and relational space is

evident in the conceptualisation of place: in the former, space and place are either synonymous or oppositional, whereas, in the latter, their relationship is dialectical (Davoudi, 2017, p. 18). It accelerated the transformation from the traditional static view of space and towards seeking to understand complex social structures in space. Hagens (2016) argues that a relational approach requires planners to accept that spaces consist of dynamic and connected arrangements with interactions of social, physical, political, and different spatial scales. A parallel evolution unfolded in border studies, where scholars sought to uncover the socio-spatial complexities inherent in bounded spaces (Newman and Paasi, 1998; 1996). Consequently, the reconceptualisation of space from an absolute to a relational perspective significantly influenced both spatial planning and border studies, fostering a deeper, more nuanced understanding of socio-spatial processes within and across borders.

2.2.1 Production of Border as a Space

Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist-based theorist, rejected the notion of space as an absolute entity (Lefebvre, 1991). Taking on the Marxian analysis approach to space but also departing from political economists who primarily reduced space to a means of production, Lefebvre argued that the production of space is inseparable from social relations and that both influence one another reciprocally. This approach emphasised the critical role of societal dynamics in the creation of space and advocated for a shift in focus from viewing space as a static entity to understanding its active processes of production (Gottdiener, 1997). Lefebvre sought to integrate three interrelated dimensions of space: the physical, the mental, and the social. This led to the introduction of the spatial triad, which comprises *perceived space* (spatial practices), *conceived space* (representations of space), and *lived space* (representational spaces) (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). Rather than concentrating solely on the physical arrangement of objects, Lefebvre emphasised the importance of spatial patterns of social action (Davoudi and Strange, 2009). Thus, socio-spatial relations are deeply embedded within the mode of production, functioning simultaneously as both creator and outcome, connection and object. These relationships operate in a dialectical way, resisting simplification into purely class-based or territorial issues (Gottdiener, 1997, p. 125). Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space offers a useful framework for analysing ways in which borders, like those within Setsoto LM, are conceptualised, perceived, and lived by different actors, which enables a deeper understanding of how

borders are produced through economic, political and social processes within spatial planning and development processes.

Perceived space (spatial practices), as conceptualised by Lefebvre (1991), refers to the ways in which space is actively produced, managed, and controlled through everyday practices. In the context of border regions, such as Setsoto LM, this concept provides a critical lens for understanding how state actors, including planners, enact spatial practices that reinforce state power, economic control, and national security. By examining the spatial practices of border management in Setsoto LM, this analysis reveals how these practices are not merely administrative or logistical but are deeply embedded in the reproduction of capitalist systems and the assertion of state authority.

Conceived space (representations of space) refers to the way planners and policymakers conceptualise and represent borders in official documents, including spatial plans and government policies (Lefebvre, 1991). At the national and, to some extent, provincial sphere of government, spatial planning can frame borders primarily as sites of economic and political significance, reinforcing state-centric perspectives that prioritise territorial integrity, economic corridors, and cross-border trade facilitation. This abstract representation tends to instrumentalise border spaces, reducing them to administrative and economic constructs while overlooking their complex social and cultural dimensions. Within Setsoto LM, planners engage with the border more directly due to their geographical proximity. However, their conceptualisation of the border within spatial plans may still be influenced by broader national policy frameworks and ideological paradigms that shape spatial governance. These influences can result in spatial policies that prioritise economic and political imperatives at the expense of localised social realities. Consequently, the border may be planned primarily as a regulatory and economic interface rather than a lived space with historically and socially embedded meanings for local communities. This reflects broader power relations in spatial planning, where national and provincial priorities often take precedence over municipal and community-level perspectives.

In contrast, *lived space* (representational spaces) refers to the everyday realities and spatial practices of individuals who inhabit and engage with the borderland (Pierce and Martin, 2015). In Setsoto LM, this entails examining how local communities experience, navigate and reinterpret the border in their daily lives. For these

communities, the border is not merely a state-imposed territorial demarcation but a socially embedded space that shapes and is shaped by their livelihoods, social relations, and cultural practices. In Lefebvrian terms, lived space is continually reconstituted through subjective experiences, often in ways that contradict or challenge the state's imposed representations of space (Gottdiener, 1997; Lefebvre, 1991). Residents of Setsoto LM may engage with the border in ways that contest official spatial imaginaries, producing alternative meanings and practices that do not align with state-driven policies and planning frameworks. These lived experiences expose the tensions between state-imposed spatial order and localised realities, illustrating the ways in which border communities reappropriate space in response to structural constraints.

The interplay between perceived, conceived, and lived space provides a critical lens for analysing how different actors engage with the border. Lefebvre (1991) argues that state interventions in space are not neutral but serve to maintain hegemonic structures of power. Borders, as state-produced spaces, often function as instruments of control, reinforcing socio-economic hierarchies and limiting the spatial agency of marginalised communities. This is evident in government policies prioritising economic imperatives, such as global market trade, while overlooking border communities' social and developmental needs. Within this context, it is essential to interrogate whether spatial production in the Setsoto LM border region reflects a convergence or divergence of interests between the state and local residents. Understanding these spatial contradictions provides insight into the contested nature of border governance and the extent to which communities assert agency within imposed spatial frameworks.

2.2.2 Space as a Foundation for the Exercise of Power

Power is a multifaceted concept that varies depending on underpinning assumptions and the socio-political context within which it is examined. Classical Marxist theory foregrounded the nature of class domination in capitalist societies, where power is intertwined with the ownership of the means of production and the resulting control over economic and political structures (Solo, 1978). Neo-Marxist critiques emerged to address these limitations by expanding the analysis to include the behaviour of the state and its role in reproducing social and spatial inequalities (Peet and Hartwick, 2015). Ralph Miliband's (1969) instrumentalist approach to power, which argues that a minority elite wields great influence over state institutions, contrasted sharply with

Nicos Poulantzas's (1973) structuralist view that sees the state as relatively autonomous and capable of mediating between various social groups and interests formed through divisions of labour (Jessop, 2008; Solo, 1978). Both instrumentalist and structuralist approaches share the assumption that power can be possessed, though they differ in their understanding of how it is exercised and maintained within societal and state structures.

Michel Foucault's (1982) post-structuralist critique marks a significant departure from instrumentalist and structuralist perspectives by redefining power as a relational, ubiquitous force that is produced and resisted through social practices. Rather than perceiving power as a static entity that resides within institutions or dominant classes, Foucault views it as dispersed throughout the social body, embedded in everyday interactions, and operative through diverse techniques of governance, such as surveillance, normalisation, and spatial planning (Rabinow, 2020). This conceptualisation of power is particularly relevant for examining the spatial practices of border regions like Setsoto LM, where state institutions enforce control through governance mechanisms, yet local communities actively negotiate, contest, and reshape these power relations in their everyday interactions.

2.2.2.1 Governmentality and Border Governance

The concept of governmentality, introduced by Michel Foucault (1991), provides a critical framework for understanding ways in which power is exercised in border regions through the regulation of space and populations. Governmentality refers to the complex ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections that allow for the exercise of power over populations in a way that is rationalised through discourses of governance, efficiency, and control (Foucault, 1991). It examines the intersection between discourse, knowledge, and power, highlighting that spatial plans, policies, and administrative practices produce specific spatial realities that serve broader political and economic objectives (Moisio and Luukkonen, 2015). In border regions like Setsoto LM, the government's focus on border control measures in spatial plans is not simply a matter of demarcating physical boundaries (Maila and Czimre, 2024) but involves the production of borders as regulatory mechanisms that define who can access, inhabit, and traverse these spaces (Van Houtum, 2005).

Dean (2010) identifies two primary uses of governmentality in analytical frameworks: first, to describe a specific historical rationality of rule, and second, as a general approach for analysing the mentalities or rationalities underlying governance. Rather than presenting a particular type of power, this framework offers a tool for understanding the rationalised efforts to govern border spaces. Applying governmentality to borders reveals the operation of power through various networks that influence individuals' lives in border regions. The governmentality approach also focuses on the integral link between micro and macro political levels (e.g., globalisation) (Lemke, 2002). In Setsoto LM, borders function as sites of governance where rationalities from national, provincial, and municipal spheres of governance converge. Spatial planning policies in these spheres of government can often reflect this governmental rationality and priorities. For example, planning documents and spatial strategies may frame the border as a site of economic opportunity and political control, reducing it to an instrument for advancing national interests while marginalising the everyday realities of local populations (Cimadomo, 2017; Lemke, 2002; Newman, 2006). This top-down conceptualisation of borders aligns with Foucault's (1991, 1980) notion of "power/knowledge," whereby the production of knowledge through policy discourses, spatial plans, and development strategies is intricately linked to the exercise of power over space and populations.

The Setsoto LM case study illustrates the operation of governmentality in border regions through spatial planning and development policies that regulate resource allocation and shape the spatial practices of planners. This form of governance constructs borders not merely as physical divisions but as a power tool that influences economic activity, social interaction, and political identity (Agnew, 2008).

2.2.2.2 Power Relations in Border Spatial Planning

Foucault's relational conception of power offers a critical lens for understanding the multifaceted nature of spatial planning in border regions. Unlike traditional perspectives that frame power as a top-down mechanism exercised solely by state institutions, Foucault's approach emphasises that power is continuously actively negotiated and resisted by members of society (Foucault, 1982, 1978; Rabinow, 2020). This perspective challenges the assumption that spatial planning is a neutral or purely technical process, instead revealing it as a site of struggle where power relations shape outcomes in ways that often remain obscured. Flyvbjerg (2002) builds

on this critique by challenging the idealised notion of rationality in planning, arguing that power frequently distorts or co-opts rational processes to advance specific agendas. However, Foucault's work does not reject rationality per se; rather, it interrogates how rationality has historically been deployed as a tool to legitimise and sustain power structures (Certomà, 2015). This insight is crucial in border regions, where the interplay of sovereignty, territoriality, and identity amplifies the contested nature of spatial planning.

The Foucauldian perspective shows power's pervasive and relational character, providing a robust analytical tool for examining the challenges inherent in spatial planning within border regions. Power operates not only through visible mechanisms such as policies and regulations but also through subtle, often invisible processes that influence decision-making. These processes may remain unarticulated, unrecorded, or concealed from public scrutiny, rendering them inaccessible to many participants in the planning process (Richardson, 1996). For instance, decisions regarding land use, resource allocation, or infrastructure development in border areas may be shaped by implicit power dynamics that privilege certain interests while marginalising others. This hidden dimension of power complicates efforts to achieve equitable and inclusive planning outcomes, as the forces driving decisions are not always transparent or accountable. Thus, power is an inherent part of planning, and it must be acknowledged and harnessed to create policies that are equitable and responsive to the needs of those most affected. Forester (1982) warns that planners who ignore the influence of power in the decision-making process risk rendering themselves powerless. In the case of Setsoto LM, this framework elucidates the ways in which local planners and community members negotiate their roles within a broader political and economic system that seeks to control border spaces. Therefore, understanding spatial planning in border regions requires careful consideration of the power relations that influence both the planning process and its outcomes.

Haugaard (2022) critiques Foucault's analysis of power for overemphasising domination while neglecting its enabling capacities. However, Foucault conceptualises power as neither inherently oppressive nor exclusively repressive. Foucault (1975, p. 194) states:

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.

Planners in Setsoto LM may leverage proximity to the border to influence policies that align with community needs, while residents may construct informal spaces and networks that contest official spatial representations. In this sense, power is not just about domination but also about the capacity to produce knowledge, shape social interactions, and influence spatial practices.

Moreover, the conceptualisation of power extends beyond domination and empowerment, encompassing its absence and the resulting negative consequences. When the government fails to effectively utilise spatial planning practices to create environments that promote community well-being, this absence reflects a detrimental form of power that can be observed in the negative outcomes for these communities. The implications of ineffective spatial planning underline the critical need for strategic interventions that foster inclusive and supportive spaces, as noted by Soja (2010) in the exploration of spatial justice, where the absence of adequate planning perpetuates inequities and undermines community resilience. Thus, the failure to leverage power through spatial planning in border regions manifests as a negative form of power, reinforcing the importance of understanding power dynamics in shaping community outcomes. As Jakola (2019, p. 38) writes, "*power is always materialised through practices in which it is played out, or alternatively, unplayed*". Analysing the power relations at play in border regions like Setsoto LM can provide a better understanding of spatial planning processes that either reinforce or challenge existing inequalities and how these processes shape the daily lives of borderland communities.

2.2.3 Borderlands as Contested Spaces: Thirdspace

Borders are contested not only in terms of sovereignty and control but also in terms of their meanings, functions, and lived experiences. Edward Soja builds on Henri Lefebvre's *spatial triad* and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (intersection of space, knowledge and power) to develop the notion of *thirdspace*. Soja conceptualises space in three dimensions: *firstspace*, *secondspace*, and *thirdspace* (Soja, 1999, 1996). These three dimensions of material, imagined, and lived spaces are closely

connected but can be understood as distinct in analysis (Haug, 2021). Borders are not merely static lines of separation (firstspace) or abstract political and economic constructs (secondspace); they are also lived and contested spaces (thirdspace) where diverse actors interact in ways that produce, challenge, and reshape spatial realities. Soja's trialectics of space offer a framework for understanding border regions as contested spaces.

Firstspace refers to the material and physical environment—spaces that can be observed, mapped, and measured (Soja, 1996). In the context of border regions, firstspace includes tangible demarcations such as physical boundaries, border posts, walls, and infrastructure, as well as the legal frameworks that define and regulate cross-border activity. This dimension emphasises the visible and quantifiable aspects of space, shaped by historical processes, planning policies, political decisions, and state power. For instance, the physical borders within Setsoto LM consist of infrastructure that not only represents territorial demarcation but also facilitates or restricts movement, depending on its design and function.

Secondspace, in contrast, is the conceived space—the mental or conceptual interpretation of space shaped by representations, ideologies, and cultural discourses (Soja, 1996). Secondspace is the product of the ways in which borders are imagined, depicted, and understood. It encompasses the symbolic meanings, political narratives, and social norms that define how people perceive and interact with borders. In border areas, these representations may be shaped by nationalistic rhetoric, security concerns, or economic opportunities. For example, state policies or media representations may portray the border as a site of division, security risk, or economic potential. Such representations often fail to capture the lived realities of borderland communities and instead present abstract, often top-down, conceptualisations of space.

Thirdspace, Soja's (1996) primary contribution, integrates both the material and conceived dimensions, focusing on lived space—where real and imagined coexist in the everyday experiences of individuals. Border region represents a form of thirdspace, where various discourses intersect and challenge dominant power structures (Wrede, 2023). This dimension emphasises how borders are experienced and navigated by those who live and interact with them. In border regions, thirdspace

reflects the daily practices, negotiations, and resistances of borderland residents. It includes both formal activities, such as cross-border trade and legal migration, and informal or transgressive practices, such as smuggling or the creation of unofficial pathways. Thirdspace is dynamic and continuously reproduced through the lived experiences of those who traverse, challenge, and redefine the meaning of borders. Wrede (2023, p. 184) writes:

In the thirdspace, social relationships and power hierarchies inscribed onto space are subject to ongoing contestation. Space thus becomes the site of a constant battle over power.

To deepen this analysis of borderland complexity, assemblage theory offers a complementary lens. Assemblages comprise provisional constellations of semi-autonomous elements, including social actors, infrastructures, legal frameworks and discursive practices, whose collective properties emerge from their interactions rather than from any single, fixed essence (DeLanda, 2019). From a thirdspace perspective, border infrastructure, such as checkpoints and surveillance systems, regulatory procedures, local customs and individual strategies, coalesce into a contingent formation whose character is constantly contested. Daily border commuters, informal traders, tourists and local inhabitants each bring distinct practices and viewpoints; these interactions contribute to the ongoing production of cross-border space, where physical, social and symbolic elements interweave to create zones of conflict, cooperation, and negotiation.

2.3 Cross-border Spatial Planning and Integration

Spatial planning is a strategic process aimed at guiding long-term development and land use, often serving as a policy tool to promote integration and deliver tangible outcomes rather than merely regulating space (Medeiros, 2019). In cross-border and multi-jurisdictional contexts, spatial planning faces unique challenges due to different territorial administrations' overlapping and often conflicting interests. These challenges demand innovative governance approaches that transcend traditional national and institutional frameworks (Walsh and Knieling, 2013). Fricke (2015) defines cross-border spatial planning as the exchange of information, coordination, and cooperation concerning spatial development in border areas. It seeks to harmonise planning policies and create joint development strategies among actors on both sides of the border (Durand, 2014). By doing so, it aims to mitigate the negative effects of borders,

such as fragmentation and inefficiency, while enhancing the functionality of border regions. This process requires the active involvement of stakeholders from various administrative levels, fostering bilateral and multilateral collaboration to create mutually beneficial outcomes (Medeiros, 2014).

Haselsberger (2014) argues that borders should not be understood solely as physical demarcations but as complex constructs shaped by social, economic, and political factors. This perspective calls for a rethinking of spatial planning approaches in border regions, where administrative and political structures must adapt to the relational geographies that address the needs of borderland communities on both sides (Haselsberger, 2014). Jacobs (2016) introduces the idea of “double complexity” to describe the dual challenges posed by differing planning systems and governance structures in cross-border contexts. However, Jacobs’ (2016) work falls short of fully addressing the roles of various governance levels in facilitating cross-border spatial planning. Medeiros (2014) advocates for a “think regional, act local” approach, which leverages existing regional administrative structures to implement cross-border initiatives. This strategy emphasises the critical role of local and regional actors in promoting cross-border governance and ensuring that planning practices are responsive to the needs of border communities. The ultimate objective of cross-border spatial planning is to create functionally integrated border regions through coordinated administrative and policy arrangements (Medeiros, 2014).

Cross-border (regional) integration is a multifaceted process that necessitates the active participation of various stakeholders to leverage borders as resources for economic, political, social, and environmental development. This process extends beyond the mere opening of national borders; it involves the strategic mobilisation of borders to foster regional cohesion and development. Sohn (2014) elucidates this concept by contrasting two ideal types of cross-border integration models: the geo-economic model and the territorial project model. The geo-economic model focuses on utilising borders as economic resources to generate tangible benefits. This model aims to create integrated regions by enhancing the functionality of transport infrastructure and services, thereby promoting the mobility of labour and goods. It emphasises economic interdependence and the optimisation of cross-border trade and investment flows. In contrast, the territorial project model adopts a place-making approach that transcends the physical border. This model is driven by ideological ties,

mutual interests, and the development of a shared cross-border territorial identity. It emphasises the socio-cultural and political dimensions of integration, fostering a sense of belonging and cooperation among communities on both sides of the border (Sohn, 2014).

Sohn's (2014) models can be further contextualised by contrasting them with Veemaa's (2012) framework on region-building in CBC. The framework highlights the role of spatial identities in shaping CBC and categorises two types of spatial identities: exogenous and endogenous. Exogenous spatial identities are shaped by national and international narratives of cooperation, often driven by institutional priorities such as investments, immigration policies, and tourism development. These identities are typically imposed from above and reflect the interests of national and international actors. On the other hand, endogenous spatial identities emerge from the local population's perceptions and practices. These identities are rooted in language, cultural beliefs, and everyday experiences, reflecting a bottom-up approach to cross-border cooperation (Veemaa, 2012). Furthermore, Veemaa (2012) argues that the disjunction between spatial identities and cooperation policies can lead to unstable and ineffective cross-border region-building processes. Cooperation efforts may falter when there is a lack of shared understanding or a cohesive spatial identity among the communities involved. Therefore, successful cross-border integration requires a balance between top-down institutional approaches and bottom-up local initiatives. This dual approach ensures that cooperation policies are both strategically aligned and culturally resonant, fostering stable and sustainable cross-border regions.

Cross-border integration is inherently non-linear and demands a comprehensive approach that incorporates political, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. Effective CBC requires the integration of diverse skills and the active involvement of multiple stakeholders. Borders and borderlands can be transformed into valuable resources, particularly in divided regions, through careful planning and collaboration. Feyissa and Hoehne (2010) emphasise the importance of assessing both internal and external factors when leveraging state borders and borderlands. By understanding the unique challenges and opportunities presented by divided borders, communities can develop strategies to maximize the benefits of cross-border integration. Thus, the work of Sohn (2014), Veemaa (2012), and Feyissa and Hoehne (2010) collectively highlight the importance of combining top-down and bottom-up

approaches to foster stable and effective cross-border regions that promote regional development and cooperation.

2.4 Cross-border Governance and Soft Planning

The effects of the planning practices are not felt up to where the border ends. Both sides bear the burden of clear-cut planning in border regions that end at the political boundary lines. One of the significant conceptual innovations of soft spaces in spatial planning pertains to reimagining borders. Over the years, scholars have documented the importance of CBC in cross-border regions, highlighting them as examples of new soft space imagination (Zimmerbauer and Paasi, 2020). Notwithstanding, dealing with borders in planning remains a complex endeavour. Planning is intricately tied to its context, which is deeply embedded within societal and institutional structures.

Conventionally, planning occurs within a specific institutional context or often in sets of different and varying institutional contexts, as are societal activities (Reimer, 2013). In border regions, different institutional settings clash and divergent visions for future spatial development meet. By the 2000s, the call for planning to become 'more spatial' was driven by a shift towards proactive place-making as a response to disillusionment with traditional land use and project-based planning approaches (Davoudi, 2017). In Europe, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) of 1999 played a crucial role in promoting this change, providing a conceptual framework for strategic spatial development beyond territorial boundaries and emphasising a more sophisticated understanding of territories. The ESDP aimed to transcend the limitations of bounded spaces and introduced a common language for spatial planning practices across EU's state members, influencing the broader discourse on spatial planning (Durand, 2014). However, critiques surfaced that ESDP may have fallen short in transcending traditional binary perspectives on spatial development, thereby affecting its effectiveness in promoting sustainable and inclusive development practices (Richardson and Jensen, 2000).

The emergence of soft spaces and soft planning as new concepts in spatial planning marked a reformed approach to planning (Cavaco and Costa, 2020). The formation of soft spaces is often articulated in terms of breaking away from the rigidities associated with the practices and expectations of working within existing political or administrative boundaries (Stead, 2014). The fuzziness of soft spaces is thought to better address 'real-world' challenges in the sense that they can be amended and shaped easily to

reflect different interests and challenges to overcome limitations of administrative boundaries (Faludi, 2010a; Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016). According to Heley (2013), soft spaces in spatial planning have introduced a new dimension to the traditional understanding of planning scales and boundaries, signifying a shift towards more flexible and relational planning practices, aiming to address the limitations of traditional hard spaces characterised by rigidity and exclusivity. Soft spaces are seen as a response to the challenges posed by mismatched territorial boundaries and the need for more integrated and effective planning approaches (Purkarthofer et al., 2022). Integrating soft spaces in spatial planning has further advanced the handling of complex, transnational challenges through flexible governance frameworks (Stafford, 2023). It gives rise to functional spaces that cut across various government scales (Faludi, 2010a), characterised by fuzzy geographical boundaries. This has been accompanied by a contemporary shift from government to governance. Faludi (2010a) describes this as the diffusion of control, and the need to cooperate across levels, sectors and borders. Consequently, the ideological task of planning ceases to be about dominant control and embrace a balanced development for a collective interest. It is a transition from hierarchical government to network governance, promoting complex multi-level and multi-scalar systems, which cross not only levels of government (vertical) but also national borders (horizontal).

However, critical opposition to the increasing neoliberal pressures in soft planning has been widely echoed among scholars. The formation of new planning spaces within soft planning has been argued to primarily focus on promoting economic development, thereby contributing to the neoliberal transformation of strategic spatial planning (Haughton et al., 2013; Olesen, 2014). This shift reflects a broader trend in which planning practices are increasingly aligned with market-driven agendas, often at the expense of social and environmental considerations (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Scholars have critiqued this neoliberalisation of planning, highlighting how the emphasis on economic growth undermines the participatory and inclusive ideals traditionally associated with soft planning (Albrechts, 2004; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). Furthermore, the creation of soft spaces in planning has been seen as a mechanism for advancing neoliberal policies, often bypassing formal democratic processes and prioritising private-sector interests (Faludi, 2015; Gunder and Hillier, 2009). For Stead (2014), the soft approach offers a shortcut to the democratic process.

The absence of legal parameters in decision-making processes threatens transparency and accountability (Cavaco et al., 2023; Faludi, 2015). Thus, the revival of spatial planning is said to have been '*hijacked and misused to promote neoliberal models of spatial development*' (Davoudi, 2017; Olesen, 2014, p. 289). Spatial planning, instead of resisting neoliberalism, seems to play a role in legitimising it by offering frameworks and methods that address, obscure, or soften the negative consequences of prioritising high economic growth over broader societal well-being (Haughton et al., 2009).

While it may not be possible for planners to abandon territorially embedded planning practices completely in border regions, planners can play a pivotal role in promoting cross-border networks and partnerships that transcend territorial boundaries (Maila, 2025). This aligns with Heley's (2013) perspective that if planning is to reflect the complex relational world of associational relationships stretching across a range of geographies, it also needs to operate through 'other spaces'. These 'other spaces' include non-traditional or informal settings and transnational or cross-border areas, acknowledging the diverse and dynamic contexts in which modern planning must engage. Walsh and Knieling (2013) urge spatial planners to think beyond the confined geographical spaces of formal administrative-territorial divisions and recognise the importance of creating functional relations across space. Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016) echo this view, alluding that planners should think increasingly in terms of open, porous borders despite the fact that in hard (statutory) planning activities, politics, and governance, the region continues to exist largely in the form of bounded and territorial political units.

2.5 Influential Factors Affecting Cross-border Cooperation

The effectiveness of CBC is largely determined by the activities and partnerships established between key stakeholders, such as public institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities. These partnerships play a critical role in shaping the outcomes of CBC initiatives, particularly in borderland areas where cooperation is essential for addressing transnational issues (Castanho et al., 2017). CBC projects encompass a wide range of objectives, including fostering regional integration, promoting economic development, and addressing social disparities in border areas. By facilitating joint efforts across borders, CBC initiatives can mitigate economic and social challenges that extend beyond the capacity of individual nation-

states. Furthermore, CBC serves as a mechanism for strengthening interstate relations, fostering trust, and building institutional frameworks that support long-term collaboration (Perkmann, 2003).

Drawing on an empirical investigation of twenty European cross-border cooperation (CBC) case studies, Castanho et al. (2018) integrated two open-ended survey questions asking participants to identify the three most relevant factors contributing to territorial success and the three primary challenges encountered by cities in CBC initiatives. Among the responses, three factors emerged as particularly influential in enabling effective CBC implementation: (i) the demonstration of political will and sustained commitment to CBC-related decision-making; (ii) the articulation of shared objectives and the development of integrated master plans; and (iii) the facilitation of connectivity and cross-border mobility between participating cities (Table 1). These findings reflect the centrality of sustained political support, coordinated planning frameworks, and physical linkages in enabling meaningful cooperation across national boundaries.

Table 1: Most Relevant Factors for Territorial Success in CBC Projects

Factor	%
Political will and commitment	24.4
Common objectives and master plans	22.1
Connectivity - Movement between cities	13.4
Access to European funds	10.8
Avoid duplication of infrastructure	10.8
Diverse infrastructural offer - Euro Citizenship	9.9
Stronger economy	5.4
Better life's quality standards	3.2

Source: Adapted from Castanho et al. (2018)

2.5.1 Political transparency and commitment

CBC are characterised by inherent political character (Scott, 2015). The interplay between political transparency and commitment constitutes a foundational pillar for the success of CBC (Castanho et al., 2018, 2019). Political transparency facilitates

mutual understanding by reducing informational asymmetries between partners. Regular publication of joint policy documents, open public consultations and shared data portals enable communities and administrations on either side of a border to verify that agreed actions are being implemented (Castanho, 2020). In the absence of transparency, trust can erode rapidly. Collaboration across multi-sectoral levels not only enhances transparency but also builds trust among stakeholders, which is crucial for the long-term success of cross-border initiatives. However, transparency without enforceable accountability mechanisms risks becoming performative. Castanho et al. (2019) stress that institutionalising transparency requires embedding it within legal frameworks, ensuring that data accessibility translates into actionable oversight. Equally important is political commitment (Castanho et al., 2018), which operates as a catalyst for CBC by ensuring the allocation of resources, harmonisation of regulatory frameworks, and long-term adherence to shared goals. For instance, Agbiboa (2017) illustrates the operational challenges faced by Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising forces from the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) member states (Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger, and Chad) and Benin, were exacerbated by inconsistent political commitment and lack of transparency among member states, impeding effective cross-border security cooperation. Knippschild (2011) highlights that cross-border strategic plans without political endorsement risk being forgotten within bureaucratic systems and ultimately have no real impact on urban or regional planning efforts. Thus, political commitment must be present across all phases of CBC, from initial negotiations to implementation and adaptive management (Castanho et al., 2019).

2.5.2 Definition of Common Objectives and Master Plan

The formulation of clearly defined jointly agreed objectives and a comprehensive cross-border master plan is fundamental to the success of CBC initiatives (Castanho et al., 2018). Such joint strategies must be developed, adopted, and integrated into relevant policy decisions. According to Knippschild (2011), advisable steps towards this include exchanges on key projects and dialogue around cooperation priorities grounded in shared objectives. For instance, an analysis of cross-border projects between Belgium and the Netherlands demonstrated that joint fact-finding exercises play a critical role in pre-empting conflicts and supporting sustained collaboration (de Vries, 2008). In the absence of clearly articulated and mutually endorsed goals, CBC efforts risk institutional fragmentation, parallel planning processes, and divergent

policy orientations across jurisdictions (Sohn and Giffinger, 2015). A structured master plan helps mitigate these risks by outlining short-, medium-, and long-term objectives and specifying concrete actions aligned with territorial and administrative mandates. As Innes and Booher (1999) argue, the collaborative development of planning frameworks, rather than their unilateral imposition, provides a mechanism through which stakeholders can navigate differing planning cultures, administrative systems, and development priorities.

2.5.3 Promotion of Connectivity

The promotion of connectivity and the seamless movement of people and goods between cities is a key factor in the success of CBC initiatives (Castanho et al., 2018). Transport infrastructure plays a pivotal role in facilitating cross-border mobility, which can support economic, social, and cultural integration. A case study on CBC initiatives in Hungary reinforces this point, showing that well-integrated transport systems strengthen cooperation between neighbouring regions (Khmeleva et al., 2022). The study emphasises that efficient transport links are essential not only for economic exchange but also for sustaining long-term relationships between border communities. The CBC project between Elvas (Portugal) and Badajoz (Spain), situated along the Portugal-Spain border, illustrates the consequences of inadequate transport integration. The absence of a coordinated public transport system between the two cities has limited the project's impact and prevented it from meeting its broader objectives. Thus, the study concluded that improving public transport should be treated as a priority to enhance the effectiveness of the initiative (Castanho et al., 2017).

2.6 Borders through a Postcolonial Lens

The postcolonial lens offers critical insights into the formation and lasting impact of imposed borders as instruments of colonial power. Far from being neutral demarcations, African borders were constructed without consideration for indigenous cultures, societies or governance systems, instead serving the interests of the imperialists. As a result, the legacy of borders continues to shape political, economic, and social realities in the postcolonial era. For instance, Setsoto LM, which lies at the border region between South Africa and Lesotho, serves as a legacy of colonial boundaries that remain significant in shaping inter-state relations and local development in the present day.

2.6.1 Travailing Birth of African Borders

The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, also known as the 'Scramble for Africa', epitomises the violent partition of the African continent by European powers. The conference was not merely an administrative exercise in territorial management; it was a calculated geopolitical manoeuvre designed to carve up Africa for imperial gain. Africa was sliced like a cake as colonial powers drew arbitrary lines across the continent, exhibiting contemptuous disregard for Africa's intricate cultural, ethnic, and political structures. According to Edward Said (1979), in the theory of *Othering*, colonial powers viewed Africa as a blank canvas, disregarding its complex societies in favour of European geopolitical and economic interests. As Lefebvre (2011) alludes, this process led to the imposition of artificial borders that separated ethnic groups and disrupted long-established political structures.

While the Berlin Conference formalised the partition of Africa, Prescott and Triggs (2008) argue that the parting of Africa among European imperialists began much earlier, around the 1600s, with European powers establishing control over coastal territories. The borders drawn during the Berlin Conference solidified a new phase of territorial division that ignored indigenous boundaries and imposed European governance structures. These superimposed borders were not aligned with the African landscape's cultural features, resulting in long-term fragmentation and conflict. The persistence of colonial boundaries was reaffirmed during the 1963 Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The Charter's Article III, adopted in Cairo in 1964, emphasised the need to respect existing borders to avoid further conflict among newly independent African nations.

The OAU's decision was not without criticism. Dissenting voices among African leaders and intellectuals emerged, challenging the decision to uphold colonial borders. They argued that these artificial boundaries, imposed by colonial powers, would inevitably lead to conflict and hinder African unity. Figures such as Kwame Nkrumah (1963) warned that maintaining these borders would perpetuate divisions and obstruct the vision of a politically and economically integrated Africa. Similarly, scholars like Asiwaju (1985) criticised the colonial partitioning of the continent, emphasising its long-term destabilising effects. Despite these concerns, the principle of maintaining borders as they were at the time of independence was upheld. By reinforcing the colonial

borders, African leaders sought to stabilise their nascent states, yet this decision also perpetuated the fragmentation imposed by European powers (Lefebvre, 2011).

In contrast to European borders, which often reflected historical, social, or political divisions, African borders were primarily expressions of colonial authority designed to serve imperial interests. Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity captures the paradox of postcolonial African states, forced to operate within structures that were never intended to represent them. This hybrid existence is not merely a historical legacy—it is a lived reality, with borders serving as a continuous reminder of fractured societies that still hinder regional integration and cooperation. The Borderland of Setsoto LM is a space where lingering colonial legacies are acutely felt, and the region's historical development is deeply tied to the colonial and apartheid 'projects', both of which used borders to entrench segregation and inequalities.

2.6.2 South Africa-Lesotho Postcolonial Narrative

Borders continue to operate as mechanisms of control, maintaining hierarchies and divisions long after the end of formal colonial rule. The colonial period in South Africa, which began with the arrival of European settlers in 1652, was defined by the systematic dispossession and exploitation of indigenous populations. The borders imposed during this time reflected the colonisers' desire to control land and resources, with little regard for the social or cultural cohesion of the people already living there (Prescott and Triggs, 2008). When the apartheid regime came to power in 1948, it used these colonial borders to deepen racial segregation and enforce a violent system of domination. Under apartheid, the government institutionalised the exclusion of black-African South Africans from land ownership, political participation, and economic opportunity while perpetuating their exploitation as labour force.

The Kingdom of Lesotho is an independent nation the Republic of South Africa enclaves. The relationship between the two countries has evolved; these changes can be traced through a series of events, from establishing the nation in the 1820s to the British crown control in 1884. Basotho (people of Lesotho) had to resist the British colonialist power, which Coplan (2001) refers to as 'racialised colonial frontiers'. Lesotho, known as Basutoland under British rule, resisted the incorporation into the apartheid government of South Africa, a testament to Basotho's refusal to submit to the oppressive dictates of apartheid governance (Coplan, 2001). It gained

independence in 1966, which is 28 years before South Africa dismantled the apartheid government. However, this political independence was accompanied by economic dependence, as Lesotho's economy became increasingly reliant on migrant labour in South Africa's mines and farms. Until 1963, there was no border control between Lesotho and South Africa. The motive for establishing the border was due to the different political ideologies between the apartheid government and the new independent Lesotho (Steinberg, 2005).

By the 1960s and 1970s, there were strong economic ties between South Africa and Lesotho. Many Basotho migrant labourers participated in the South African economy as wage labourers, mine workers, traders, produce exporters, and retail consumers (Steinberg, 2005). This migrant labour system emerged from British land dispossession and the imposition of taxes, which forced many Basotho men to seek work in South Africa (Murray, 1981). This system, which persisted throughout the 20th century during apartheid, was a continuation of colonial economic policies designed to exploit labour while maintaining social and racial hierarchies. Although Basotho migrant mine workers have decreased since the 1990s (Mensah and Naidoo, 2011), the socio-economic effects of this exploitative relationship endure. Thus, despite the end of formal colonial rule and the apartheid era, African borders bear the heavy weight of legacies that continue to shape their development. These borders are not merely historical artefacts; they remain active sites perpetuating the systems of division established during colonialism.

Thus, the border between South Africa and Lesotho functioned not just as a demarcation but as a historical site of exploitation, and the struggle with the aftereffects of decades of unequal development remains visible. This political boundary continues to reflect the enduring legacy of unequal resource distribution. South Africa, classified as an upper-middle-income economy, stands in stark contrast to its enclave, Lesotho, which ranks among the least developed countries in the world and is categorised as a lower-middle-income economy. According to Coplan (2010), the South Africa-Lesotho border, along with the U.S.-Mexico border, is one of the few places in the world where such stark disparities in development levels converge. These inequalities between neighbouring nations influence migratory patterns as individuals move across borders in search of better opportunities and resources.

2.6.3 South Africa post-Apartheid Spatial Planning

During the colonial era in South Africa, settlements were strategically established to serve the interests of the colonisers in two primary ways. First, black-African (or non-white) communities were forcibly removed from fertile and productive land to make way for economic activities and settlements that benefited the colonisers (Christopher, 1994). Second, black-Africans (or non-whites) were forced into providing cheap labour for white-owned farms, mines, and industries as a means of survival, further entrenching their economic exploitation (Wolpe, 1972). These practices were not merely economic but also deeply political, as colonial powers embedded their political objectives into spatial development to ensure the dominance and benefit of the minority white population (Mabin, 1992).

The institutionalisation of racial segregation intensified in 1948 with the rise of the National Party, marking the formal beginning of the apartheid era. Apartheid spatial planning policies were explicitly designed to enforce racial segregation. They were implemented through a rigid top-down approach, with decisions mainly taken at the national level to benefit the white minority. At the same time, the role of local governments was limited to delivering basic services. Cities served as the main sites of apartheid spatial order, resistance, struggles, and protest (Maylam, 1995). When apartheid officially ended in 1994, it marked a new dawn of democracy, and the newly elected government came into power. However, the legacy of colonialism and apartheid had left the spatial layout of South Africa with a particular racially and class-segregated residential pattern known as the 'Apartheid City' model (Christopher, 1999). Residential areas occupied by the white population had a concentration of socio-economic resources. In contrast, the black-African city dwellers lacked essential resources and socio-economic opportunities and lived marginalised in urban peripheries and rural areas.

The post-apartheid government under the democratic leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) recognised that a conflict resolution of extreme inequality and lack of access to basic services within the black-African residential areas could not be secured without developmental interventions. The democratic government sought to implement spatial transformation to reverse the legacy of apartheid through various development initiatives. It adopted the grassroots approach and active

involvement of civil society in development planning. Local municipalities were empowered to take responsibility for 'developmental local government'. Efforts to decentralise development planning included the adoption of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in 1995, supporting coordinated delivery for reconstruction and development. The Local Government Transition Act Second Amendment Act 97 of 1996 made the IDP formulation a legal requirement for local councils (Binns and Nel, 2002). The IDP enabled a municipal council's integrated development and management of a municipal area. The White Paper on Local Government, launched in March 1998, further strengthened the coordination of the municipalities, making the local authorities the central body of the government's development activities. The concept of developmental government expressed in the White Paper identified the importance of integrated development planning (Pycroft, 1998). In this aspect, an integrated development approach is a decentralised planning process led by local government, which seeks to align public investment with community priorities through coordinated, cross-sectoral strategies. It involves meaningful public participation to ensure that development reflects local needs, and it functions as both a planning and governance tool to address the spatial and socio-economic legacies of apartheid (Groenewald and Smith, 2017)

Presently, IDP has matured into a five-year plan that each municipality compiles and is reviewed yearly. Its lifespan corresponds directly to the term of office for local councillors. After every local government election, the new council has to decide on the future of the IDP. The council can adopt the existing IDP or develop a new one that considers existing plans. The Spatial Development Framework (SDF) forms part of the IDP and translates the vision outlined in the IDP into spatial terms. The formulation of municipal IDP in South Africa is primarily the municipality's responsibility, as outlined in legislation such as the Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (MSA) and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013 (SPLUMA). In Setsoto LM, the IDP serves as the principal strategic planning instrument, which guides and informs all planning, development, and all decisions regarding planning, management and development in the municipality (Setsoto Local Municipality IDP, 2024, p. 29). However, empirical research has shown that the implementation of IDP remains fraught with difficulties in many municipalities. A case study of the Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality found that institutional mechanisms

intended to facilitate community participation were often superficial, failing to foster meaningful involvement in development planning processes. The study identified a disjuncture between formal participatory frameworks and the actual practices on the ground, raising concerns about the substantive inclusion of local voices in shaping municipal priorities (Asha and Makalela, 2020). An analysis of nine municipalities spanning local, district, and metropolitan levels identified recurring problems that continue to impede the implementation of IDPs; among the key issues were the absence or marginal involvement of communities and relevant stakeholders, persistent financial constraints, and a failure to develop long-term plans that correspond with available budgets. The study also found that the planning process often suffers from a lack of consultation, inadequate technical capacity at the municipal level, and limited coordination with national and provincial authorities (Fourie and Der Waldt, 2021). These conditions contribute to fragmented implementation and reinforce a pattern in which IDPs remain procedural exercises rather than meaningful instruments for spatial and socio-economic transformation. Similarly, a study of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality revealed that, despite the IDP's formally coherent strategic framework, its implementation was severely constrained by several structural and institutional limitations. In particular, the process was weakened by low levels of community participation, the misalignment of resources with stated priorities, and a shortage of technical planning competencies among municipal officials (Mpolweni et al., 2024). These studies show that the mere existence of a plan is insufficient to ensure meaningful implementation when the necessary institutional and material conditions are lacking.

Enacted in 2013, SPLUMA was introduced to establish a coherent framework for spatial planning and land use management in South Africa. It not only aims to address and rectify the fragmented, unequal, and unjust planning system inherited from apartheid but also its consequences in space (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development and Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2022). All three spheres of government—national, provincial, and municipal—are mandated by Section 12(1) of SPLUMA to develop SDF as a strategic approach to South Africa's post-apartheid development (Appendix 1). Section 12(2)(a) stipulates that the three spheres of government must participate in the spatial planning

processes that impact each other to ensure that their plans and programmes are coordinated, consistent and in harmony with each other.

A municipal SDF is a strategic planning tool that guides the spatial development of a municipality. It provides a long-term vision for the development and spatial organisation of the municipality, indicating where growth, development, and infrastructure should occur in line with national and provincial policies (Setsoto Local Municipality, 2017). Thus, Setsoto LM SDF is prepared under its municipal IDP's vision and aligns with the National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) and Free State Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF).

The NSDF is a long-term strategic planning tool that provides a vision for the spatial development of the country. It is designed to guide and coordinate spatial development across national, provincial, and local government levels, aligning with broader national policies and development goals, such as those outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP). It aims to redress the national apartheid legacy of spatial imbalances and promote sustainable development by setting the strategic direction for land use and development across South Africa. Its focus is on creating a more equitable and efficient spatial layout that supports national economic, social, and environmental objectives. The NSDF emphasises the need for coordination across all three spheres of government to drive spatial transformation and achieve the desired spatial future (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development and Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2022).

The PSDF is a strategic planning document developed by provincial governments to guide spatial planning and land use at the provincial level. It provides a framework for integrating various developmental initiatives across municipalities and aligns with broader national and regional policies. The PSDF outlines long-term goals and spatial patterns for growth, development, and environmental management within a province, ensuring that spatial development is consistent with sustainable development principles and national priorities. Thus, PSDF ensures alignment with national and local frameworks while focusing on the province's specific spatial needs, opportunities, and challenges (Free State Province, 2023).

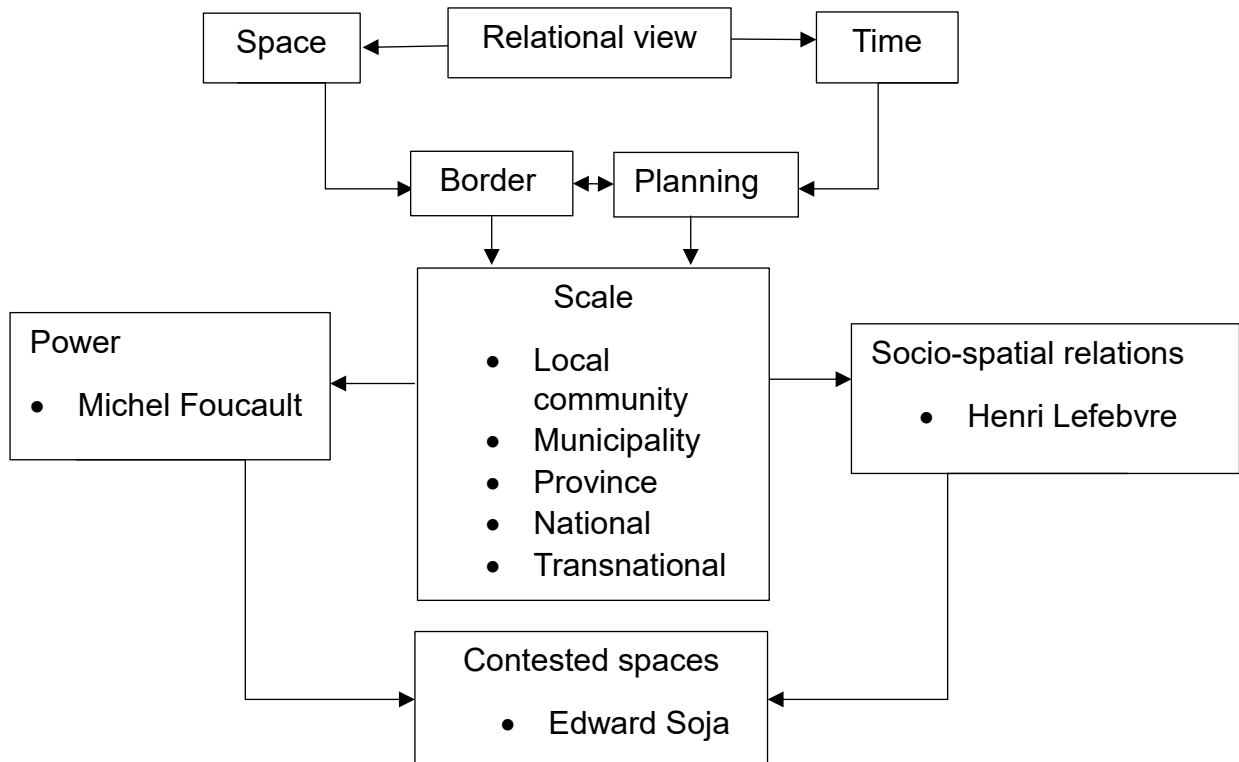
Despite efforts to decentralise and harmonise development planning in South Africa through policies and legislation, spatial planning and development in border regions

remain inconsistent. The Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005, which aims to improve collaboration between national, provincial, and local government spheres, focuses solely on domestic coordination. It lacks provisions for addressing cross-border challenges or fostering cooperation with neighbouring countries. Responsibility for cross-border development initiatives continues to rest primarily with national government and sector departments. For instance, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) manage intergovernmental relations, negotiate international agreements, and oversee cross-border projects. Other departments, such as the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), contribute to targeted initiatives like rural development or land reform, some of which affect border regions. However, these efforts often lack a unified spatial planning framework, leading to fragmented outcomes. Although local municipalities are empowered to engage in 'developmental local government', their involvement in cross-border spatial planning and development is typically subordinate to the provincial and national spheres of government due to the intricate nature and broad scope of such projects.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that borders are not fixed geographical entities but are actively shaped through institutional practices, policy interventions, and lived experience. Rather than being treated as neutral lines on a map, borders are produced through processes that unfold across multiple scales, from local communities to state authorities. Lefebvre's spatial triad provided the basis for understanding space as a social product constructed through representations, practices, and everyday life. Within this perspective, borders are part of how space is organised, claimed, and experienced. Their meaning and function cannot be separated from the spatial strategies of planning authorities or from how border communities engage with them. Foucault's work on power was used to examine how borders are instrumentalised through legal, institutional, and bureaucratic systems. These are not just control points or sites of surveillance but spaces where authority is materialised and reproduced through planning. Planning, in this context, becomes a form of spatial governance that shapes what is possible, permitted, or excluded within and across borders. Soja's concept of thirdspace added another layer by highlighting the tensions between formal

spatial orders and lived realities. It helped to connect abstract planning frameworks with the everyday negotiations that take place in border regions. This approach draws attention to how space is often contested, especially in areas where policy, identity, and belonging intersect. The conceptual and theoretical framework integrates these perspectives by treating border and planning as spatial constructs, practices, and processes shaped through social relations, institutional power, and lived experience within a relational conception of space (Figure 3).



Source: Author's own

Figure 3: Conceptual and theoretical framework diagram.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research set out to provide a comprehensive case study of the Setsoto LM, situated within the unique socio-political and geographical context of the South Africa-Lesotho border region. It was evident that concentrating exclusively on the municipal sphere of governance posed substantial limitations. A key issue was the potential for municipalities to relegate responsibility for dealing with borders in spatial planning and development to provincial or national authorities. This could have given an incomplete picture of inconsistencies and inefficiencies in addressing border-related spatial planning and development challenges. Recognising this, the research includes insights from all three spheres of government: municipal, provincial, and national.

The research employed an exploratory case study design suitable for examining complex, context-dependent phenomena (Yin, 2014). Case studies allow for in-depth analysis of specific settings, issues, or individuals, which is ideal for understanding the intricate dynamics of border regions. Creswell and Creswell (2022) describe case studies as in-depth explorations that provide detailed insights into specific phenomena, and they are particularly useful when little is known about a subject, making them an appropriate choice for this research. As Swedberg (2020) explains, exploratory research aims to gain insights into poorly understood topics and generate new ideas. Although, the limitation of case study research is its restricted generalisability (Tight, 2022). Berg and Lune (2017) argue that when conducted rigorously, case studies do not merely address the circumstances of a particular individual, group, or event; they can also contribute to broader insights that resonate with similar cases elsewhere. This case study provides a contextualised exploration of the perception of planners and documents the lived experiences of border residents. This approach is particularly relevant given the complexity of border regions, which are often shaped by historical legacies, political negotiations, and economic conditions (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

3.2 Research Methods, Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The case study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative data to achieve a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Mixed methods are particularly valuable in multidisciplinary studies,

where combining qualitative insights with quantitative data provides a fuller picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell and Clark, 2018). In this case study research, qualitative data was predominant, as it facilitates a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. Quantitative data, which was used supplementary, supports and contextualises the qualitative findings, adding breadth to the analysis (Johnson et al., 2007). Table 2 depicts the qualitative and quantitative means of data collection used:

Table 2: Mixed-methods approach.

Qualitative	Quantitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth interviews • Site observation • Document analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) census data • Document analysis

3.2.1 Qualitative

Qualitative research typically involves collecting data from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, rather than relying on a single source. This approach allows researchers to review and synthesise data comprehensively, organising it into themes or categories that emerge across both primary and secondary sources (Creswell, 2013). This process facilitates a nuanced interpretation of the data, reflecting the complexity and diversity of participants' views and experiences.

3.2.1.1 Interviews

Interviews provide insights into participants' memories, explanations of why things have become what they are, and descriptions of current problems and aspirations (Stark and Torrance, 2005). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between February and November 2024 with the borderland residents (Appendix 2) and town planners (Appendix 3). The participants were selected according to the snowball sampling, and the following selection criteria for residents in Setsoto LM were used: they must be 18 years and above and must have resided in Setsoto LM for at least 10 years within the last 2 years. This criterion was established to ensure that participants possessed a deep-rooted understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics specific to the borderland context. As a result, transient

populations, including border crossers and short-term residents, were excluded from the study. While this exclusion narrows the demographic range of participants, it enables a richer examination of the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals who have sustained and intimate ties to the region over an extended period.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face and telephonically. To ensure rigour, data collection was carried out in three phases:

Phase 1: Initial Exploration—a preliminary phase designed to gain initial insights through informal communication and discussion, which included two community members.

Phase 2: Pilot Study—a pilot phase aimed at further refining and analysing emerging contextual patterns. It consisted of seven interviews with community members. This aided in understanding the study area's context and refining the interview questions to ask relevant questions in the primary data collection phase.

Phase 3: Final Synthesis—the primary data collection phase involved nine community members and nine planners, allowing a comprehensive synthesis and final consolidation of insights.

In total, 27 interviewees participated from phases one to three. However, data from 18 participants were used for the final analysis. In the final analysis, the number of interviews aligns with established qualitative research practices that prioritise depth over breadth in sample size to capture nuanced insights (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative studies often employ small, purposive samples, particularly when exploring specific local contexts or homogeneous groups, as this approach enables a detailed examination of participants' lived experiences and recurring themes (Patton, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2003). Guest *et al.* (2006) found that data saturation—where no new themes emerge—can frequently be reached with as few as six to twelve interviews, particularly in focused community studies.

The average interview duration was 51 minutes. Interviews with community members offered insights into lived experiences in Setsoto LM, enabling a nuanced understanding of local perspectives while maintaining qualitative rigour that balances depth and feasibility. As shown in Table 3, interviews with community members and

planners were conducted individually, except at the local government level, where a paired interview was used. At this level, two planners were interviewed together in a single session, resulting in a total of three participants across two interviews.

Table 3: Number of participants in the primary data collection phase.

Final analysis data collection	Number of Participants
Community members	9
Municipal planners	3
Provincial planners	3
National planners	3
Total	18

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis of interviews was undertaken using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis process: (1) familiarising, (2) coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) developing and reviewing themes, (5) refining, defining and naming themes and (6) writing up. A hybrid approach, combining deductive and inductive strategies, was employed to identify and explore patterns, themes, and commonalities within the qualitative data, guided by the research aim and objectives. NVivo software was used for coding.

3.2.1.2 Observation

Observation in qualitative research is essential for gaining direct insights into participants' environments, behaviours, and interactions, offering an understanding of context-specific social phenomena that interviews alone may not fully capture (Jones and Somekh, 2005). This research employed an unstructured observation, enabling a flexible, adaptive approach to fieldwork (Jones and Somekh, 2005). Observational data were collected through field notes, informal conversations, community meeting attendance and photographs, supporting a comprehensive understanding of the observed context.

3.2.2 Quantitative

Quantitative census data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) was obtained via Stats SA SuperWEB—a web-based platform for accessing and analysing statistical

datasets, which enables users to generate custom reports and visualisations. This data was utilised to provide contextual information on the demographics, socio-economic conditions, and social facilities within the Setsoto LM. These data complemented the qualitative findings, offering objective socio-economic indicators that enriched the contextualisation of spatial planning and development dynamics (Johnson et al., 2007).

3.2.3 Mapping

The study area boundaries (Map 1) were imported as a shapefile (geospatial vector data format) and delineated using QGIS (Quantum Geographic Information System). In constructing the income map (Map 2), household income classification data from Stats SA SuperWEB was carefully pre-processed. Each municipality was assigned a unique code that matched the administrative boundaries attribute table before being spatially integrated with the municipal administrative boundaries in QGIS. This methodical coding and spatial join ensured that the income distribution within the study area was accurately represented, thereby allowing a detailed examination of income disparities at the municipal level. Similarly, the school map (Map 3) was developed using an Excel dataset from the Department of Education (2016). This dataset provided details of school names, educational phases, the town in which each school is located, and the corresponding geographic coordinates (longitude and latitude). Importing the dataset into QGIS and joining it with the Setsoto LM administrative boundary layer enabled a clear visualisation of the spatial distribution of educational institutions.

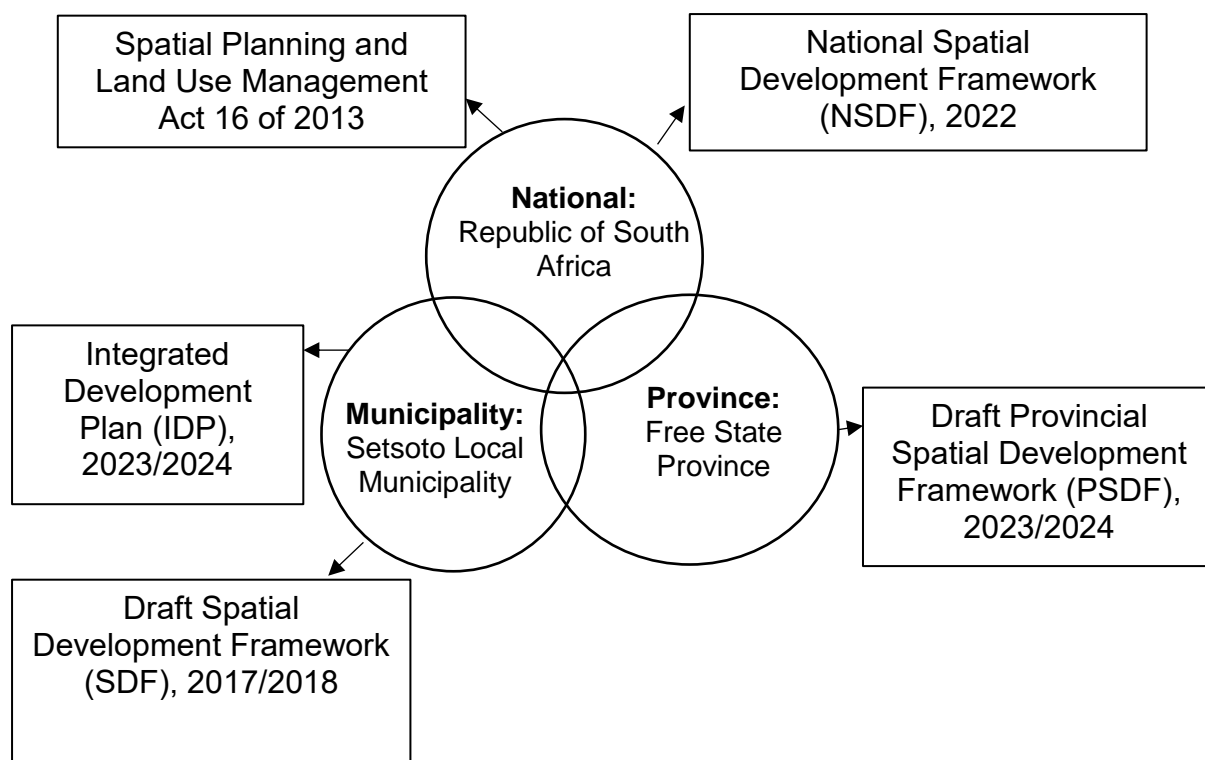
3.2.4 Documentary Analysis

Document analysis examined spatial development plans in Setsoto LM and contrasted them with those in the provincial and national spheres of government. This research explored how border issues are framed and interpreted in policy documents through content and discourse analysis. Documents were carefully selected to capture the multi-level governance spatial planning and development in the context of border region (Figure 4):

Municipality: Setsoto LM's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Spatial Development Framework (SDF) outline local priorities and planning strategies.

Province: The Free State Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF) provide strategic objectives impacting Setsoto LM's spatial planning.

National: The National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) 2022 and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013 (SPLUMA) set overarching spatial planning standards and regulatory guidelines relevant to Setsoto LM.



Source: Author's own

Figure 4: Selected spatial planning policy documents.

3.2.4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed to examine the quantitative scopes of selected policy documents, with a specific focus on word frequency analysis. This method was utilised to assess the extent to which border areas are addressed in spatial planning and development policies across the three spheres of government. The analysis targeted three primary terms: 'border,' 'boundary,' and 'frontier,' including their morphological variations (e.g., 'borders,' 'boundaries,' 'cross-border,' and 'transboundary'). These terms were selected for their distinct conceptual and linguistic connotations, grounded in scholarly discourse on border studies (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 1999), and their

relevance to Setsoto LM, a municipality situated along South Africa's border with Lesotho. Though they hold nuanced differences, boundary, frontier, and border are often treated as synonyms in daily discourse, news media, and broadcasts (Prescott and Triggs, 2008). In many European languages, including British English, frontier is often synonymous with border. By contrast, in the Americas—and particularly in the U.S.—the term boundary encompasses narrower definitions, including those linked to borders (Czimre, 2019; Langer and Fernández-Götz, 2020). In the U.S. context, the frontier has historically represented a zone of exploration, settlement, and frequent conflict (Adelman and Aron, 1999; Czimre, 2019; Prescott, 2015). The distinction between frontier and border is particularly pronounced in the U.S., where the frontier carries historical and cultural significance, while the border is more formal and fixed. In this context, the term 'border' reflects a neutral descriptor of the physical or political line between South Africa and Lesotho (Newman, 2006). 'Boundary,' often linked to formal legal and administrative delineations (Diener and Hagen, 2012), aligns with Setsoto LM's challenges in managing jurisdictional and resource allocation issues across its territorial edges. Finally, 'frontier' refers to a transitional or peripheral space characterized by ambiguity, fluidity, and potential for transformation (Martinez, 1994; Prescott and Triggs, 2008). In the context of Setsoto LM, the term captures the municipality's dual identity as a periphery facing underdevelopment and as a strategic municipality for cross-border regional development and integration, reflecting its potential to serve as a space of opportunity. The analysis of these terms highlights the degree to which policies address border regions. This approach ensured that all relevant terminology within the policy texts was systematically identified and examined, providing a thorough understanding of the extent to which border areas are integrated into spatial planning and development policy frameworks.

The Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC) technique was applied to analyse these terms' semantic and contextual usage (Weber, 1990). This method allows for identifying word meanings within their specific textual (in-context) environments, enabling a distinction between references to international political boundaries and more generic or internal uses of the terms. For instance, mentions of 'border' in the context of international cooperation or territorial demarcation were prioritised over references to administrative or internal regional divisions.

The analysis was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved identifying and quantifying key terms across the documents. Each document was systematically scanned and processed to extract and tally the frequency of the target terms (Bazeley, 2013). This quantitative approach provided a measurable indicator of the prominence of border-related concepts within the policy discourse. The second phase focused on thematic analysis, examining the contexts in which border-related terms were used. This involved categorising the mentions based on thematic associations (Weber, 1990). By combining these approaches, the analysis quantified the prevalence of border-related terminology and provided insights into the thematic priorities and policy orientations associated with border areas. This approach ensured a nuanced understanding of how border issues are conceptualised and integrated into spatial planning and development policies. The findings from this analysis contribute to a deeper comprehension of the role of borders in policy frameworks and highlight potential gaps or areas for further attention in addressing the complexities of border regions.

3.2.4.2 Discourse Analysis

While content analysis provides valuable insights into the prevalence of border-related terms and associated themes in spatial development plans, it falls short of capturing the nuanced discursive articulations surrounding borders. As Jakola (2016) observes, border regions are not merely physical demarcations but serve as arenas of discursive contention shaped by intricate socio-institutional dynamics. These dynamics include competing interests, historical legacies, and power struggles, which make border regions fertile ground for investigating how policies are transferred, adapted, and legitimised. For instance, Jakola's study of the Finnish-Swedish border highlights how discursive practices shape the perception of borders as either barriers or bridges, influencing policy outcomes and regional development strategies (Jakola, 2016).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed to address these complexities and examine how borders are framed and the underlying ideologies that influence their prioritisation and conceptualisation within spatial planning and development policy documents. CDA investigates power relations, dominance, and resistance by analysing language in policy documents as a problematized medium. In this context, language is not treated as a neutral tool but as an active mechanism through which actors construct and reinforce particular worldviews (Wagenaar, 2011). This approach

draws heavily from Michel Foucault's and Norman Fairclough's foundational work on discourse and power (Fairclough, 2013, 2001, 1992; Foucault, 1981, 1972). Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and discursive formations are particularly relevant, as they emphasise how power operates through knowledge production and institutional practices, shaping what is considered legitimate or marginal in spatial planning discourses. Fairclough's contributions highlight how documents are not objective representations of reality but socially constructed artefacts that reflect and shape broader socio-political contexts.

In operationalising CDA for this research, a three-stage analytical framework adapted from Fairclough (2001, 1992) was applied: (1) textual analysis, (2) discursive practice analysis, and (3) social practice analysis. During the textual analysis stage of policy documents, thematic coding was applied to identify recurring lexical patterns, metaphorical constructions, and syntactic structures related to borders and spatial development. Although the initial coding focused on categorising prominent semantic groupings, the subsequent interpretation was guided by CDA principles to interrogate the ideological assumptions and discursive framings embedded in language use. This approach enabled a shift from surface-level content to a critical examination of how linguistic choices reflect and reproduce power relations, institutional priorities, and spatial imaginaries. In the second stage, discursive practice analysis, intertextuality and interdiscursivity were examined to trace how dominant policy discourses about borders are reproduced or challenged across documents in national, provincial, and municipal spheres of government. This included analysing references to broader strategic frameworks and the alignment or disjuncture of border-related narratives across planning levels. The third stage, social practice analysis, involved situating these discourses within broader political, historical, and institutional contexts.

Thus, CDA in this research interrogates policy documents as discursive artefacts, identifying how power relations, ideologies, and socio-political priorities manifest in the language of spatial planning. For example, Van Dijk's (1993) work on ideology and discourse, and Fairclough's (2001) exploration of language and power are instrumental in unpacking how discourse shapes perceptions of borders. This analysis provides practical implications for policy-making, revealing how discursive practices can perpetuate inequalities or foster more inclusive and equitable spatial planning in border regions.

3.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are critical criteria for qualitative research to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Reliability, as Bhattacharjee (2012) states, concerns the degree to which a measurement of a construct is consistent and dependable. In this Setsoto LM case study, reliability was enhanced through a carefully developed semi-structured interview protocol designed to address core research themes while providing flexibility for participants' insights. The iterative nature of this protocol, refined through a pilot study, was instrumental in identifying and rectifying ambiguities or misinterpretations, thus ensuring consistency and enhancing the clarity and reliability of responses (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

To achieve validity, or the degree to which the study measures what it intends to (Taherdoost, 2016), attention was given to the research design's ontological and epistemological foundations. The researcher adopted a constructivist lens, acknowledging that 'being in the world' (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology) shape both the observation process and the analysis of data (Jones and Somekh, 2005). This reflexive stance recognises the researcher's influence on knowledge creation and includes ongoing self-assessment of how personal beliefs, values, and experiences may affect data interpretation (Palaganas et al., 2017). Reflexivity, therefore, served as an essential mechanism for maintaining analytical rigour, whereby the researcher continually reflected on positionality and its implications for the study's findings.

Moreover, methodological triangulation was employed to bolster the validity of the research (Patton, 2015). Triangulation involved integrating multiple methods of data collection, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, observational fieldwork and census data to cross-verify findings across diverse sources. This approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the research problem and minimised potential biases inherent in single-method studies (Denzin, 2017). By drawing on different types of data, triangulation strengthened the study's validity, facilitating a holistic analysis that aligns closely with the study's aims and constructivist framework (Flick, 2014).

3.4 Data Collection Summary and Ethical Considerations

This section provides a concise overview of the data collection process, as shown in Table 4, linking research questions with corresponding data sources and methods. The objective is to ensure a systematic approach to the data collection process.

Table 4: Summary of the data collection process.

No	Research Objectives	Data sources	Means of data collection
1.	To document the perceptions and lived experiences of borderland residents in Setsoto LM and assess the implications for spatial planning and development.	Primary data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members Secondary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stats SA census data 	Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic and Socio-economic context
2.	To explore planners' perceptions of roles and engagement across the municipal, provincial and national spheres in shaping spatial planning and development processes in Setsoto LM.	Primary data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal planners • Provincial planners • National planners 	Qualitative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations
3.	To analyse how current spatial planning and development practices address challenges and opportunities arising from the cross-border context in Setsoto LM.	Primary data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members • Municipal planners • Provincial planners • National planners Secondary data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setsoto LM IDP • Setsoto LM SDF • Free State PSDF • South Africa NSDF • SPLUMA 	Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations • Document analysis Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis
4.	To propose recommendations to enhance community participation, intergovernmental coordination and institutional capacity in border-region planning.	Primary Data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights from interviews and observations 	Qualitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations • Document analysis

		Secondary Data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of policy documents 	Quantitative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis
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Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary. At the commencement of each interview, an ethical statement was presented to participants, clearly outlining the research's purpose, the data's intended use, and the request for consent to record the interview, ensuring transparency in the data collection process. To uphold the principles of confidentiality and anonymity, identifying information, including names and telephone numbers, was excluded in the final analysis. Additionally, interviewees could express themselves in any preferred South African official language.

CHAPTER 4: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Setsoto Local Municipality Contextualised

This research aimed to investigate and document the lived experiences of border communities, analyse planners' perceptions of borders, examine how different spheres of government influence spatial planning and development in Setsoto LM, and identify strategies to address the unique challenges and opportunities arising from its cross-border context. The ultimate goals are to enhance governance, inform policy frameworks, and improve living conditions for borderland communities. Against this backdrop, this chapter synthesises the case study's findings by integrating insights from primary and secondary data sources to fulfil the research objectives. To comprehensively understand Setsoto LM's context, its demographic profile is analysed, including population growth, composition, language distribution, age groups, and citizenship composition. Additionally, its socio-economic profile is examined, covering education levels, employment trends, income distribution, and economic sectors, as well as the distribution of social facilities such as schools and healthcare centres.

4.1.1 Demographic profile

4.1.1.1 Population Growth Trend

Between 1996 and 2001, Setsoto LM's population grew by 12.2% (from 109,768 to 123,194), exceeding the Free State's 2.5% growth over the same period. This disparity may have been due to post-apartheid investments in basic services, small-scale agricultural projects, and infrastructural developments, which can strengthen local economies and encourage inward migration (Binns and Nel, 1999). However, this positive trend did not last. Between 2001 and 2011, Setsoto LM's population decreased by 8.6% (from 123,194 to 112,597), while the Free State's population rose by 1.4%, and South Africa's overall population increased by 15.5%, as illustrated in Table 5. Several factors may have contributed to this decline, including the 2008 financial crisis, which placed greater pressure on municipalities with limited industrial diversity or weak safety nets. Youth outmigration for education or employment likely worsened the decline by reducing population size and birth rates. Research by Turok (2014) shows that South Africa's rural and semi-urban municipalities faced higher

unemployment and outmigration during this period as residents moved to larger cities in search of economic opportunities.

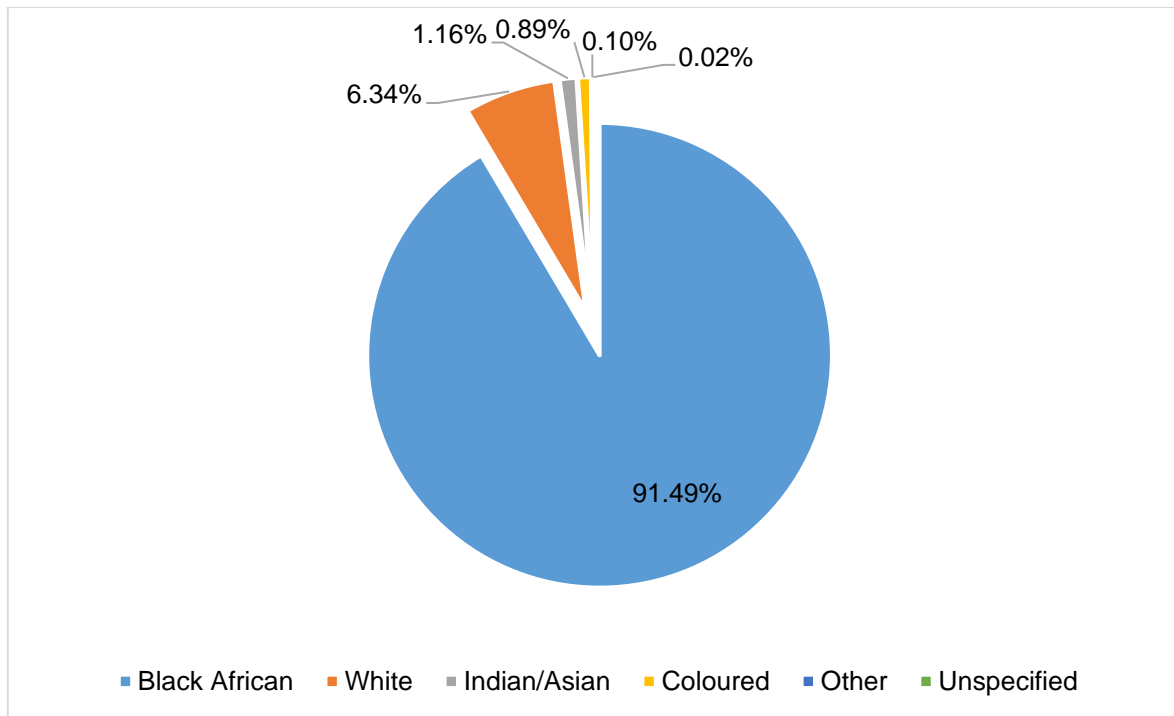
Table 5: Population size in Setsoto LM, Free State and South Africa between 1996 and 2022.

Population	1996	2001	2011	2022
Setsoto LM	109 768	123 194	112 597	127 918
Free State	2 633 504	2 706 775	2 745 590	2 964 412
South Africa	40 583 573	44 819 778	51 770 560	62 027 503

By 2022, Setsoto LM's population had recovered to 127,918, a 13.6% increase from 2011, matching the Free State Province's steadier 8.0% growth over the same period. However, national figures show that South Africa's population grew by 52.8% between 1996 and 2022, compared to Setsoto LM's overall increase of only 16.6. This difference reflects Setsoto LM's peripheral position in national urbanisation trends, which have concentrated economic opportunities in larger cities offering better healthcare, education, and formal employment.

4.1.1.2 Population Groups

The black-African population group primarily shapes the demographic composition of Setsoto LM as the majority, comprising 91.49% of the population. This demographic dominance not only reflects historical and socio-political legacies but also shapes the municipality's cultural, linguistic, and social landscape. This concentrated demographic provides opportunities for community cohesion around shared cultural practices and identity. The presence of minority groups, however, introduces an element of diversity that enriches the community. White population group comprises 6.34% of the population, while Indian or Asian constitute 1.16%, and Coloured account for 0.89%, as shown in Figure 5. Although these population groups represent a smaller proportion of the population, their presence contributes to a multicultural social environment. Local planning policies and resources should be sensitive to support the majority group's cultural and social needs and facilitate platforms for minority group participation and representation.

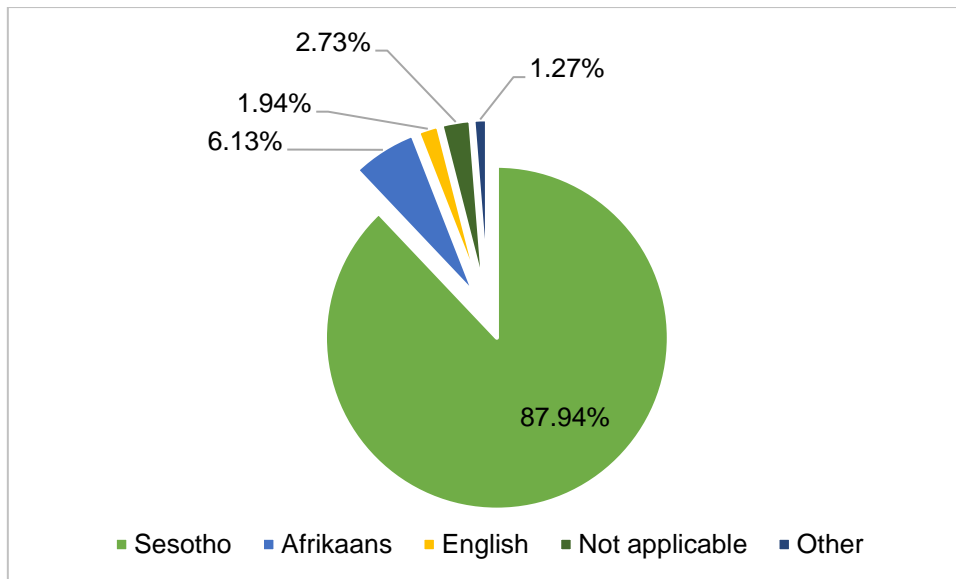


Source: Stats SA (2022)

Figure 5: Population composition of Setsoto LM by population groups (2022).

4.1.1.3 Language

South Africa officially recognises 12 languages: IsiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, isiSwati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xhosa, Afrikaans, IsiZulu, English, and South African Sign Language. Nonetheless, English serves as the primary language for government and parliamentary matters. While most South Africans can speak more than one language, Sesotho holds the majority linguistic presence in Setsoto LM, spoken by 87.94% of the local population. Afrikaans (6.13%) and English (1.94%) follow in usage but are much less prevalent, as shown in Figure 6. The predominance of Sesotho, which is also the main language in Lesotho, highlights a strong cultural and linguistic bond between the communities across the Free State-Lesotho border.

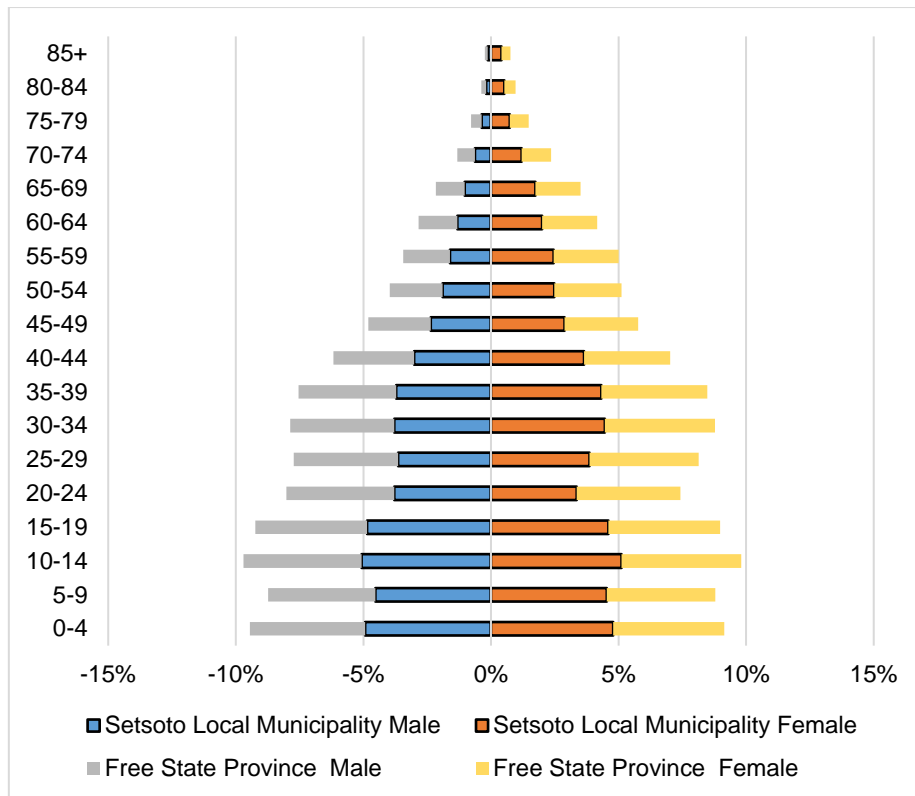


Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2022)

Figure 6: Share of Setsoto LM residents by most often spoken language (2022).

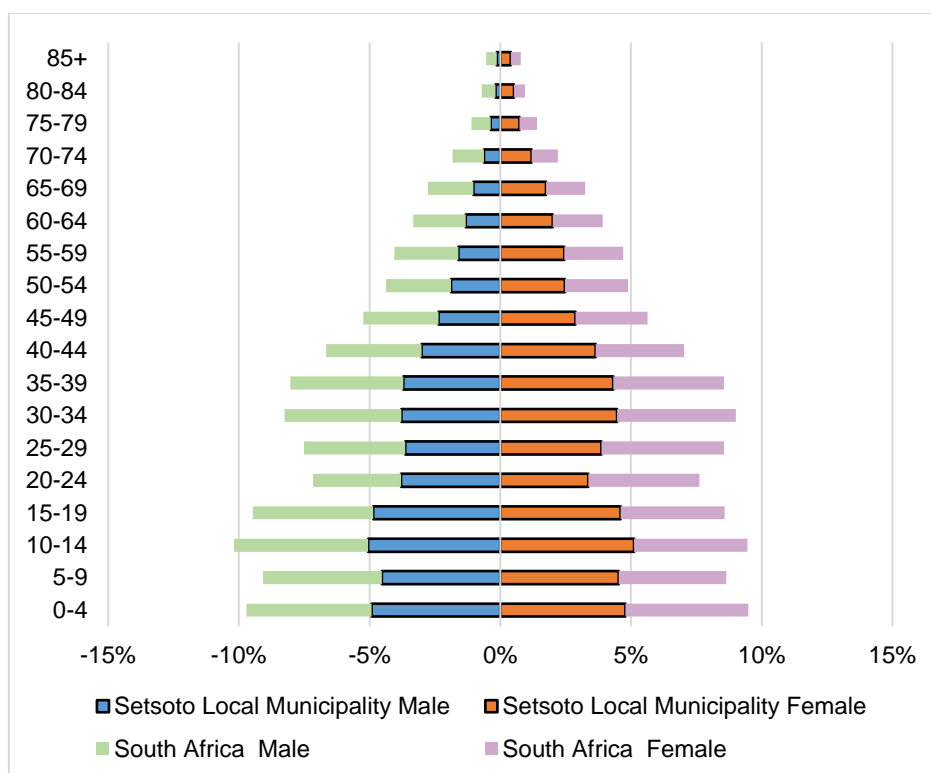
4.1.1.4 Age Groups and Gender Distribution

The population pyramid for Setsoto LM shows slight percentage differences across age-gender cohorts compared to the Free State Province and South Africa. While these variations may appear minor within a 0.5–1% range, they suggest emerging trends that could have cumulative effects over time. The data suggest that demographic trends are shaped primarily by family-level migration and natural factors such as birth and mortality rates in the youngest age groups. For example, in the 10–14 age group, Setsoto LM has 5.06% males and 5.12% females. In contrast, the Free State has 4.63% males and 4.68% females, while South Africa shows 5.12% males and 4.34% females, as depicted in Figures 7 and Figure 8.



Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2022)

Figure 7: Comparative age group distribution of Setsoto LM and the Free State Province residents by 5 year-gap (2022).



Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2022)

Figure 8: Comparative age groups distribution of Setsoto LM and South African residents by 5 year-gap (2022).

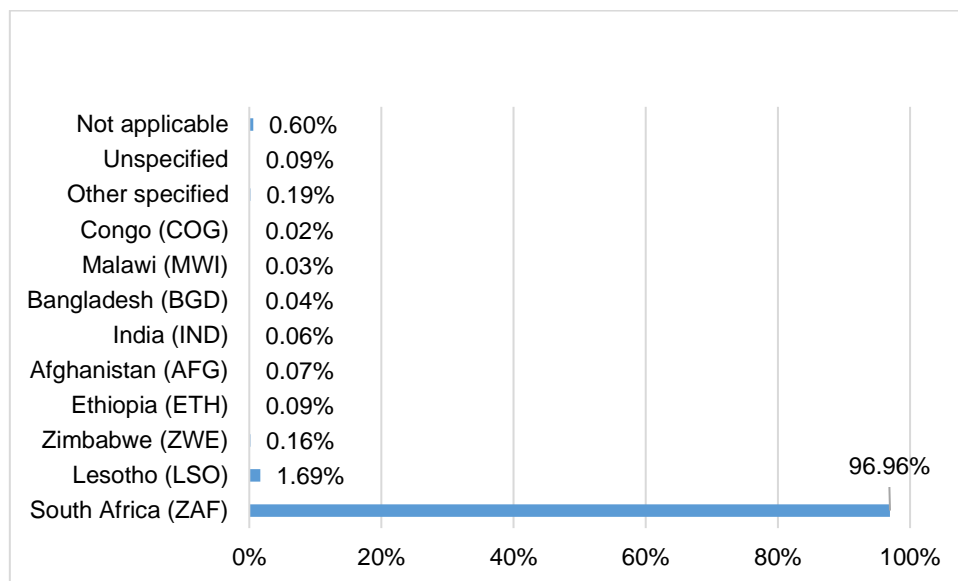
The working-age group is typically defined as those aged 15–64 years globally. In Setsoto LM, the trends observed in early working ages provide key insights into future economic capacity. For instance, in the 20–24 age group, Setsoto LM shows 3.79% for males and 3.36% for females, while the Free State records 4.22% for males and 4.07% for females. This drop from 5.06% for males and 5.12% for females in the 10–14 age group in Setsoto LM suggests that limited local career advancement opportunities may be driving young people to migrate in search of better education and employment prospects.

With the working-age population (15–64 years) making up 64.1%, the youth (0–14) and elderly (65+) accounting for 27.0% and 7.0%, respectively, Setsoto LM’s dependency ratio is 56.1%. In comparison, the Free State Province has a working-age share of 66.4%, while the youth and elderly population make up 26.7% and 7.0%, respectively, resulting in a dependency ratio of 50.7% (Stats SA, 2022). South Africa’s overall age dependency ratio is 48.3%, which is lower than the global average of

58.4%. A lower ratio generally suggests reduced financial pressure on the working population and greater political stability (World Economics, 2024). In Setsoto LM, however, the relatively higher dependency ratio indicates that there will likely be growing demands on healthcare and social services unless a sufficient number of new working-age residents join the population.

4.1.1.5 Citizenship

The citizenship profile of Setsoto LM shows a predominantly South African population, with 96.96% of residents identifying as South African citizens. Given Setsoto LM's proximity to Lesotho, citizens born in Lesotho form the second-largest group (1.69%), which is larger than all other nationalities combined, making up less than 1% of the population. The next notable group comes from Zimbabwe (0.16%). There is also a smaller but noticeable share of citizens from Ethiopia (0.09%), Afghanistan (0.07%), and India (0.06%), none of which are neighbouring countries or part of the SADC region (Figure 9).



Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2022)

Figure 9: Population composition by citizenship status in Setsoto LM (2022).

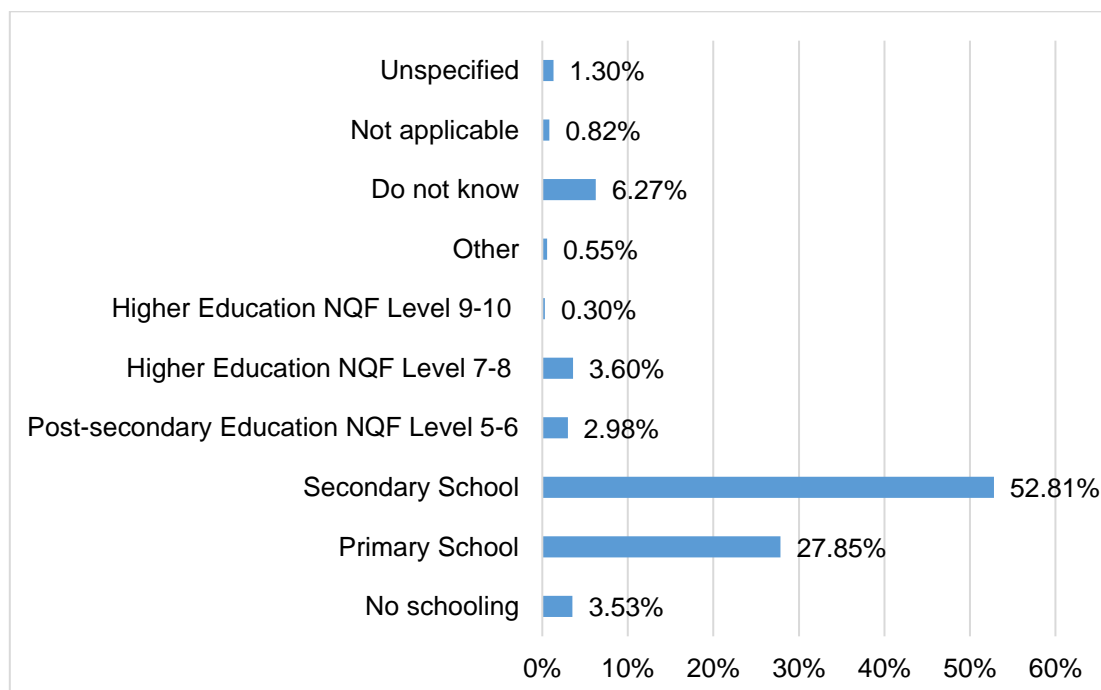
Border regions are characterised by active cross-border flows, where social and economic networks intersect, including shopping, tourism, and commuting, encompassing short, medium, and long-term stays on the other side of the border. This has implications for Setsoto LM, where spatial planning and development

measures can help ease strains on housing, social facilities, and employment while also encouraging the cultural integration of migrants into the local community. This includes sharing data on population flows, coordinating infrastructure development along shared borders, and aligning strategies for service provision.

4.1.2 Socio-Economic Profile

4.1.2.1 Education

Analysis of educational attainment data for the population aged 25 to 64 years shows that a significant portion lacks tertiary education. Specifically, 27.85% of individuals have completed only primary education, while a further 52.81% have attained secondary schooling. Fewer than 7% have any form of education beyond secondary school (Figure 10). This pattern highlights a concerning trend: the majority of residents lack the qualifications needed to compete in an increasingly demanding job market. The shortage of a well-educated workforce creates significant challenges for local economic development, as businesses looking to establish operations in the area often prioritise locations with a skilled labour pool that can support innovation and productivity.



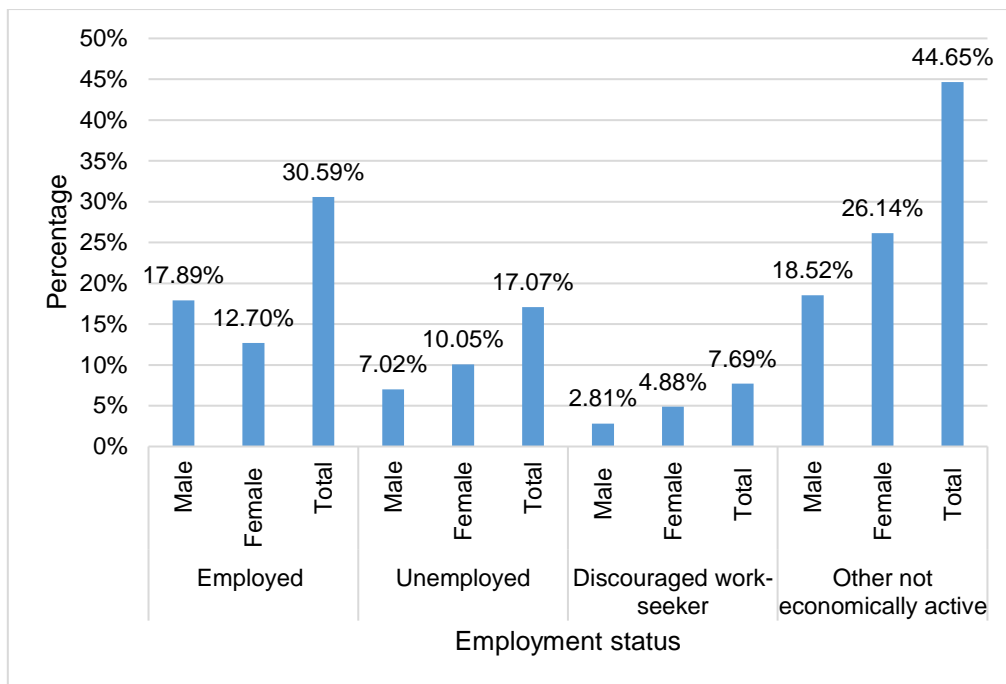
Source: Adapted from Stats SA (2022)

Figure 10: Breakdown of the population aged 25-64 years by level of education in Setsoto LM (2022).

While the majority (80.66%) of Setsoto LM's population has attained at least primary or secondary education, the municipality faces a significant gap in advanced educational opportunities. Setsoto LM has no tertiary institutions, such as universities or large technical colleges, which restricts local access to higher education and training. Most higher education resources for residents are located in larger towns or cities outside the municipality. For example, the University of the Free State Qwaqwa Campus, situated approximately 180 km away, and the University of the Free State and Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, around 320 km away, are the nearest options for residents seeking higher education. This geographical distance further compounds the barriers to educational attainment.

4.1.2.2 Employment Status

The employment data for Setsoto LM shows a labour market marked by systemic inefficiencies and deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities. Only 30.59% of the population is formally employed (Figure 11), highlighting the municipality's struggle to create sufficient economic opportunities for its working-age residents. This low employment rate is not simply a result of individual circumstances but reflects broader structural challenges, including a lack of industrial diversification and a persistent mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the demands of the labour market.



Source: Stats SA (2011)

Figure 11: Employment status classification of the population aged between 15 and 64 years by gender in Setsoto LM (2011).

A closer look at the data shows significant gender disparities. Male employment stands at 17.89%, while female employment is notably lower at 12.70%. This gap suggests that women face greater barriers to economic participation, which are further compounded by higher unemployment rates among women (10.05%) compared to men (7.02%). The high number of discouraged work-seekers—individuals who have stopped actively looking for employment due to repeated setbacks—is particularly concerning, with women (4.88%) disproportionately affected compared to men (2.81%). Additionally, a significant portion of the population falls into the “other not economically active” category, which includes those engaged in unpaid domestic work, full-time caregiving, or informal subsistence activities. Here, the gender disparity is striking: 26.14% of women and 18.52% of men are classified as economically inactive. While economic inactivity is not inherently negative, the gendered imbalance highlights that women are over-represented in non-market roles.

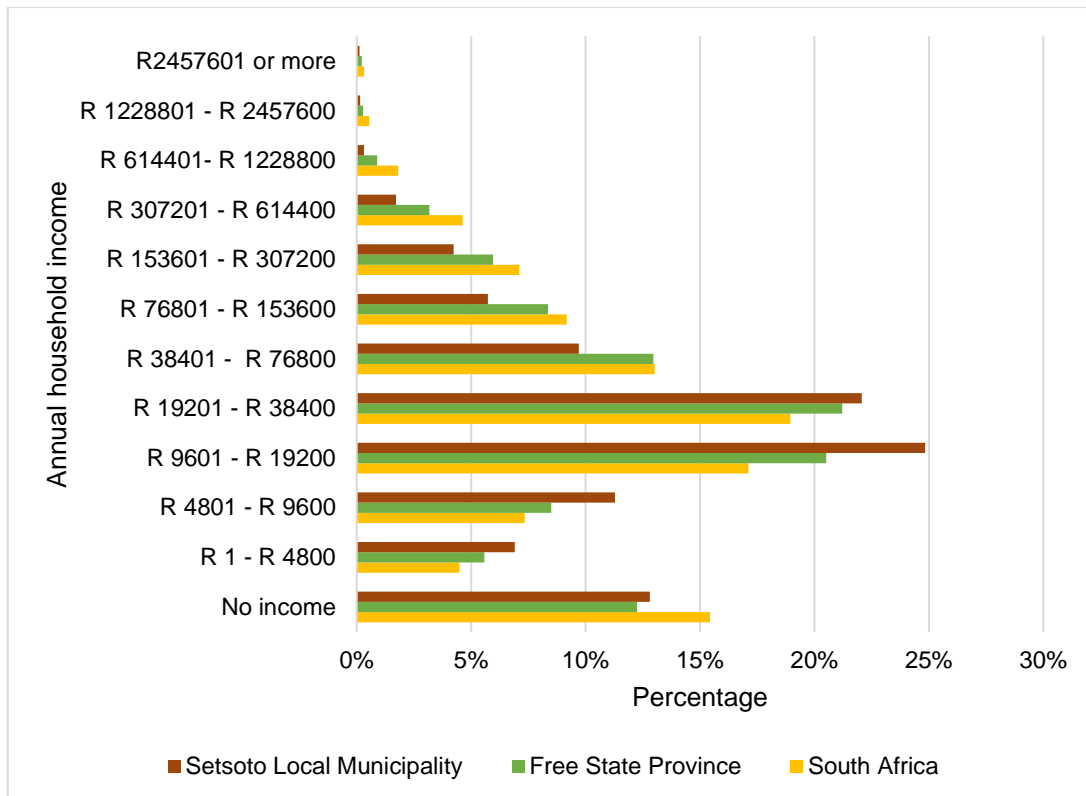
The consequences of low formal employment go beyond individual hardship, with significant impacts on the municipality’s socioeconomic fabric. One major effect is the worsening of brain drain, as skilled young people and working-age individuals move

to urban centres or other regions in search of better job opportunities. Additionally, the lack of formal employment limits the municipality's revenue base, as low household incomes reduce taxable earnings and make it difficult for residents to pay for municipal services. This financial shortfall weakens Setsoto LM's ability to invest in critical infrastructure, education, and healthcare, creating a cycle of underdevelopment.

4.1.2.3 Annual Household Income

A closer look at annual household income brackets in Setsoto LM shows a clear concentration in the lower income ranges, particularly between R 9,601 and R 19,200 in 2011 South African Rand (ZAR). Here, 24.84% of households fall into this bracket, compared to 20.52% in the Free State Province and 17.12% nationally. This clustering in the lower income brackets suggests that a significant portion of Setsoto LM's population may struggle to meet daily expenses, which can weaken local consumer demand and economic resilience. In contrast, the proportion of households in higher brackets above R 38,401 (such as R 76,801–R 153,600 and beyond) is much lower in Setsoto LM (5.74% and below) than in both the province (8.36% and above) and the country (9.17% and above). These figures indicate that upward mobility into the middle- and upper-income levels may be more difficult in Setsoto LM due to limited employment opportunities and a lack of high-paying industries in the area.

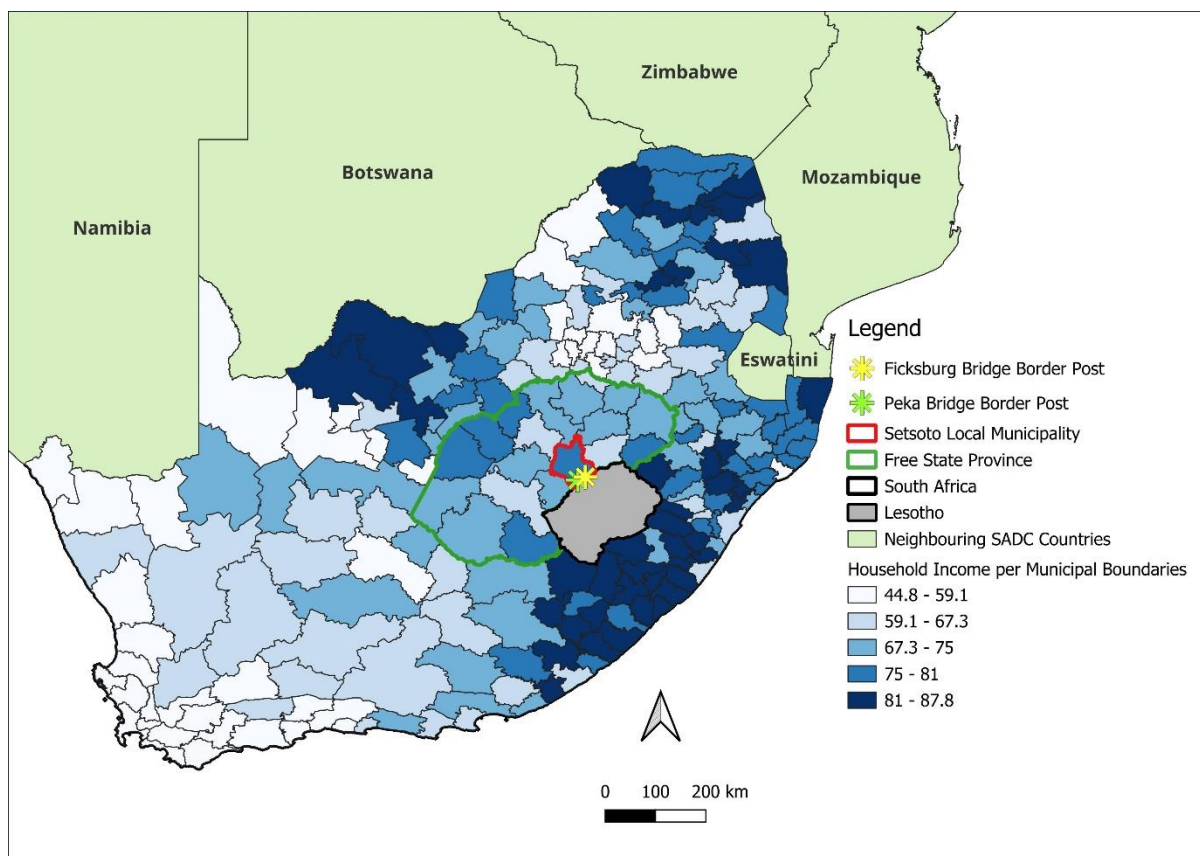
A further point worth noting is the percentage of households reporting no income. While the national average is 15.44%, Setsoto LM records a slightly lower figure of 12.81%, as shown in Figure 12. Households classified as having no income may still engage in subsistence activities, which can help reduce absolute income deprivation. For example, 32.64% of households in Setsoto LM are involved in agriculture (Stats SA, 2016).



Source: Stats SA (2011)

Figure 12: Distribution of annual household income at three spheres of government Setsoto LM, Free State and South Africa (2011).

Using the 2011 Census threshold of R38,400 (approximately \$5,000 USD, based on 2011 exchange rates) to define low-income households, the data reveals that 77.91% of households in Setsoto LM fell below this level. This proportion is considerably higher than both the provincial average of 68.06% and the national average of 63.33% (Stats SA, 2011), as illustrated in Map 2.



Source: Author's own

Map 2: Low annual household income cluster in percentages per South Africa's municipal boundaries (2011).

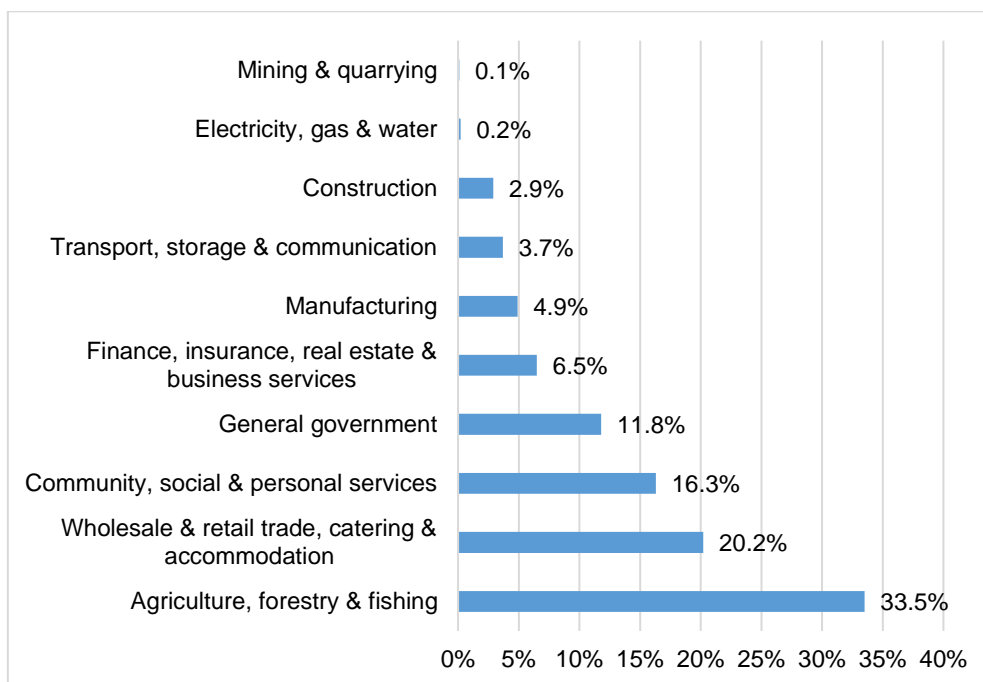
The high concentration of low-income households calls for greater focus on local spatial planning and development strategies that can help address low-income conditions. The Ficksburg Bridge border post plays a vital role in facilitating trade between South Africa and Lesotho, yet its economic importance contrasts sharply with the ongoing financial instability faced by residents in Setsoto LM. In 2021, the border post handled R4.1 billion (~ \$277 million USD) in South African exports to Lesotho and managed R2.5 billion (~ \$170 million USD) in imports to Lesotho. As a result, the Ficksburg Bridge border post accounted for 42% of the total volume of goods South Africa imported from Lesotho in 2021 (Cross-Border Road Transport Agency, 2022).

Despite this substantial cross-border trade and Ficksburg Bridge serving as a commercial border post, the economic benefits remain largely disconnected from local communities in Setsoto LM. This gap highlights systemic inefficiencies in leveraging

economic flows traversing its borders. Instead of remaining passive to the economic activity passing through its borders, Setsoto LM should adopt targeted spatial planning and development measures to harness its strategic location for local growth.

4.1.2.4 Economic Sectors

The economic structure of Setsoto LM is predominantly shaped by primary and tertiary industries, with minimal industrial diversification. Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing form the largest employment sector, comprising 33.5% of jobs in 2019. This reflects the municipality’s extensive agricultural land, where crop and livestock farming sustains a substantial population share. The Wholesale and Retail trade, Catering, and Accommodation sector follows, accounting for 20.2% of employment, while Community, Social, and Personal Services contribute 16.3% (Figure 13). Collectively, these three sectors provide 70% of employment in Setsoto LM, highlighting a local economy reliant on agriculture, trade, and service-oriented activities.



Source: Adapted from the Department of National Treasury (2021, p. 22)

Figure 13: Share of economic sectors that contribute the most to employment in the Setsoto LM (2019).

As a border region, Setsoto LM’s economic structure presents both opportunities and challenges. The dominance of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing sector, and the

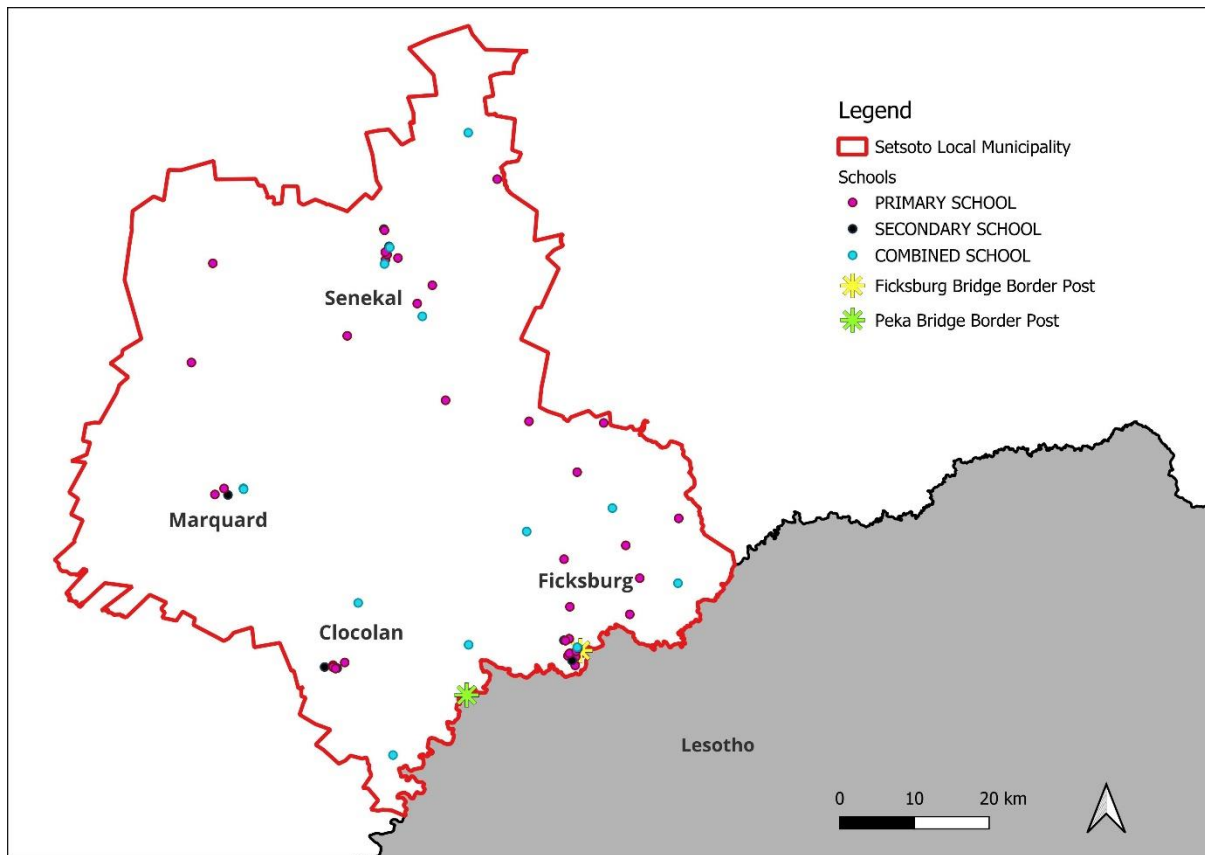
Wholesale, Retail, Catering, and Accommodation sector positions the municipality as a potential hub for regional food systems and cross-border trade. However, the lack of economic diversification and reliance on low-value sectors highlight the need for equitable spatial planning strategies to improve conditions for local border communities.

4.1.3 Social Facilities

Social facilities are essential for cross-border spatial planning, influencing regional integration, social equity, and sustainable development. These facilities—such as schools, healthcare centres, community halls, recreational spaces, and social welfare offices—play a vital role in shaping mobility patterns for border communities, as people frequently cross borders in search of better living conditions and improved access to services.

4.1.3.1 Schools

The accessibility and distribution of educational infrastructure directly influence the opportunities available to young people in border regions. In Setsoto LM, individuals aged 5-24 make up 35.88% (45,896) of the population, indicating a significant demand for educational services. The municipality has approximately 54 schools: 33 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, and 11 combined schools (which offer both primary and secondary education) (Department of Education, 2016), as shown on Map 3.



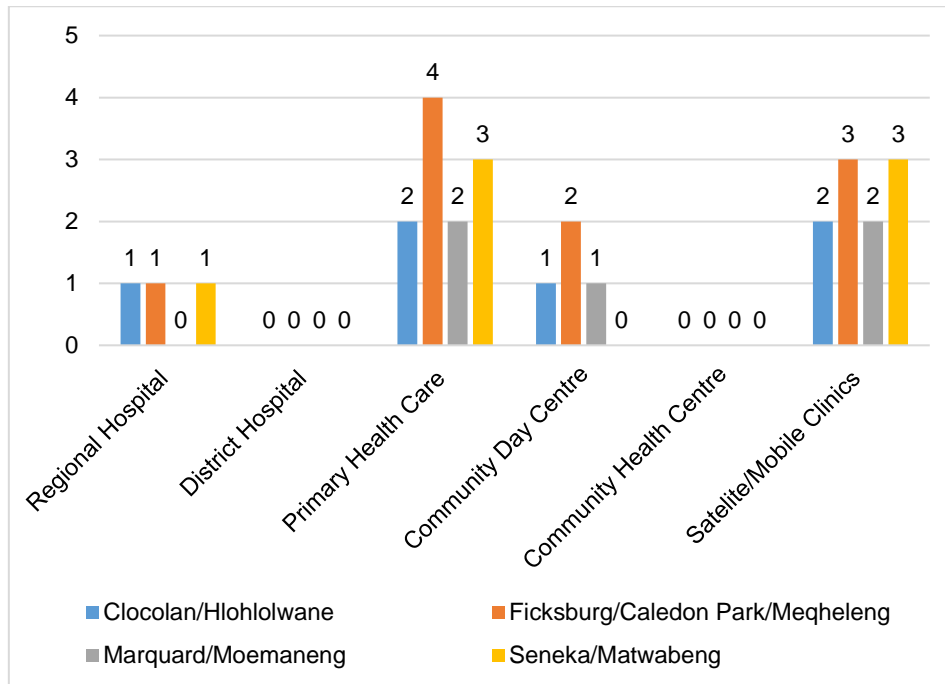
Source: Author's own

Map 3: Spatial distribution representing the number of schools in Setsoto LM (2016).

The typical population threshold for primary schools ranges from 2,200 to 6,600 people, while secondary schools generally require a threshold of 4,000 to 10,000 people. These benchmarks provide useful guidance for assessing whether the existing school infrastructure meets the needs of the population or if gaps in educational accessibility remain (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and Department of Human Settlements, 2019). In border municipalities like Setsoto, where uneven development between South Africa and Lesotho may attract cross-border learners, existing resources could face additional pressure. This necessitates planning strategies that account for fluctuating student populations. Without proper planning, disparities in access to quality education can worsen spatial inequalities and hinder the development potential of border communities. Therefore, evaluating social facilities such as school distribution in Setsoto LM must consider not only demographic demand but also cross-border enrolment trends, infrastructural capacity, and the policy framework influencing educational mobility in the region.

4.1.3.2 Healthcare Facilities

Healthcare facilities play a vital role in attracting cross-border populations seeking improved medical services. Setsoto LM has Regional Hospitals (3), Primary Health Care (11), Community Day Centres (4) and Satellite/Mobile Clinics (10), as shown in Figure 14.



Source: Setsoto Local Municipality IDP (2024, p. 64)

Figure 14: Number of healthcare facilities in four main towns of Setsoto LM.

According to guidelines from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the Department of Human Settlements (2019, p. 33), primary healthcare clinics (PHC) are permanent facilities, whether public or private, that offer a range of primary healthcare services. They operate for at least eight hours a day and four days a week and are designed to serve a population of 5,000 to 60,000 people. Community health centres (CHCs) are permanent, well-equipped facilities that provide a wider range of primary healthcare services. These include observation beds, accident and emergency care, and midwifery services, though they do not conduct surgeries under general anaesthesia. CHCs operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and serve a larger population of 60,000 to 150,000 people.

With a population of 127,918 (2022), Setsoto LM's geographic position as a border municipality has significant implications for the provision and accessibility of healthcare services. The municipality often serves not only local residents but also individuals from Lesotho who cross the border to access essential healthcare. This transboundary demand places additional pressure on existing healthcare infrastructure, frequently exceeding the population thresholds originally intended for local service delivery. If this cross-border usage is not integrated into planning frameworks, it risks straining resources, potentially leading to overcrowding, reduced quality of care, and logistical inefficiencies. As a result, healthcare provision in border municipalities like Setsoto LM requires a broader approach, ensuring facilities are adequately equipped to manage patient volumes that extend beyond municipal boundaries. This calls for coordination and collaboration between local governance structures and cross-border stakeholders to maintain equitable and functional healthcare services.

4.2 Site Observation

4.2.1 Setsoto LM Borderland

The Ficksburg Bridge border post exemplifies the state's attempt to materialise the border through infrastructure such as checkpoints, customs facilities, and traffic control systems (Figure 15). These structures align with the state's broader objective to assert control and regulate movement, reflecting the notion that borders demarcate the jurisdiction of states, influencing trade, migration, and the management of natural resources (Diener and Hagen, 2012).



Source: Author's own (2024)

Figure 15: South Africa (Ficksburg)-Lesotho (Maputsoe) border post.

Field observations conducted in May 2024 revealed that, while a formal border post operates at the Ficksburg Bridge, the physical fencing along the Caledon/Mohokare River has been vandalised and deteriorated over time, leaving the riverbank largely unfenced and accessible. The Caledon/Mohokare River functions as a geographic boundary between Setsoto LM and Lesotho yet lacks continuous state-installed barriers. During the dry season, the riverbed often dries out, reducing the natural barrier to a shallow ford and enabling pedestrians to cross informally without utilising the official route through the Ficksburg Bridge border post. Individuals carrying grocery bags were observed crossing the river in both directions, engaging in these crossings openly and without interference from state authorities. Albeit such crossings are technically illegal, they have become an accepted part of daily life for local residents. Soja's thirdspace (1996) highlights these crossings as sites where material infrastructures and everyday lived experiences converge to contest and reconfigure state-defined spaces. Such observations reinforce the conceptualisation of borders as socially constructed phenomena continually re-produced through social practices. Repetitive crossing routines produce lived border realities that diverge from official state inscriptions. The act of crossing by the river, not through the border post and without formal clearance, constitutes a bordering practice that both engages with and

contests state-defined spatialities (Soja, 1999). These practices defy demarcation. Thus, on one hand, the Ficksburg border post is a symbol of state control; on the other, the porous river crossings function as expressions of everyday resistance, illustrating how local agency can reshape the material and symbolic dimensions of state-defined space. This echoes Newman's (2006) insight that borders are not rigid barricades but zones of encounter, continuously re-imagined through the interactions of those who live alongside them.

4.2.2 Integrated Development Plan and Budget Community Meeting

On 10 May 2024, the Setsoto LM convened an IDP and budget review meeting at the Ficksburg Community Hall, inviting public participation. This ward meeting provided a valuable opportunity for this research to conduct first-hand observation of community engagement in municipal processes. However, the meeting was poorly attended, with fewer than 30 participants, which raises concerns about public disengagement from municipal processes. Ward meetings typically cover 5,000–15,000 people (Piper and Von Lieres, 2008), meaning fewer than 30 attendees equate to under 1% of the ward population accessing public participation. This low turnout could suggest that:

- Lack of awareness about the meeting.
- Lack of interest in attending the meeting.
- Prior experiences where participation did not lead to visible change.
- Practical barriers (time, location, competing priorities).

The session focused predominantly on reporting past expenditures and achievements, such as road repairs and site developments. While these outputs were presented as evidence of progress, unfortunately, the meeting largely failed to address critical issues of accountability and the lack of tangible improvements in residents' quality of life. The municipality's narrative was formulaic, emphasising quantifiable outputs—"we fixed this road," "we developed this site"—while neglecting to engage with the qualitative outcomes that matter most to communities. This showed a stark disconnect between the municipality's portrayal of progress and the lived realities of residents, whose socio-economic conditions continue to deteriorate despite the reported expenditure of millions of Rand.

The tone of the meeting suggested a strategy aimed at convincing attendees of the municipality's efforts rather than fostering meaningful dialogue about systemic challenges or co-creating solutions with the community. For ordinary citizens, this approach could be deeply frustrating. Hearing about significant financial investments in projects that fail to translate into improved living standards fosters disillusionment and distrust. The meeting provided a platform for authorities to interact with ordinary citizens; however, it also illuminated a broader challenge in municipal governance—the disconnect between procedural participation and substantive engagement. When communities perceive that their input fails to effect meaningful change, when their needs go unmet, and when their lived experiences are overlooked, their willingness to engage in such processes diminishes. This creates a vicious cycle where low attendance is used to justify top-down decision-making, further alienating residents and eroding trust.

Albeit the Setsoto LM's IDP and budget review meeting provided a valuable platform for public engagement, it revealed a significant gap between municipal reporting and community expectations. Given the low attendance, one would expect the authorities to have addressed the lack of meaningful participation and explored strategies to rectify this issue. However, failure to do so highlighted a deeper systemic problem. This disconnect emphasises the urgent need for a more participatory, transparent, and accountable approach to municipal governance that prioritises tangible improvements in residents' lives over merely reporting outputs. Without such a shift, municipal meetings risk becoming performative exercises, deepening rather than bridging the divide between local government and the communities they aim to serve. To rebuild trust and foster collaboration, the municipality must engage residents proactively, address their concerns, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusive and responsive governance.

4.3 Lived Experiences of Borderland Residents

In the final phase of interviews, nine participants were recorded, comprising six males and three females, as shown in Table 6. The lower level of female participation may be attributed to the societal tendency for women to serve as primary caretakers in the home, which often limits their availability for unplanned activities. This trend is consistent with the pilot phase, which included six males and only one female. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 42 years, with an average age of 31.

Table 6: Profile of interviewed community members in Setsoto LM.

		Male	Female	Total
Age	Years range	26, 28, 29, 32, 37, 38, 42	24,30	24 - 42
Culture	Basotho	7	1	8
	Coloured	0	1	1
Race	black-African	7	1	8
	Coloured	0	1	1
Employment	Unemployed	4	0	4
	Employed	2	2	4
	Self-employed	1	0	1
Highest attained education level	Secondary school	5	1	6
	Higher education	2	1	3
Participants	Total	7	2	9

Regarding demographics, most participants (eight) identified as part of the black-African ethnic group, while one respondent identified as Coloured. Culturally, eight participants were associated with Basotho, and one was associated with Coloured culture. These findings align with the prevalence of Sesotho as the most widely spoken language in Setsoto LM. One respondent, although born in Lesotho, identified as a South African citizen and expressed a strong connection to Basotho culture. This highlights the community's diverse yet culturally cohesive nature within the municipality.

Among the nine interviewed Setsoto LM residents, employment status varied. Four individuals reported being unemployed, while four were employed, and one identified as self-employed. This distribution highlights a mixed labour market situation within the borderland community, with a notable proportion facing unemployment. Participants' education levels varied, with six having completed secondary school and three having pursued higher education. This highlights a larger portion of the community with only basic education, while a smaller group has attained further qualifications.

4.3.1 Daily Life in the Borderland: Realities and Challenges

The borderlands of Setsoto LM embody a space where opportunity and hardship coexist. Residents navigate the border's unique spatial and economic realities to sustain their livelihoods, often adapting to challenges with resilience and creativity.

One prominent feature of life near the border is the competitive market environment. The availability of cheap labour from Lesotho and the price differences between goods in South Africa and Lesotho make the border region a hub of both formal and informal trade. Informal traders, in particular, exploit these price differences to generate profit, often competing with established formal markets. This phenomenon positions the border as a space of profit but also of heightened economic tension. As one resident remarks encapsulated in the following verbatim response:

So it's very very competitive... We have all these people who will just come home from Lesotho in the morning, come to Ficksburg to sell whatever produce that they have and then go back home (24-year-old female).

From the perspective of local residents, the stagnation of economic growth, particularly coupled with the high unemployment rate, is seen as a critical and ongoing challenge in their community. For the youth, the situation is even more dire. Many residents express frustration that the younger generation faces a bleak job market, with few opportunities to gain experience or secure stable work. Many feel that opportunities are limited despite the strategic location of Ficksburg near the border. A participant remarks:

You know, so there is really no economic growth in Ficksburg and the youth unemployment is actually high. Very high! I'm not sure about the stats, but it's very high. It's either you work in retail or you have a government job. You know, that's the only two options, really! There's, there's nothing really there's really nothing (24-year-old female).

Agriculture remains a dominant sector in Setsoto LM. However, for livestock farmers, it is fraught with risks due to rampant theft. Criminals exploit the porous border to steal livestock in one country and sell it in the other, complicating efforts to trace stolen goods. One participant reflected that:

And provided we are living from..uhmm closer to the borders and 'ho phela' [to live] close to the borders within a town 'ye e leng hore ha ena' [where there is no] strong security becomes hard, and people are experiencing the worst in terms of 'ho utswiwa diphoofo' [livestock theft]....(28-year-old male).

Beyond agriculture, theft extends to other goods smuggled across the river in an organised manner. This pervasive insecurity not only disrupts livelihoods but also contributes to an overall sense of unease. The lack of safety is exacerbated by the widespread availability of drugs, with many young people in the area falling into substance abuse. This has profound social implications, particularly in a region where youth make up a significant proportion of the population. Thus, high crime rates and drug abuse have fostered a pervasive sense of anxiety about the safety and future of the community. The challenges are conveyed in the following responses:

We have people, like I told you, we have a like a a uhh a drug problem. So, well... drugs it turns into crime, you know. And then now that we are fighting that (24-year-old female).

I can speak of personal experience with my brother is a drug addict, and I feel like it's easily accessible for them. There was a young girl who recently... who just got killed. She started using drugs at school (30-year-old female).

Residents expressed concerns about the lack of recreational and developmental activities for young people, which leaves them vulnerable to negative influences. Furthermore, the absence of higher education institutions in the area further limits opportunities for youth advancement, deepening frustration among the community.

Despite these challenges, the borderland remains a vital space for residents to sustain their livelihoods. Informal trade and cross-border commerce offer economic opportunities, while the proximity to Lesotho facilitates access to diverse markets. As participants remark the following:

Like I said, some of the products we buy them from Lesotho. If ever I need, let's say—tomato, people selling fruits and veggies in the street of Lesotho, they are very cheap. After crossing the border, you meet the markets, they are very cheap. I would go and buy fruits or vegetables (32-year-old male).

Ntho tse nkgahlang, ke bone dintho tsa Lesotho di le Cheap, ke ha ngata ke rekang Lesotho [what I like is that things in Lesotho are cheap, I buy in Lesotho many times] (37-year-old male)

When we want paraffin and stuff, often we go to Lesotho and buy it from there (42-year-old male)

The findings capture the everyday realities of borderland residents, emphasising how they navigate the border space to sustain their livelihoods and challenges. Border residents adapt their livelihoods to the unique spatial realities of living near the border.

Therefore, to improve the quality of life for border residents, addressing issues of safety, youth development, and access to social amenities is crucial, transforming the borderland into a space of empowerment rather than insecurity. This theme captures the everyday realities of borderland residents, emphasising how they navigate the border space to sustain their livelihoods and challenges. Thus, the borderland of Setsoto LM can be described as a contested space marked by a competitive market, economic stagnation, pervasive insecurity, and limited opportunities for youth, all of which reflect its complexity. It functions as a thirdspace, where conflicting realities and lived experiences intersect, combining both tangible and imagined aspects of the border in the daily lives of its residents (Soja, 1996). Despite structural challenges, residents show agency through adaptive strategies, reshaping the space around them.

4.3.2 Cross-Border Interaction: A Space of Connection and Division

The border between South Africa and Lesotho in the Setsoto LM is both a space of opportunity and tension. It reflects the duality of life in the borderland, where shared activities and daily interactions create connections while systemic barriers and inequalities reinforce divisions. The border fosters significant cultural and social connectivity through shared activities. Events such as church services, South Africa's national Heritage Day celebrations, initiation schools, hiking excursions, and soccer matches bring together communities from both sides of the border. These organised activities are evidence of shared Basotho heritage and the deep social ties that transcend national boundaries. As one participant explained:

..well now with Heritage Day coming up, would have like events, you know, going on, would have events you know, like even now even now Lesotho women and Ficksburg women they have other initiatives that they do every, I don't know, every second month or every second week, but with cultural things I know with us and Lesotho we link (24-year-old female).

I used to go there to attend events, but 'e ne e le nakong e ntseng ke sebetsa' [it was the time I used to be employed]. 'Ke e tsamayela ke ile ho attenda diEvent boMaputsoe daar' [I used to just go there to attend events in Maputsoe].

There is a place called haSkikethe. I used to like that place...And ohh! another thing, I went to play soccer (29-year-old male).

Maputsoe, a town in Lesotho, is located adjacent to the Ficksburg border post and is a walkable distance from Ficksburg in Setsoto LM. These activities strengthen community bonds, highlighting the border as a space of connection. The significance of such shared practices points to the need for spatial planning strategies that incorporate cultural cohesion into development initiatives.

Moreover, some residents frequently commute across the border for shopping, work, and family visits. Cross-border shopping is particularly prominent, driven by perceptions of price and quality differences. Lesotho nationals often prefer South African goods for their perceived superior quality, while some South Africans also shop in Lesotho to take advantage of lower prices. As the respondent explains:

Uh, daily we have more than 100,000 people crossing from Lesotho. People bring money in Ficksburg. People buy clothes. People buying clothes in Ficksburg, daily! (38-year-old male).

...majority of Lesotho people buy their products from Ficksburg. You can go to Shoprite month end, KFC 'o fola line up' [you queue] until. From morning until evening o eme [standing in a] line because of Lesotho people. That's why we have almost 5 Shoprites (32-year-old male).

The daily, weekly and monthly cross-border interaction demonstrates interdependence between South Africa and Lesotho. These regular interactions provide opportunities for spatial planners to enhance cross-border regional development that enables equitable economic prosperity.

4.3.3 Border Identity: United by Culture and Space but Divided by Citizenship

The identity of the borderland community in the Setsoto LM, particularly in Ficksburg, is shaped by the complex interplay of culture, citizenship, and geography. While Basotho culture remains a unifying force across the South Africa-Lesotho border, the legal and social boundaries create divisions that manifest in unique ways for those living in the borderlands.

Homogeneity within the borderland community in Setsoto LM emerges through two interrelated dimensions: spatial proximity and cultural interconnectedness. These dimensions collectively create a shared identity and mutual belonging that transcends the geopolitical demarcations separating Lesotho and South Africa. This shared spatial identity creates a collective consciousness where challenges and opportunities are perceived as communal rather than individual. A participant's remarks powerfully articulate this sentiment:

So, because Ficksburg is so small and Maputsoe is big but small, Lesotho is also big but small. You...everybody knows everybody in a sense. So, if there is a challenge, it's by your doorstep. You will always feel responsible on how can I better where I am, because bettering where I am is not just better for my life but everybody else around you. Ficksburg is very small, if something happens, it happens to all of us. It's the same with Maputsoe, it's so small, if something happens, it happens to all of us (30-year-old female).

This account reveals the deep communal and personal connections that bind the border communities, where spatial identity bridges the physical divide of the border. The sentiment expressed by the participant illustrates a sense of place that is relational and not a static container. Borderland communities have constructed their own spatial rationalities, shaped more by relational practices than by state-defined borders. These rationalities are situated within what Lefebvre (1991) terms lived space, a dimension of spatiality shaped by affective attachments, social relations, and routine navigation of space. This resembles Veemaa's (2012) observation that endogenous spatial identities emerge from the perceptions and practices of local populations. These identities are embedded in language, cultural beliefs, and everyday experiences and reflect a grounded spatial logic that resists top-down interpretations of territory. These identities offer an alternative foundation for functional cross-border spatial planning that is tied to lived continuity rather than administrative boundaries.

Beyond spatial connectedness, the second dimension of homogeneity lies in cultural ties deeply embedded within the shared heritage of the Basotho people. These cultural bonds manifest through common language, traditions, and family connections that traverse the political boundary. The historical and genealogical ties that link individuals across the border blur distinctions of nationality, fostering a sense of cultural unity. As

the respondent explains in the following verbatim response, which reflects the enduring influence of historical ties:

Basically, we are from Lesotho. All of us, the Sotho people, we are from Lesotho. Because, when you check the history, our father's father, he is from Thaba Bosiu, but due to politics or wars back then, we don't know what happened because I have an uncle in Lesotho, and I have an uncle in South Africa, meaning I don't know where I am standing but I am South African person born in Ficksburg. My mother born in Ficksburg 19...[redacted], my father born in Ficksburg 19...[redacted], my grandmother born in Marquard 19...[redacted]. So, you can imagine, we have a family in Lesotho, both from maternal and paternal family. We have a family in Lesotho (32-year-old male).

The respondent's narrative illustrates the complex interplay of identity, history, and belonging, shaped by both shared heritage and political separation. These connections create a duality in how people perceive themselves—simultaneously rooted in their immediate locality while maintaining strong ties to the broader Basotho cultural identity. This finding aligns with Newman's (2011) observation that where borders were imposed on previously unified cultural landscapes, individuals on either side often maintain affinities with each other.

At the same time, South African Basotho living near the border with Lesotho often encounter identity-related challenges, particularly when they travel inland within South Africa. One recurring perception is that they are mistaken for Lesotho nationals due to their strong accent, which is influenced by their proximity to the border and frequent interactions with Basotho from Lesotho. Although the Sesotho accent in Lesotho is different from the Sesotho accent spoken by community members in Setsoto LM, people in inland South Africa commonly associate it with Lesotho or areas close to the border. This creates a sense of ambiguity regarding their identity, as their linguistic features do not fully align with those of Lesotho nationals nor with those of South Africans living inland or further away from the border. The general sentiment among Setsoto LM border residents is that they feel a sense of familiarity when encountering Lesotho nationals in inland South Africa. Living near the border appears to shape a unique dual identity, where their cultural and linguistic connections to Lesotho coexist with their South African nationality. As one participant recalls:

... I think with us, our tribe is also the nationality of Lesotho people. So, 'batho ba Lesotho ba bitswa Basotho' even South Africans 'ba buang Sesotho ba bitswa Basotho' [So, Lesotho nationals are called Basotho even South Africans who speak Sesotho are called Basotho]. But people don't know how to separate the two. They don't know when to separate to say Ohhh! No! this is South African 'mara ke Mosotho ke Mosotho' because 'o bua Sesotho' and that one 'Ke Mosotho' because 'a hlahella Lesotho' [but he or she is Mosotho because they speak Sesotho and that one is Mosotho because he or she is from Lesotho]. So people don't know how to separate. So oftentimes, the lines get blurred (24-year-old female).

This participant's reflection highlights how living near a border can shape complex identities that are neither entirely tied to one nation nor fully separate from the neighbouring country. The ambiguity created by language and cultural commonalities offers insight into the everyday realities of those navigating border spaces, where the proximity to another nation both connects and distinguishes their sense of self. One respondent explained:

I get to live... I guess, the best of both lives because I experience the culture differently on either side. I will always tell people that I get to surround myself with Sotho people from South Africa, I get to surround myself with Sotho people from Lesotho. And it's more different than the same. Culture is the same but different (30-year-old female).

Despite these shared cultural elements, subtle distinctions emerge, particularly through the lens of citizenship. While both South Africans and Lesotho Basotho are culturally united, they navigate their lives differently due to the stark contrast in their respective nations' legal status and quality of life. The residents reflect a complex identity shaped by this shared space and culture but divided by citizenship. The implications for spatial planning and development are significant as efforts should address infrastructural gaps and the social and emotional dimensions of cross-border life. Borders are more than physical dividers—they shape identity and perceptions of belonging.

In this context, the borderland in Setsoto LM is not reducible to the rigid demarcation between 'us' and 'them'. Instead, it emerges as a liminal space where hybrid identities

are actively negotiated and reimagined. Here, individuals exercise agency to socially construct the border's meaning, transforming it into a site of fluid interaction rather than a fixed boundary. Through everyday encounters, the borderland becomes a living process where distinctions blur, and new cultural and social meanings continually take shape. This phenomenon mirrors Anzaldúa's (1987) conceptual framework of borderlands as spaces where identities are fluid and continuously reshaped by everyday practices and interactions.

4.3.4 Planning and Development: Is Setsoto LM a Burdened Sinking Ship?

The lived experiences of residents in Setsoto LM highlight the inadequacies of planning and development policies, exposing the persistent failure of these policies to translate into effective practice. As a border municipality, Setsoto LM faces compounded developmental challenges, revealing gaps in planning, particularly in addressing infrastructural and socio-economic pressures in cross-border spaces.

4.3.4.1 Informal Settlements

Informal settlements pose a significant spatial planning challenge in Setsoto LM. Participants note that these settlements frequently arise on land not designated for residential development, often in hazardous or environmentally sensitive areas. This situation highlights deficiencies in the spatial planning framework for managing rapid, unpredictable population growth, indicating that Setsoto LM is not adequately meeting residential development demands. A participant currently renting accommodation emphasised the difficulty of accessing new residential land, noting that he has waited over a decade to obtain an erf (a plot designated for residential development):

DiSite, ntse bare ba tla refa — ba tla refa, ba nka nako. Ke a kgolwa gore ke na le about 10 years ntse ke batla site, ha ke e thole [Sites, they say they will give us — they will give us, but they are taking time. I am sure that I have been waiting for about 10 years for a site, but I have not got it] (37-year-old male).

The challenge of securing an erf or accessing affordable housing in border municipalities such as Setsoto stems from the intersection of labour migration, persistently low wages, and spatial planning systems that remain ill-equipped to respond to transboundary population movements. This issue is particularly pronounced in borderland contexts, where population flows are inherently fluid due to

frequent cross-border migration and daily commuting. These movements disrupt conventional settlement patterns, placing additional pressure on planning frameworks that are typically designed within rigid national boundaries. Migrants from Lesotho seeking employment find local wages insufficient to enter the formal housing market; those who remain permanently confront income insecurity and inadequate housing provision, forcing many into informal settlements, resulting in rapid expansions of informal settlements. These patterns reflect structural limitations within current planning approaches, which often neglect the cross-border realities of border municipalities. As noted by Soja (2010), the absence of adequate planning perpetuates inequities and undermines community resilience. Addressing these challenges requires the development of regionally integrated spatial planning strategies that explicitly engage with the socio-economic and spatial implications of cross-border flows.

4.3.4.2 Transport and Stormwater Infrastructure

Transportation infrastructure, particularly road maintenance, emerges as a central concern in participants' accounts of infrastructural decay. Participants consistently described the condition of roads, particularly those marred by potholes, as a significant safety risk, with some noting that poorly maintained roads have contributed to car accidents. The situation is compounded by the high volume of heavy trucks transporting goods through the Ficksburg Bridge border. A participant expressed:

I can make you an example, there is a road 'e tlohang' [starting] from town to that border gate. That road is very very bad. It is very very bad, there is no maintenance 'ya teng' [of it] (29-year-old male).

This situation highlights the additional burden that local municipalities like Setsoto, located in border regions, have to deal with in maintaining a transportation network that can accommodate both local mobility and the demands of cross-border trade. The residents also emphasised that while some parts of Setsoto are burdened with deteriorating roads that challenge municipal capacity, other areas remain entirely underserved, lacking even basic road infrastructure. Border municipalities face the unique challenge of balancing the needs of local populations with the demands of facilitating cross-border trade. As such, these municipalities require focused attention and targeted support from provincial and national governments to maintain and

develop economically strategic infrastructure on a national or regional scale while ensuring adequate access to road infrastructure for border residents.

The stormwater infrastructure in Setsoto LM faces significant challenges that impact both environmental sustainability and public safety. Residents highlighted the inadequacies of the existing drainage systems, particularly in their inability to manage rainfall runoff effectively. Stormwater drainage systems are inadequate and often get blocked during heavy rainfall, causing surface water to accumulate in the streets. Participants reflected:

Oh my goodness, when it's raining...I don't think those things (drainage systems) are working anymore...because it would rain and that stream would over flood and that is an indication that there are some things, you know, blocking (24-year-old female).

They had to change the piping in our roads because our roads flood to the point that our houses, you know, they also flood. It goes up to our knees. Uhhh, they are also fixing that now. We don't know how long it's gonna take (30-year-old female).

Given Setsoto LM's proximity to the Caledon/Mohokare River, the municipality faces both challenges and opportunities for environmentally sustainable urban design. This closeness necessitates meticulous planning to manage flood risks, develop resilient infrastructure, and facilitate cross-border mobility. Current infrastructure shortcomings reveal gaps in urban planning that fail to capitalise on the river's potential for effective water management.

4.3.4.3 Service delivery: Sanitation, Water and Electricity

Service delivery inefficiencies emerge as a concern, with residents recounting persistent challenges related to irregular water supply, frequent electricity outages and failing sanitation infrastructure. These issues disrupt daily life and highlight weaknesses in the municipality's capacity to provide basic services reliably. Frequent sewage pipe leaks came up as a reoccurring concern, shedding light on the potential impact of irregular population influxes at certain times of the month or year. Such fluctuations may contribute to the additional strain on ageing infrastructure, exacerbating the frequency of sewage system failures described by participants.

Border municipalities like Setsoto face unique challenges, as they lack mechanisms to regulate the flow of people crossing for purposes such as tourism, shopping, or other activities. This movement of people places significant pressure on local services and infrastructure, highlighting the need for spatial planning strategies that account for border regions' dynamic and transient nature. A respondent expressed his disappointment in the municipality's maintenance and management of the sewage system in the following verbatim:

To be quite honest, it is a dismal failure on the municipality's side from my point of view because we still have these sewages coming out from the pipes every now and again and flooding the whole town, just making a mess out of everything (26-year-old male).

On the sewage side, eyih! Sewage. We are living inside sewage. Sewage everywhere. Sewage everywhere 'ka hare ha Setsoto' [within Setsoto]...sewage spillage, there is spillage 'ka ha re ha Setsoto' [within Setsoto] (42-year-old male).

Interestingly, residents provided contrasting perspectives on waste management. Some expressed satisfaction, stating that the municipality manages waste effectively, while others were unsatisfied, highlighting deficiencies in service delivery. This divergence in experiences may be explained by the fact that participants reside in different wards in Setsoto LM, suggesting that waste management services are not applied consistently across the municipality. These varied responses reflect spatial inequalities in service delivery, pointing to the need for more equitable waste management practices throughout the municipality. These contradictions are further illustrated in the verbatim quotes. A 29-year-old male had a positive view and expressed high satisfaction:

'Hayi noh!' Waste they are managing it. On my area 'hayi' it's very very clean. I dont know other sides but for my side 'hayi!'. Its very very clean. I know each and every Wednesday 'trucka ya tla' [the garbage truck comes]. Waste 'yona ba sebeta' [they do the work when it comes to waste], I dont wanna lie (29-year-old male).

On the other hand, another resident explicitly stated that waste management is not equitable, conveying inconsistencies in waste management:

Ditraka tsona di a tsamaya mara di nka mola le mane, ha di nke ho re all over ka ha re ha lekeishene [Garbage trucks do function, but they pick here and there, it doesn't pick all over in the Location (township)] (37 year-old male).

Another resident expressed dissatisfaction with the municipality's waste management efforts, emphasising the inconsistency and inefficiency:

You know, I will start with where I live. We had a corner that we used for like trash. You know, in the Kasi's (informal term for a township), we will just have that one corner, would just throw trash there and everybody would throw it. But then the community members are like; no man!, this is very hazardous to us, our kids and everyone also because it's close to a school. It's by the corner of a school. So now they started this initiative that nobody is going to dispose of trash there anymore. We are cleaning up this corner. But then, now when the trash truck, it comes by, I don't know about other parts of Ficksburg but where I live it comes by every Tuesday, on Tuesdays. So now, if it doesn't come, you run this risk of having this trash piling up! piling up. And what do you now, where do you where do you throw it away?! (24-year-old female).

Moreover, irregular water supply in Setsoto LM significantly compromises both household needs and public health, revealing a critical gap in service delivery. Participants expressed frustration, noting that given the municipality's proximity to a river, persistent water shortages should not occur. This sentiment highlights the importance of making strategic decisions to ensure that natural resources in border regions are harnessed effectively and managed sustainably. Furthermore, frequent electricity outages are highlighted as disrupting economic activities and social well-being. Power shortages are not unique to Setsoto LM. Load shedding has been a recurring problem in South Africa since around 2007 and has become more frequent and intense over the years, especially during periods of high demand.

In border regions such as Setsoto LM, infrastructural deficits pose challenges but also create opportunities to advance integrated, sustainable planning that addresses cross-sectoral needs while fostering resilient, resource-efficient communities. These regions possess untapped potential for sustainable development through shared resource management, cross-border collaboration, and integrated energy-water nexus planning. By strategically leveraging their geographical proximity and natural

resources, they can develop innovative solutions to systemic service delivery failures, transforming vulnerabilities into drivers of equitable growth, climate resilience, and transboundary environmental governance. Such approaches improve local livelihoods and enhance integrated regional development, promoting long-term sustainability and cross-border cooperation.

4.3.4.4 Healthcare Services

Public healthcare systems are a concern in participants' accounts, particularly due to the dual burden of serving local residents and nationals from neighbouring Lesotho. While participants express an understanding of the humanitarian need to assist cross-border patients, they articulate how this creates unsustainable demand on an already under-resourced system. This remark encapsulates the issue:

Ficksburg we have like 1, 2, 3 clinics, well if you count the one in town is 4. But and then the location is growing and growing. But now we have all these people that are coming in. So now the services are no longer sustainable for us, you know — the residents, because we also have people who come from Lesotho pregnant and especially pregnant women, they would go to the hospital and they give birth then go back (24-year-old female).

This situation highlights the absence of coordinated cross-border planning mechanisms, which could distribute healthcare provision more equitably. These inefficiencies reflect broader structural challenges in service delivery planning, resource allocation, and infrastructure maintenance within Setsoto LM, raising questions about the effectiveness of IDP in addressing such persistent deficits.

4.3.5 Social Attitude: Tensions, Resilience and Aspiration

Community members in Setsoto LM portray a layered relationship with the border, viewing it as both a challenge and an opportunity. Their reflections reveal a deep entanglement with the borderland, shaped by lived experiences and tempered by practical considerations. With participants' sentiments, the border can be metaphorically described as a double-edged sword, simultaneously enabling and constraining life in the region.

4.3.5.1 Border Proximity and Unmet Expectations

Residents perceive a monopolisation of the economic benefits associated with the border, feeling excluded from the advantages while bearing the brunt of its challenges. While a selected few seem to profit, most endure borderland life's hardships without corresponding rewards. This frustration mirrors broader issues related to governance, inadequate infrastructure, and unequal resource distribution. The disparity between the potential opportunities and their lived reality cultivates a sense of stagnation, further exacerbated by perceptions of neglect from authorities. As described by residents, the border represents a politically charged space marked by contestation and unmet expectations. Some even question its very existence, sentiment encapsulated in repeated statements about its uselessness. As residents remarked:

The only thing 'e o ke e bonang e etsahala ke hore ba tlose diBorder gate mme e mpe re tshwaneng' [that I see should be happening is that they should remove the border gate and let us be the same] because we are not even benefiting from that (28-year-old male).

But the border, for me to have a border....I don't know..yeah for drugs and cars is okay but for the people ahhhh its like useless (42-year-old male).

'Go ya ka nna' [According to me] border gate is useless for me (29-year-old male).

That border is useless according to me (32-year-old male).

These views of the border reflect a disconnection between the state's vision of the border and the realities of those living alongside it. Far from being a site of opportunity, the border, as described by residents, is ineffective and burdensome. Through these critiques, residents articulate a clear demand for change: reimagining the border as a space that prioritises shared prosperity and inclusivity over division and exclusion.

The historical legacy of Ficksburg town in Setsoto LM, once a prosperous town, is seen as having "fallen from grace". This sentiment is tinged with sadness and nostalgia as the community reflects on the fading grandeur of a town once shaped by its proximity to the border. As she explains:

And what Ficksburg was 10 years ago and what Ficksburg is now, it's two different towns. When we moved to Ficksburg, it was the most beautiful place.

It was the most cleanest place you could experience. What do you see now, you didn't see it back then (30-year-old female).

Similarly, the transformation of Ficksburg is lamented as a departure from its former governance and community pride standards.

Ficksburg is not the same 'joalo le ka pele' [as before], I so wish 'o kare municipality ola wa pele o ka khutla' [the former municipality could come back] (29-year-old male)

The past and present coexist in tension, with many hoping to restore this borderland's former prominence while acknowledging the challenges imposed by its decaying state. There is a collective yearning for revitalisation intertwined with a recognition of the authorities' role in shaping the town's trajectory.

The residents' exclusion from economic benefits and the burdens imposed by the border exemplify how power operates within spatial planning—not as a neutral or technical process but as a contested arena where certain interests dominate. This aligns with Flyvbjerg's (2002) argument that power distorts rational planning, privileging select groups while marginalising others. The monopolisation of border-related advantages highlights the extent to which planning decisions reinforce existing hierarchies rather than addressing community needs. Residents' lived experiences of neglect and stagnation highlight how planning, rather than serving as an inclusive mechanism, becomes a tool through which dominant actors sustain control. Foucault's (1982) conception of power as both repressive and productive is evident here: while state mechanisms regulate the border through formal policies, they simultaneously shape social realities by excluding residents from reaping the benefits of the border proximity. The perception of the border as “useless” reflects a failure to harness power in ways that enable agency and local development. Instead of producing spaces of opportunity, the planning process entrenches exclusion, rendering the border a site of frustration rather than economic integration. This signals not just an absence of equitable planning but the presence of a power structure that selectively determines whose interests shape spatial outcomes.

4.3.5.2 Willingness to Participate in Grassroots Initiatives

Community perceptions regarding participation further illustrate a complex social fabric. Faith in municipal-led meetings is notably absent, with many dismissing these gatherings as ineffective and politicised. Surprisingly, there is still a marked willingness to participate in grassroots community meetings, where local concerns take precedence over political agendas.

I hate to participate in municipal meetings because I hate politics (28-year-old male).

These sentiments reflect a deeper frustration with top-down governance and the disconnect between municipal priorities and what communities actually need. Residents prefer grassroots meetings because they see them as platforms where their concerns matter, unlike municipal meetings, which are often dismissed as political theatre. The reliance on informal community-driven initiatives rather than municipal-led planning exposes a fundamental weakness in how participation is structured. When municipal planning ignores these organic forms of engagement, it reinforces existing power imbalances and distances itself from the very people it is meant to serve. This has direct consequences for the IDP process, which cannot be effective if it fails to account for the political and spatial realities shaping community participation. Genuine engagement is not just about inviting residents to meetings—it requires understanding the power dynamics, histories, and lived experiences that shape how people respond to planning efforts.

All participants responded positively when asked about their thoughts on the research interview, with many expressing gratitude for the opportunity to share their perspectives. Several described the experience as engaging and meaningful, appreciating it as a rare platform to voice their concerns. For some, being heard alone provided a sense of validation, affirming the value of their lived experiences. Others found the process unexpectedly therapeutic, offering space for emotional expression and self-reflection. A few also viewed the interview as a learning experience, prompting them to reconsider their perspectives and explore new insights. Participants remarked:

Oh! this interview was great. Actually, I think if the politicians or officials can start doing this, they would start understanding how we feel in South Africa. They will stop taking decisions for us (38-year-old male).

Ke e utlwa ke thabile kudu ka hore ke motho o a ratang hlabollo. Wa tseba this thing ya khanselingnyana, be o ka re o mpha khanseling like ho bua [I feel very happy because I am the kind of a person who likes development. You know this thing of counselling, it was as if you were giving me counselling like to have a chance to talk] (42-year-old male).

The interview is so awesome to an extent 'ya hore' [that] I think it will bring a serious difference and your research was proper. And I so wish it gets to good hands. Uhhh..And the questions were relevant, and I wish that if everyone can get that opportunity 'ya hore a bue a botse, a arabe dipotso tsa hao, wabon!' [to talk, ask, and answer your questions] (28-year-old male).

These remarks were underpinned by a prevailing optimism about the potential for change, as participants expressed hope that their voices could contribute to meaningful shifts in their communities.

4.3.5.3 Aspirations for Progress

The participants shared a strong desire to live impactful lives and contribute to the revitalisation of Setsoto LM, particularly Ficksburg. Central to their aspirations was the hope for economic development, which they believed could provide opportunities for growth and prosperity in the town. Many expressed a keen interest in entrepreneurship as a means of not only securing their own financial future but also creating jobs and stimulating the local economy. Ultimately, these aspirations were underpinned by a longing for a meaningful life, one where personal success and contribution to the community would align. Through these narratives, a portrait of resilience and adaptability emerges.

Ultimately, the relationship between Setsoto LM residents and their local space is characterised not by outright rejection or passive acceptance but by actively negotiating its contradictions and possibilities. This lived experience embodies a tension between the material constraints (economic stagnation, infrastructural limitations) and the collective imagination (their vision for revitalisation). Through this interplay, the borderland of Setsoto LM emerges as a lived space where aspirations and everyday realities collide. Such a process mirrors Lefebvre's (1991) triad and Soja's (1999) thirdspace, demonstrating how space is continuously (re)produced

socially through the agency of its inhabitants, who navigate, challenge, and reimagine their environment in pursuit of a more meaningful and equitable future.

4.4 Perceptions of Planners

Interviews with planners explore their perspectives on the roles and interactions between planning authorities across the three spheres of government in shaping spatial planning and development processes in Setsoto LM. These discussions also reveal how planners perceive the significance of border regions in influencing policy decisions and development priorities.

4.4.1 Cross-Border Spatial Planning and Development

Cross-border spatial planning and development in Setsoto LM is characterised by significant institutional and procedural challenges, revealing a fragmented and politically driven approach. While high-level political engagements, such as ministerial and presidential visits in Lesotho, symbolise bilateral relations, these events lack follow-up mechanisms to translate intentions into actionable spatial planning initiatives. The absence of technical collaboration further exacerbates this disconnect, limiting the impact of such engagements.

Within the Setsoto LM, the lack of formal collaboration with Lesotho highlights the institutional void. Protocols or mechanisms to facilitate collaboration across the border are notably absent, leaving local planners without a framework to address shared developmental concerns. SPLUMA, while providing a comprehensive framework for domestic land use in South Africa, makes no specific provisions for addressing cross-border regions. This omission leaves municipalities like Setsoto unequipped to navigate cross-border spatial challenges. A municipal planner state reflects:

So, when it comes to the border post or Lesotho, since this is an international border we are not able as I've already alluded that, we are not able at this level to be able to sit down with our counterparts on the other side of the of the border to try to synchronise our planning. So, there is no synergy between what is happening on this side and on the other side. So that does have a very direct negative impact because that harmony or that order does not exist (Municipal Planner 2).

Interviewed municipal, provincial, and national planners reported limited direct engagement with counterparts in Lesotho. When interactions occur, they are typically confined to political levels, leaving significant operational gaps in planning.

Asymmetries in capacity and planning systems compound this lack of engagement, as South Africa's advanced spatial planning framework contrasts sharply with Lesotho's underdeveloped spatial planning structure. A municipal planner observed:

And you should bear in mind that in Lesotho, there's no spatial planning. So, you just go to the traditional authorities if you want a site; they give you a site (Municipal Planner 1).

Overall, planners perceive cross-border spatial planning as an area dominated by political symbolism rather than substantive technical cooperation. When initiated, they are typically managed by individual government sector departments or spheres, leading to limited stakeholder involvement and perpetuating institutional silos. This approach lacks central coordination, resulting in fragmented planning initiatives in border regions. The absence of cohesive protocols, mechanisms, and institutional frameworks restricts the potential for meaningful collaboration, leaving significant developmental opportunities unaddressed.

4.4.2 Relationship between Local, Provincial and National Government

The relationship between local, provincial, and national spheres of government in addressing cross-border spatial planning challenges reveals systemic fragmentation and insufficient coordination. Each sphere of government exhibits distinct roles and responsibilities, yet their interactions often fail to produce coherent strategies for border municipalities such as Setsoto LM.

In the municipal sphere of government, Setsoto LM bears the immediate responsibility for spatial development within its jurisdiction, yet its capacity remains constrained by inadequate support mechanisms and resources. For example, the mushrooming of informal settlements in border areas persists, leaving the municipality grappling with land ownership, basic services provision, and unregulated development issues. While IDP, a key planning tool, is submitted to the province and National Treasury as part of the process, the feedback loop between these spheres of government often lacks actionable outcomes regarding specific border issues. The absence of dedicated

provisions for border municipalities results in a limited strategic focus on the unique challenges of cross-border settlements. The Free State provincial government, through its sector departments, supports local municipalities such as Setsoto by developing SDFs, facilitating land-use applications, and addressing informal settlements through enumeration and impact assessments. However, these efforts are reactive rather than proactive, reflecting a lack of sustained engagement with border-specific issues. In the national sphere of government, its role is characterised by policy formulation and funding allocation. National frameworks such as the NDP and SPLUMA establish guidelines for development priorities and spatial planning and land use management, respectively. However, these frameworks provide no special consideration for the unique challenges of border municipalities. Support for Setsoto LM manifests as generic capacity-building initiatives. The lack of a coordinated approach to border-specific issues indicates systemic gaps in horizontal and vertical collaboration. While national initiatives aim to strengthen Free State PSDF and Setsoto LM planning capacities, they do not address the pressing need for transboundary spatial planning strategies.

Addressing cross-border spatial planning challenges in Setsoto LM necessitates a paradigm shift towards integrated governance, where all spheres of government engage in sustained, coordinated efforts. The current fragmented approach limits the municipality's ability to effectively manage land-use pressures, informal settlements, and service provision. A national policy framework explicitly recognising border municipalities' distinct challenges, alongside proactive provincial interventions that transcend reactive support, is imperative. Without structural reforms facilitating strategic intergovernmental collaboration, border municipalities will remain marginalised within broader spatial planning and development agendas.

4.4.3 Mechanisms of Collaboration in the three Spheres of Government

Existing intergovernmental collaboration mechanisms, including bilateral agreements, GIS forums, and transboundary committees, provide a structural basis for integration but suffer from weak enforcement and institutional discontinuity. Platforms such as the Presidential Coordinating Council and Minister and Members of Executive Council (MinMEC) structures facilitate dialogue; however, their deliberations rarely translate into concrete, context-specific interventions for border municipalities. Moreover,

horizontal coordination among sector departments remains fragmented, resulting in disjointed policy implementation that does not effectively address cross-border spatial challenges.

National frameworks such as the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF) and the NSDF aim to align spatial planning with broader developmental imperatives, yet their applicability to border municipalities remains limited due to the absence of explicit provisions for transboundary governance. Similarly, the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management (SPLUM) Intergovernmental Forum and the District Development Model (DDM) offer potential avenues for improved multi-scalar coordination. However, these mechanisms are underutilised in addressing border-specific spatial complexities, as they prioritise generic local development concerns without recognising the distinct socio-economic and spatial pressures faced by border municipalities. Strengthening these mechanisms requires deliberate policy adjustments that institutionalise sustained collaboration, ensuring that intergovernmental structures translate policy intentions into actionable strategies.

4.4.4 Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation

Effective stakeholder engagement and public participation are indispensable for reconciling the spatial and developmental complexities of border regions. Legislative frameworks, including South Africa's MSA and the SPLUMA, mandate participatory planning processes to ensure inclusivity and equity in governance. Municipalities bear statutory obligations to facilitate community involvement in decision-making, primarily through instruments such as SDFs and IDPs. In Setsoto LM, these mechanisms are operationalised through ward-level consultations, which aim to align local priorities with development strategies. However, institutional capacity deficits, chronic resource limitations, and administrative prioritisation of immediate service delivery needs frequently undermine the efficacy of these engagements. Border regions face amplified challenges due to transient populations and cross-border migration, which strain municipal efforts to maintain consistent and representative participation. For instance, fluctuating demographics complicate the alignment of long-term SDFs with the evolving needs of communities, while limited funding restricts the frequency and reach of consultations.

A fundamental structural gap exists in the uneven participation of provincial and national government tiers in localised participatory processes. Municipal-led engagements predominantly address immediate local concerns, whereas provincial and national strategic priorities risk misalignment with the lived realities of border communities. This disconnection is further reinforced by weak coordination among the three spheres of government, leading to fragmented policy implementation and limited responsiveness to border-specific challenges. The lack of structured public engagement with border communities in the provincial and national spheres of government further deepens their marginalisation. This deficiency in stakeholder participation poses a significant challenge, as national cross-border collaboration often prioritises state interests while bypassing local communities most affected by border-related spatial and developmental issues. Consequently, the absence of a central coordination mechanism prevents a targeted and responsive approach to the day-to-day spatial planning challenges unique to border regions.

Addressing the governance challenges of border regions necessitates a more integrated and inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement. While legislative frameworks provide a foundation for participatory planning, their effectiveness is constrained by institutional weaknesses and inadequate coordination across government spheres. Without a structured mechanism to incorporate border communities into decision-making in the provincial and national government sphere, spatial planning efforts will continue to overlook their specific needs. Strengthening intergovernmental collaboration and ensuring sustained community participation is imperative for fostering equitable and responsive development in border municipalities.

4.4.5 Border Perception

Planner's perception of borders in three spheres of government reveals a complex interplay of negative and positive sentiments.

4.4.5.1 Negative Border Sentiments

The views of the border as a space that fosters corruption and socio-economic challenges are negative sentiments among planners. Prevailing issues of sporadic mushrooming of informal settlements in border towns, often in environmentally sensitive areas or inhabitable land. It is believed that being closer to the border

exacerbates this phenomenon. Land invasions for informal settlements impose substantial pressures on municipal budgets, particularly in border municipalities like Setsoto. These challenges are compounded during legal eviction processes or when municipalities must provide basic services in compliance with constitutional obligations. In Setsoto LM, it is perceived that undocumented Lesotho nationals make up a large number of informal settlement dwellers. Planners also identify housing backlogs as exacerbated by the presence of undocumented foreign nationals who place additional strain on municipal resources.

An additional layer of complexity arises when news of formalisation processes through township establishment spreads within informal settlements. Planners recount reports that informal settlement dwellers, particularly from Lesotho national, often inform their counterparts about these developments, resulting in an influx of new arrivals. This increased population exacerbates the strain on municipal planning capacities, administrative systems, and resource allocation. Consequently, the municipality's ability to achieve orderly and equitable formalisation is undermined. These challenges significantly detract from the municipality's capacity to focus on proactive spatial planning and greenfield development. Instead, planners often find themselves allocating the majority of their resources and time to managing informal settlements. One municipal planner recounted:

But township establishment in areas bordering other countries or in this situation, I can say in an area bordering Lesotho, it's a challenge due to informal settlements that always erupt, and then we actually spend the most time trying to formalise informal settlements than greenfield developments. The municipality had six informal settlements in different towns where Ficksburg and Clocolan are highly impacted (Municipal Planner 1).

Setsoto LM's border proximity also significantly strains social services, healthcare systems, and sanitation infrastructure. These pressures are exacerbated by the asymmetries between South Africa and Lesotho, where disparities in economic and social conditions dictate the primary direction of migration flows. Migrants are drawn towards regions with better opportunities and improved living standards, leading to a sharp spatial division between zones of economic prosperity and hardship. In Setsoto LM, the unanticipated influx of migrants further compromises already stretched

infrastructure and services, as the additional population often falls outside the official resource allocation frameworks. This unaccounted-for demographic growth undermines planning and service delivery, creating significant challenges for local governance. Unfortunately, planners' negative sentiments expose the consequences of border vicinity, indicating that many border region municipalities like Setsoto LM are reaping many unplanned negative consequences from the border space.

4.4.5.2 Positive Border Sentiments

Despite the challenges posed by the border, planners also recognise its potential to drive positive outcomes. Cross-border interactions facilitate cultural exchange, enriching the social fabric of border communities and fostering a sense of regional identity. These interactions also play a vital role in supporting local economic development. Informal and formal trade networks sustain local businesses, while cross-border investments and tourism stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities. Furthermore, resource-sharing initiatives, such as collaborative agreements for electricity and water supply, demonstrate a potential for mutually beneficial arrangements. These initiatives not only address shared infrastructure needs but also exemplify how cooperative strategies can transform borders from regions of contention into spaces of integration. Planners believe that by leveraging these opportunities, border regions can balance the complexities of migration and resource pressures with strategies that promote sustainable development.

4.4.5.3 Reflections and Remarks

Planners widely acknowledge the necessity for enhanced collaboration between South Africa and Lesotho, particularly given their limited understanding of Lesotho's planning frameworks. There is a recognition that cross-border spatial planning remains an underexplored area, with planners expressing appreciation for research that illuminates the spatial and developmental implications of borders. As noted by planners' opinions, this research provides valuable insights into an often-overlooked aspect of planning:

It's a very interesting research topic that you chose because I don't know how much work is done in this field. It would be interesting to see the outcomes of your study because I think the truth of the matter is that not a lot of cross-border

in terms of international and supranational planning is done (National Planner 3).

You know, I must first appreciate and acknowledge your area of study as well as your topic, it's very important. And more especially as far as the upgrading of informal settlements is concerned. In border areas, we are experiencing a serious problem. Hence, I said to you, you have come up with a very good, good, good proposal, to say we must take it forward to see into it that we challenge authorities to also consider those border towns in terms of planning for future purpose (Provincial Planner 3).

While planners recognise the significance of addressing these cross-border spatial planning issues, they also acknowledge the institutional, political, and operational constraints that hinder progress. Fragmented governance structures, jurisdictional complexities, and competing national priorities impede effective collaboration, limiting the potential for coordinated spatial planning that accommodates national and local border concerns.

4.5 Spatial Planning and Development Document Analysis

Spatial planning policies face the complexity of addressing the borders, especially in terms of how they affect resource allocation, governance, and development priorities. Borders in spatial planning can reflect power dynamics, socio-economic hierarchies, and political priorities. This subsection addresses objective 3. It seeks to reveal how borders are conceptualised and prioritised in national, provincial, and municipal government policies in the context of the Setsoto LM.

4.5.1 Border Consideration Word Frequency

The frequency of mentions of the term 'border' in the context of international borders across municipal, provincial, and national SDFs are 22, 29 and 23, respectively, as presented in Table 6. This narrow range is intriguing and unexpected, considering these governmental spheres' differing administrative scopes and mandates.

Table 7: Keyword search for border-related terms in spatial plans.

Spheres of government	Policy documents	Border		Boundary		Frontier	
		In-context	Generic	In-context	Generic	In-context	Generic
Setsoto LM	IDP	9	11	1	3	0	0

	SDF	22	22	0	9	0	0
Free State Province	PSDF	29	45	3	32	3	3
South Africa	SPLUMA	0	0	0	6	0	0
	NSDF	23	26	6	8	5	5

It might be anticipated that NSDFs would place substantially greater emphasis on international borders, given the national government's spatial planning responsibility extends to the borders shared with six neighbouring countries: Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, eSwatini, and Lesotho. These findings highlight discrepancies in the prioritisation of border-related considerations across three spheres of governance. Notably, Free State PSDF demonstrate greater engagement with the term 'border,' which, when the context is not considered, appears generically 45 times. This suggests a broader acknowledgement of spatial delineations and cross-border dynamics within provincial planning frameworks. The IDP of Setsoto LM contains only nine mentions of 'border'. This limited reference is concerning, given the municipality's location as a border region and the significant socio-economic and spatial challenges typically associated with such areas. Furthermore, SPLUMA, a key national legislative document, does not mention 'border' or related terms at all, reflecting a containerised conception of space that overlooks the complexities of border regions. This finding demonstrates rigidities associated with the practices and expectations of working within existing political or administrative boundaries (Stead, 2014).

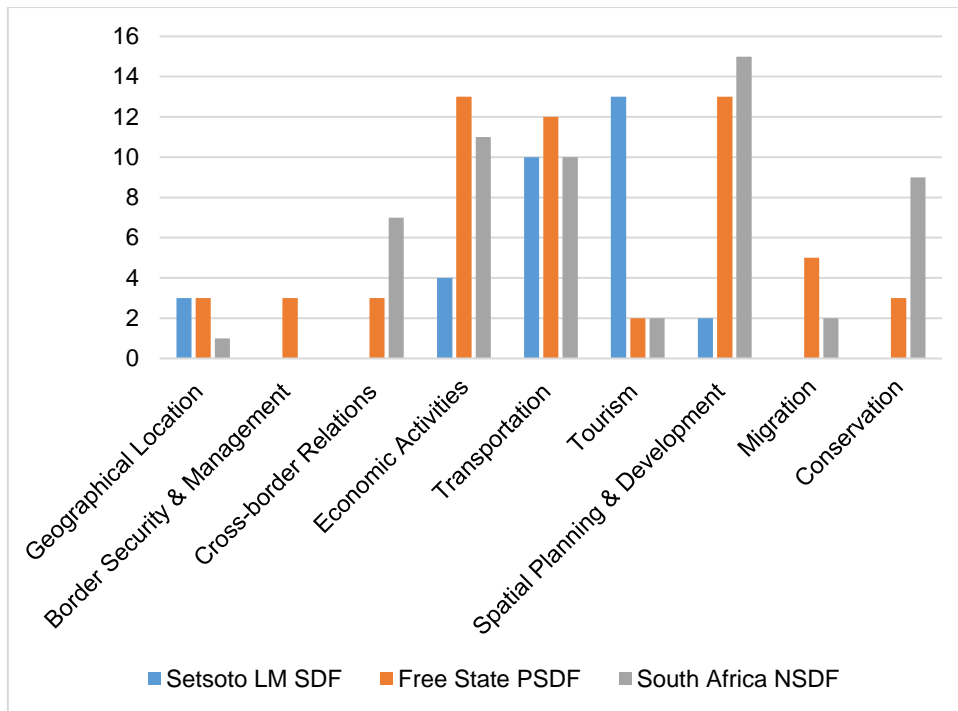
The minimal mentions of the term 'boundary' in the context of international boundaries, not exceeding six references in any policy document and being entirely absent in the municipal SDF of Setsoto, highlight a critical gap in how boundary-related issues are addressed across spheres of government. The Free State PSDF demonstrates a relatively higher number of generic mentions (32) when context is disregarded, suggesting a broader but domestic recognition of spatial delineations without a substantive engagement with international boundary-specific challenges.

The term 'frontier' appears sparingly in the analysed policy documents, with only three mentions in the PSDF and five in the NSDF. This limited frequency highlights the marginal role that frontiers play in the discourse of spatial planning across three spheres of governance. The findings reveal a fragmented and inconsistent approach

to addressing border areas in spatial planning across the three spheres of government. The unexpectedly narrow range of mentions for the term 'border,' despite the differing mandates and responsibilities of municipal, provincial, and national governments, highlights a lack of emphasis on international boundaries in policy discourse. While PSDF displays greater generic engagement with border-related terms, their limited contextual relevance to international boundaries weakens their applicability to borderlands-specific challenges. The sparse references to 'boundary' and 'frontier' further indicate the marginalisation of border issues within spatial planning frameworks. The omission of such terms in SPLUMA and the minimal mentions in the IDP of Setsoto LM are particularly concerning, given their legislative importance and strategic location, respectively. These gaps underscore the need for more deliberate considerations of border regions in spatial planning to better address the complexities of border regions and their socio-economic and spatial challenges.

4.5.2 Border Considerations Themes

The thematic priorities show sharp contrasts, exposing a potential lack of cohesion between municipal, provincial, and national approaches to border spatial planning. Border-related consideration related to the *Spatial Planning and Development* theme, as displayed in Figure 16, is a focal point at the provincial and national governments but is minimally addressed within the Setsoto LM SDF.



Source: Author's own

Figure 16: Themes from border-related mentions in SDFs.

This omission raises important questions about the extent to which local planning efforts engage with larger frameworks. In the national sphere of government, *Spatial Planning and Development* is imbued with regional aspirations tied to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as noted in the following statement:

Consolidate nodal development to support inter-regional development corridors and trade with SADC, which includes (1) a focus on SADC corridors, and (2) improving efficiencies at border and port facilities on these routes, to handle greater international and regional trade flows.

The emphasis here lies in strengthening regional integration through enhanced border infrastructure and trade routes. Similarly, the Free State PSDF articulates the significance of border posts in facilitating local cross-border exchanges. As indicated in the following statement:

Upgrade all borders between Lesotho and the Free State, with a particular focus on border posts near Ficksburg and Ladybrand to facilitate cross-border trade and movement, given their significant dependence on Lesotho.

While provincial and national priorities align in their attention to infrastructure development linked with trade, the near absence of this theme in the Setsoto LM SDF suggests that localised planning may not yet reflect the broader aspirations of its provincial and national counterparts.

Closely connected with the *Spatial Planning and Development* theme, the focus on *Economic Activities* is also given significant attention in the Free State PSDF and NSDF but is only modestly featured in the Setsoto SDF. This reflects Lefebvre's (1991) concept of conceived space, where the state, through strategic planning, envisions borders as economic assets designed to bolster regional economic networks and facilitate trade. This disparity suggests a divergence in priorities with local-level planning.

Themes such as *Cross-border Relations (or Coordination)*, *Migration*, and *Conservation* are conspicuously absent from the Setsoto LM SDF. This silence speaks to a gap in addressing the wide range of realities that define life in borderlands. The absence of these themes in the municipal government sphere may curtail the capacity to engage meaningfully with border governance's broader, interconnected challenges. In contrast, *Tourism* emerges as a dominant theme in the Setsoto LM SDF while receiving comparatively limited attention in the Free State PSDF and NSDF. Setsoto LM appears to lean on its unique geographical and cultural identity, positioning itself as a key tourism destination. The following excerpt from the Setsoto LM SDF reflects this vision:

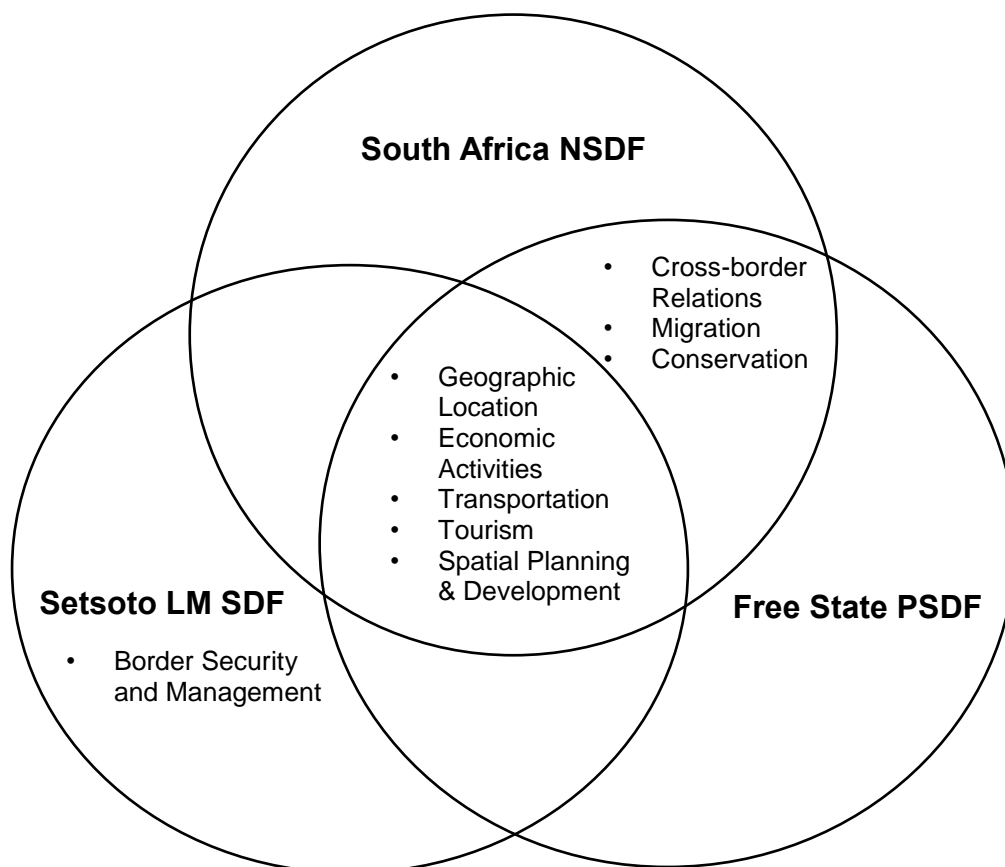
Ficksburg, at a main border post with Lesotho and with greater tourism potential, is larger than Clocolan.

Ficksburg, known as the "cherry capital", exemplifies the municipality's focus on leveraging its distinct offerings to attract visitors. This localised emphasis, though valuable, illustrates a departure from provincial and national priorities, raising questions about whether local strategies fully align with broader spatial planning goals.

The *Transportation* theme is well considered in three government spheres. Transport linkages are even more vital in border regions, acting as a critical link for domestic and international trade. Setsoto LM, which is home to two border posts with Lesotho, acknowledges its strategic position as a gateway to the neighbouring country. Similarly, the Free State PSDF and NSDF also recognise the significance of this

infrastructure in promoting cross-border connectivity and economic development. Efficient transport networks are essential not only for ensuring the mobility of local communities but also for promoting regional trade, stimulating economic activity, and improving integration into global markets. This finding supports the work of Castanho *et al.* (2018), who observed transportation as a crucial role in CBC as it facilitates connectivity and the movement of people and goods.

The contrasts between spheres of government highlight varying priorities and expose critical gaps that could hinder the development of cohesive strategies for border regions (Figure 17). While provincial and national frameworks emphasise regional integration infrastructure enhancement through *Spatial Planning and Development* and *Economic Activities*, the Setsoto LM SDF demonstrates a more localised focus, notably on *Tourism*, with limited engagement in broader cross-border economic and governance strategies.



Source: Author's own

Figure 17: Thematic overlap of border-related in the SDFs of three spheres of government.

This disparity highlights a critical gap in the coherence of spatial planning efforts. Addressing these disjunctures is essential to fostering a more integrated and effective approach to border spatial planning, ensuring that local initiatives align with and contribute to regional and national development aspirations.

4.5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

4.5.3.1 Discourse in the National Government Sphere

A key feature of the discourse in the national sphere of government is its alignment with South Africa's regional engagement strategy within the SADC. This manifests in an emphasis on harmonising economic policies, strengthening cross-border flows and logistics infrastructure, and fostering large-scale investment in border zones. While these objectives contribute to macroeconomic stability and trade facilitation, they simultaneously reproduce the historical neglect of border communities as integral socio-spatial entities. By privileging infrastructural development and economic competitiveness, the national discourse sidesteps critical questions of socio-spatial justice, and the everyday lived realities of borderland inhabitants. The NSDF expresses this notion in the following statement:

Consolidate nodal development to support inter-regional development corridors and trade with SADC, which includes (1) a focus on SADC corridors, and (2) improving efficiencies at border and port facilities on these routes to handle greater international and regional trade flows.

Moreover, the planning documents reflect an inherent tension between post-apartheid spatial transformation and neoliberal economic pragmatism. While the document explicitly critiques colonial and apartheid-era spatial inequalities, its border-related interventions remain rooted in an efficiency-driven paradigm that privileges economic growth over deep spatial redress. The historical role of borders as mechanisms of exclusion, identity formation, and social regulation is acknowledged in principle but does not substantively inform spatial strategies. Instead, border spaces are framed as economically underperforming regions requiring state intervention to enhance their integration into national and regional markets. This approach fails to challenge the structural conditions that have historically marginalised border communities, perpetuating a spatial logic that prioritises economic governance over socio-spatial inclusivity.

Furthermore, the spatial discourse is characterised by a centralised planning ethos that marginalises localised, bottom-up perspectives. While the framework outlines broad development goals for border regions, it lacks a nuanced engagement with the specificities of different border areas, their socio-economic complexities, and the agency of local actors. This abstraction results in a uniform treatment of border zones, where spatial policies are applied through a generalised developmental lens rather than being tailored to the distinctive historical, cultural, and economic dynamics of each border region. Consequently, border towns are acknowledged as strategic but not central to national spatial transformation, reinforcing a hierarchical spatial order in which border regions remain secondary to national economic and infrastructural priorities. As expressed in the NSDF, the following statement reflects this idea:

An increase in cross-border trade and the rendering of personal, financial, education and health services in border-region towns, will see an increase in movement by South Africans and citizens from other African countries to such towns.

The statist logic embedded in the planning documents also manifests in framing borders as 'spaces to be managed' rather than lived spaces, reflecting a territorial governance approach that prioritises state control, economic regulation, and logistical efficiency over community-driven spatial strategies. This discourse aligns with a broader global trend in which borders are simultaneously sites of economic liberalisation and regulatory enforcement, creating a paradox wherein borders are increasingly open to capital flows yet remain restrictive for marginalised populations.

4.5.3.2 Discourse in the Provincial Government Sphere

In the provincial sphere of government, the central discursive element in the Free State PSDF is the prioritisation of transport infrastructure and logistical hubs as mechanisms for economic growth. Border towns, particularly Ficksburg, are positioned as key nodes within provincial connectivity strategies, with investments in road infrastructure, border post efficiency, and trade facilitation mechanisms seen as primary levers for development. This spatial strategy reinforces the role of border spaces as economic conduits rather than as places of lived experience. While the document acknowledges the economic significance of border towns, this recognition is primarily framed through their integration into formalised provincial trade routes rather than through an

engagement with the local socio-economic fabric of these spaces. As noted in the PSDF:

Upgrade all borders between Lesotho and the Free State, with a particular focus on border posts near Ficksburg and Ladybrand to facilitate cross-border trade and movement, given their significant dependence on Lesotho.

Unlike the national discourse, which emphasises macro-spatial integration at the level of SADC and supranational coordination, the provincial spatial vision is more immediate and locally scaled, focusing on the role of border towns within the Free State's economic pursuits. This provincial framing reflects a pragmatic economic approach, prioritising spatial interventions that align with provincial trade patterns and economic policies. However, this approach largely neglects the more granular, everyday realities of borderland communities, as the emphasis remains on infrastructural efficiency rather than community-driven spatial planning that aims to alleviate borderland's economic disenfranchisement.

Another notable feature of the Free State PSDF's discourse is its selective emphasis on border management and spatial governance. Unlike the NSDF, which employs a broader geopolitical framing, the Free State PSDF is more concerned with the functional integration of border towns into provincial trade networks. This results in a spatial vision where borders are primarily seen as facilitators of controlled economic flows rather than as complex socio-spatial spaces. The document lacks substantive engagement with informal economic activity, social cohesion across borders, or the role of borderland communities in shaping cross-border interactions. Instead, the provincial discourse remains anchored in an economic-developmental paradigm that prioritises formalised economic linkages over socially embedded cross-border relations. The PSDF articulates this perspective in the following statement:

Virtually every business in Ladybrand and Ficksburg has interests across the border in Lesotho, which drives economic development and employment. The prominence of manufacturing in Lesotho's economy, supported by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) linked export opportunities, is significant. There is potential for industrial activities leveraging Lesotho's low-cost firms as suppliers of inputs.

Moreover, while the Free State PSDF acknowledges regional spatial inequalities, it does not critically interrogate how border towns experience marginalisation within the broader provincial development hierarchy. The document does not substantially engage with border communities' unique spatial, economic, and social vulnerabilities, nor does it offer a transformative vision for border spaces that extends beyond logistical and trade imperatives. Instead, its approach reinforces a functionalist conception of border spaces as extensions of provincial economic strategies rather than as autonomous socio-spatial entities with distinct developmental trajectories.

4.5.3.3 Discourse in Municipal Government Sphere

In Setsoto LM, planning documents (IDP and SDF) frame borders primarily through the lens of local development and service provision, with an emphasis on spatial justice and economic upliftment. Unlike national and provincial approaches that position borders as strategic assets, the local discourse acknowledges border communities as active spaces of socio-economic life, albeit within a framework that still reflects constraints. Borders are conceptualised as both challenges and opportunities—sites of economic hardship and criminal activities requiring targeted intervention but also spaces with potential for establishing and maintaining cross-border partnerships. The following excerpt from the IDP:

Partnerships with Lesotho facilitates decision making and serves as a valuable exchange of knowledge and learning best practices. Prevailing partnerships include: participation in Cross Border Crime Prevention Forum which constitutes all municipalities along the borderline with Lesotho and all the District Councils and law enforcement agencies of the two countries.

The municipal planning discourse lacks a critical engagement with borderlands as social reproduction, identity formation, and historical continuity spaces. Instead, the discourse adopts a deficit-based approach, where border towns are viewed as spaces requiring intervention rather than as active agents in shaping spatial, social and economic development. The municipal planning discourse thus reflects a tension between broader mandates, formal spatial governance, and the lived spatial realities of border residents. In this case, power asymmetry between municipal authorities and higher spheres of government limits the ability of local stakeholders to influence broader development trajectories in border regions.

While municipal planning seeks to engage border communities more directly than national and provincial policies, it remains constrained by structural dependencies on higher spheres of government. Borders are recognised as spaces of socio-economic dynamism, yet municipal policy lacks the autonomy to fully leverage this potential due to capacity constraints that often lie with national and provincial spheres of government. In essence, the prioritisation of borders varies across governmental spheres, with national and provincial frameworks reinforcing economic and infrastructural imperatives, while the municipal level grapples with the immediate socio-spatial implications of border proximity. The Setsoto LM discourse reflects a municipal governance paradox: despite being the administrative unit closest to borderland communities, it remains structurally dependent on higher-tier economic and spatial mandates, limiting its capacity to advance alternative border imaginaries. Public participation mechanisms, while present, do not fundamentally alter the spatial priorities influenced by national and provincial policies. The result is a fragmented spatial vision where border regions are acknowledged as strategic yet not central to cross-border development discourses. Instead of reconfiguring border spaces as integrated, dynamic, and lived spaces, municipal planning reproduces a functionalist logic, wherein borders are managed rather than engaged, reinforcing their economic and logistical instrumentalisation at the expense of deeper socio-spatial integration.

4.5.3.4 Discourse in three Spheres of Government

The planning document's prioritisation of economic corridors, trade facilitation, and cross-border infrastructure development in the national government sphere reflects a top-down spatial vision. This approach aligns with state-driven economic imperatives, often marginalising local borderland relations in favour of broader national agendas. By framing border regions primarily as conduits for economic expansion, the document neglects the socio-spatial complexities inherent to these areas, reducing them to instruments of macroeconomic strategy rather than recognising them as sites of diverse social, cultural, and environmental significance. In the provincial government sphere, the planning document's emphasis on growth-oriented interventions perpetuates a path-dependent approach to spatial planning. Borders are conceptualised as economic assets, reinforcing a narrow developmental paradigm that prioritises market-driven objectives over integrated socio-spatial strategies. This approach fails to account for the multifaceted nature of borderlands, which require

development frameworks that address not only economic growth but also social equity, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability. The provincial focus on economic utility risks perpetuating historical inequalities and overlooking the transformative potential of more inclusive planning practices. Setsoto LM planning documents, in contrast, demonstrate efforts to incorporate public participation into IDP and SDF, signalling an acknowledgement of consultative planning principles. However, the efficacy of these participatory mechanisms in shaping borderland development priorities remains limited. While municipal documents recognise challenges such as informal settlements, service delivery deficits, and socio-economic vulnerabilities in border areas, their approach tends to be remedial rather than transformative. This suggests a constrained capacity to address the structural causes of marginalisation and inequality, as policies often focus on mitigating symptoms rather than reimagining development paradigms.

The disjuncture between national, provincial, and municipal planning approaches highlights the need for a more cohesive and integrated framework. Such a framework must transcend purely economic and infrastructural priorities to incorporate the lived realities of borderland communities. This highlights the necessity of a multi-scalar planning approach that critically engages with historical legacies, asymmetries in governance, and alternative conceptions of border spaces. By doing so, planning processes can move beyond remedial measures to embrace transformative strategies that empower borderland communities and address their unique socio-spatial needs.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This final chapter summarises and concludes the findings derived from the research aim and objectives. It offers recommendations that intend to bridge institutional gaps in spatial planning and development within South Africa's border regions and offers insights into the pressing needs of Setsoto LM.

Objective 1: To document the perceptions and lived experiences of borderland residents in Setsoto LM and assess the implications for spatial planning and development.

The borderland of Setsoto LM emerges as a place of contrasts, where communities navigate both limitations and possibilities. Residents demonstrate resourcefulness in adapting to difficult conditions shaped by economic stagnation, widespread insecurity, and limited opportunities for young people. Informal trade and cross-border economic activities serve as critical survival strategies, connecting borderland communities to regional markets. The borderland of Setsoto LM reflects a complex identity shaped by this shared space and culture but divided by citizenship. Regular interactions across the border reveal an interdependence that may be harnessed to promote a more integrated and equitable spatial planning and regional development strategy. The municipality's closeness to the Caledon/Mohokare River presents both environmental challenges—such as managing flood risks and addressing infrastructural deficits—and opportunities for sustainable urban design. Pressures on social services and infrastructure, heightened by the need to serve both local and cross-border populations, expose wider planning shortcomings in the delivery of services to a variable population. Despite difficulties faced in the borderland, there is a shared sentiment of hope that conditions can improve. While residents are keen to take part in grassroots initiatives, they tend to dismiss municipal-led meetings as overly politicised. The findings highlight the urgent need to transform the borderlands from a space of marginalisation into one of empowerment. To bridge this gap, spatial planning must adopt collaborative, cross-border strategies that account for migration patterns, housing demands, infrastructure gaps, climate risks, cultural sensitivity, and informal activities and embrace grassroots initiatives. By aligning policies with the everyday realities of borderland life, the focus can shift from merely managing constraints to

fostering local agency and ensuring that development is both inclusive and environmentally responsive.

Objective 2: To explore planners' perceptions of roles and engagement across the municipal, provincial and national spheres in shaping spatial planning and development processes in Setsoto LM.

Planners view cross-border spatial planning in Setsoto LM as largely symbolic, driven more by political rhetoric than substantive technical coordination. Initiatives are typically managed within isolated government sectors or spheres, limiting stakeholder involvement and reinforcing institutional fragmentation. The absence of central coordination leads to disjointed planning efforts, restricting opportunities for meaningful cross-border collaboration and leaving critical developmental challenges unaddressed. A shift towards integrated governance is essential, requiring sustained, coordinated engagement across all spheres of government. The current fragmented approach undermines the Setsoto LM's capacity to address land-use pressures, informal settlements, and service provision. Existing intergovernmental mechanisms are insufficiently leveraged to address border-specific planning concerns, as they lack specialised dedication to border municipalities. Strengthening these structures demands deliberate policy adjustments that institutionalise sustained cooperation, ensuring policy commitments translate into actionable strategies. A national planning practice explicitly recognising the distinct challenges of border municipalities, coupled with proactive provincial interventions beyond reactive support, is imperative. Without structural reforms to facilitate strategic intergovernmental collaboration, border municipalities will remain peripheral within national spatial planning and development agendas and will continue to overlook the unique socio-economic and spatial dynamics of borderland communities. Planners acknowledge that while border regions bear unanticipated negative consequences and pressures on social services, healthcare, and sanitation infrastructure, exacerbated by migration inflows, strategic planning can harness opportunities for sustainable development. There was recognition that cross-border spatial planning remains underexplored, with planners valuing the implications of this research.

Objective 3: To analyse how current spatial planning and development practices address challenges and opportunities arising from the cross-border context in Setsoto LM.

Analysis of mentions of border-related key terms in spatial plans from municipal, provincial, and national spheres shows that explicit attention to international boundaries is insufficient. The absence of such terms in SPLUMA and their minimal presence in the Setsoto LM IDP is particularly concerning, given the strategic importance of these boundaries. These gaps underscore the need for more deliberate considerations of border regions in spatial planning to better address the complexities of border regions and their socio-economic and spatial challenges.

In border consideration themes in spatial plans, while provincial and national frameworks emphasise regional integration infrastructure enhancement under the *Spatial Planning and Development* theme and also focus on the *Economic Activities* theme, the Setsoto LM SDF demonstrates a more localised focus, notably on *Tourism*, with limited engagement in broader cross-border economic and governance strategies. This disparity highlights a critical gap in the coherence of spatial planning efforts.

Discourse analysis further exposes conceptual limitations in planning paradigms. National and provincial documents reductively frame border regions as economic conduits, sidelining their socio-cultural, environmental, and lived complexities. Although Setsoto LM's planning instruments acknowledge border-specific challenges, such as informal settlements, service delivery deficits, and socio-economic marginalisation, their responses remain remedial, targeting symptoms rather than structural drivers of inequality. This reactive approach reflects institutional constraints in reimagining transformative development models that address systemic marginalisation. The resultant disjuncture between macroeconomic priorities and localised realities necessitates an integrated planning framework that harmonises economic imperatives with the socio-spatial needs of borderland communities.

Site observations identify acute procedural shortcomings in municipal engagement practices. Current public participation mechanisms risk devolving into performative exercises, exacerbating mistrust between local government and communities. To bridge this gap, municipal processes require substantive reform, prioritising critical

issues of accountability and the lack of tangible improvements in residents' quality of life. Without such shifts, spatial planning risks perpetuating exclusionary practices that compound the very disparities it seeks to resolve.

5.2 Recommendations

Objective 4: To propose recommendations to enhance community participation, intergovernmental coordination and institutional capacity in border-region planning.

5.2.1 Section dedicated to Cross-border Spatial Planning and Development

Cross-border spatial planning and development is a critical mechanism for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities inherent in border regions, which often face issues such as fragmented infrastructure, disparities in service delivery, and limited economic integration. To address these complexities, it is recommended that all municipalities within border regions incorporate a dedicated chapter or section in their IDPs and SDFs, and PSDFs for the seven provinces with borderland municipalities—Free State, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, North West, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga—as well as in the NSDF (see Appendix 4). This dedicated section should adopt a systematic and evidence-based approach to identify and address the multifaceted challenges of border regions while leveraging opportunities for cross-border collaboration. Such collaboration must operate at multiple scales, encompassing vertical integration across local, provincial, and national spheres of government, as well as horizontal integration beyond national borders to foster regional coherence and sustainable development. Furthermore, spatial plans should integrate an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach by identifying local cross-border assets that characterise residents' everyday lives and places (Nel, 2015). Rather than focusing on community deficiencies, planning must acknowledge the ways in which individuals cope and survive despite borderland constraints, scarcities and shocks. The ABCD approach empowers communities to address their own challenges from within, mobilising existing assets such as youth groups and local associations to build resilience and continuity (García, 2020; Nel, 2015).

5.2.2 Rethinking Municipal Public Participation

Effective public participation is a critical determinant of equitable and responsive governance, yet traditional methods—often limited to town hall meetings—exclude key demographics, including youth, working populations, and mobility-constrained

individuals. To address these systemic gaps, the Setsoto LM must adopt a multimodal framework that integrates digital and hybrid strategies, ensuring equitable access and substantive engagement across its diverse community.

5.2.2.1 Survey Deployment for Demographic Inclusivity

Complementing conventional public meetings with strategically distributed surveys can mitigate participation disparities. Deploying both digital and physical questionnaires disseminated via municipal websites, community centres, and targeted outreach programs ensures representation from populations often excluded by temporal or spatial constraints. Survey designs can enhance data diversity and validity, particularly when tailored to local subpopulations' linguistic and literacy profiles (e.g., elderly residents, informal workers). Embedding these instruments within iterative feedback loops, where results inform subsequent policy drafts, can further legitimise municipal decision-making.

5.2.2.2 Digital Innovation

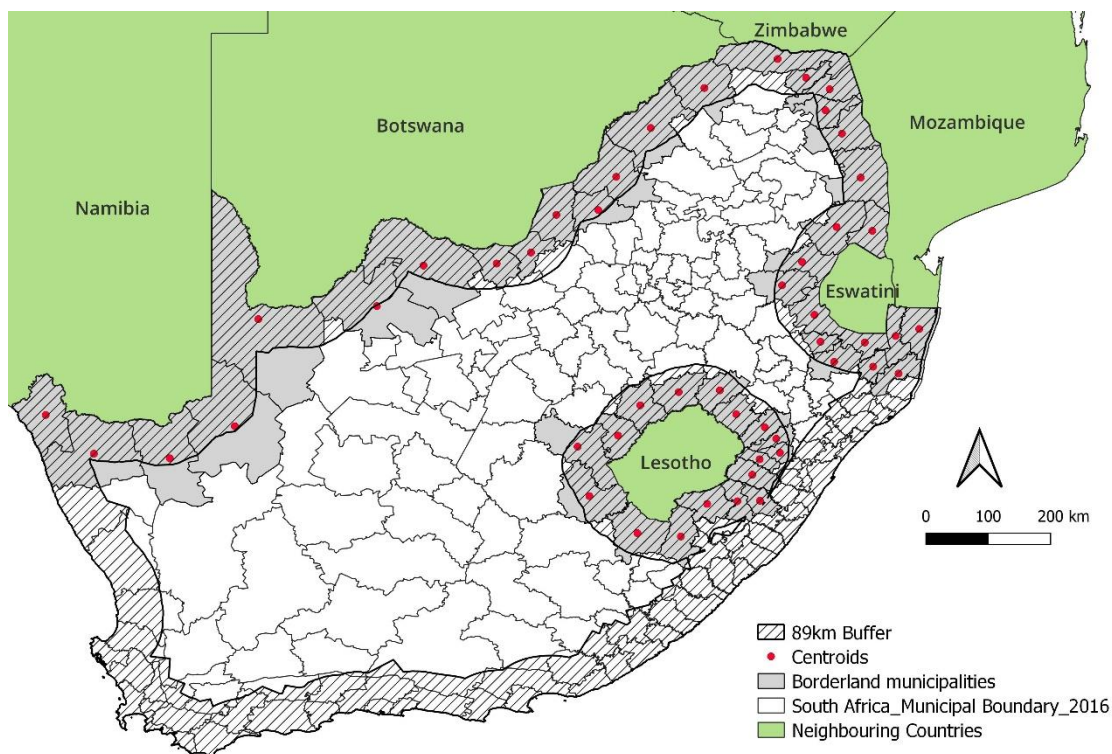
Developing a dedicated mobile application, *SetsotoApp* would modernise public engagement by providing a centralised platform for community participation. For instance, a case study on German municipalities examined 248 applications aimed at strengthening citizen participation. The study found that many apps were effective in allowing users to report problems within their cities and access diverse information provided by the city itself (Beutelspacher et al., 2018). This digital application would enable residents to complete surveys, access municipal meeting schedules, and report service delivery concerns such as illegal dumping, infrastructure failures, and other governance issues. By integrating these functions, the municipality can enhance transparency, responsiveness, and efficiency in its interactions with citizens. Over 60% of the population in Setsoto LM is under the age of 35, a demographic that increasingly relies on mobile devices for information and communication. Aligning public participation mechanisms with these technological preferences would strengthen the municipality's ability to engage younger residents and ensure their perspectives are incorporated into decision-making.

5.2.2.3 Hybrid Participation Platforms

A hybrid engagement model that integrates in-person meetings with virtual participation can expand public involvement while ensuring substantive discussion. Digital platforms, such as Zoom or a built-in feature within *SetsoApp*, allow residents to participate remotely, removing barriers related to distance, mobility, or scheduling conflicts. To enhance accessibility, virtual meetings should incorporate live transcription, multilingual interpretation, and assistive technologies to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Providing recorded sessions for later access can further support those unable to attend in real-time. By adopting this approach, the municipality can foster broader civic engagement, ensuring that all residents, regardless of their circumstances, have an opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes.

5.2.3 Border Municipalities as Critical Support Areas

Borderland municipalities play a crucial role in the nation's socio-economic and political landscape. Positioned at the intersection of national and transnational forces, they are key areas for targeted development and support. Municipalities situated within 89 kilometres of South Africa's political boundary line can be classified as borderland municipalities (Figure 18), as outlined in the work of Maila and Czimre (2024).



Source: Maila and Czimre (2024)

Figure 18: Delimitation of South Africa's borderland municipalities.

Given strategic importance and the distinct challenges these municipalities face, it is recommended that border municipalities be recognised as priority zones for resource allocation and specialised regional development initiatives by both provincial and national governments. The unique challenges of border municipalities, such as cross-border migration, informal trade, infrastructural deficits, socio-economic challenges, and marginalisation, necessitate a tailored approach to resource allocation. Provincial and national governments should prioritise these areas in budgetary planning for municipalities, ensuring that adequate financial and logistical resources are directed toward addressing their specific needs. To effectively guide resource allocation in border municipalities, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is an important framework for guiding resource distribution in these municipalities by examining five interlinked categories of capital: human, social, economic or financial, natural, physical and other (Natarajan et al., 2022). Its value lies in capturing the complexity of livelihood strategies and vulnerabilities in spatially and institutionally marginalised areas. SLA enables planners to identify context-specific constraints and opportunities in border contexts, where fragmented governance structures, uneven infrastructure, and socio-economic vulnerabilities intersect. The SLA facilitates more equitable, responsive, and integrated interventions that align with local needs and broader development objectives.

5.2.4 Institutionalising Border Regions Planning

The establishment of an institutional body dedicated to cross-border spatial planning and development by the South African national government can be essential for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of borderland communities. Such an entity should take the form of a research-based institute that engages directly with borderland communities to ensure inclusive and evidence-driven planning practices. Cross-border planning requires specialised skills and knowledge that many borderland municipalities may lack due to resource and expertise constraints. A centralised research-based institution would bridge this gap by serving as a hub for knowledge generation, dissemination, and capacity building. This institution should be staffed by specialists in cross-border spatial planning, development policies, and community engagement. These experts would collaborate closely with borderland municipalities, such as Setsoto LM, not only to build local capacity but also to co-produce context-sensitive solutions. Additionally, the institution would engage planners working in

border municipalities and provinces to provide capacity-building activities. Workshops, targeted training programmes, and other initiatives would equip local planners with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of cross-border governance effectively.

Beyond capacity building, this institutional body should take a leading role in developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating cross-border initiatives. Consistently applying technical expertise and resources would foster long-term visions for sustainable and inclusive development in border regions. This approach ensures that cross-border engagements transcend political rhetoric, embedding practical, evidence-based solutions into regional planning. Centralising these functions would create a coherent framework to address the overlapping jurisdictional, social, and economic challenges that typify border regions. Furthermore, it would enhance coordination across multi-level and multi-scalar systems, integrating vertical governance across governmental tiers and horizontal collaboration across national borders to align regional development objectives. Such a soft (informal) planning approach does not aim to replace hard (statutory) planning but complements it, allowing flexible and adaptive solutions to coexist alongside formal mechanisms.

The effectiveness of this institutional body would depend on its ability to adapt to the diverse socio-economic and spatial dynamics of border regions. Regular evaluations and feedback mechanisms should be embedded within its operations to ensure responsiveness to emerging challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, integrating community voices into its planning processes would not only legitimise its role but also contribute to the empowerment of borderland communities. The institution should thus act as a catalyst for fostering equitable and sustainable cross-border collaborations, ensuring that development initiatives address the needs and aspirations of those living in these marginalised areas.

5.2.5 Planner's Context-Sensitivity in Borderland Municipalities

Effective planning in borderland municipalities demands more than technical proficiency; it requires a profound understanding of the unique social, cultural, and political realities of these regions. As Faludi (2010b, p. 14) observes, "*soft spaces require soft planning*," which in turn relies on planners possessing a combination of technical expertise and essential soft skills such as communication, negotiation, mediation, and adaptability. These skills are not easily taught in formal settings but are

cultivated through lived experience, reflective practice, and meaningful engagement with local communities. This distinction highlights a critical gap in traditional planning education, which often prioritises hard skills over the contextual and relational competencies necessary for borderland planning. To address this gap, borderland municipalities should prioritise hiring planners with long-term residency or deep personal experience in border areas. Such planners bring a dual advantage: they possess the technical knowledge required for the role, but they also have a first-hand understanding of the local context. This includes familiarity with cross-border cultural norms, historical tensions, economic interdependencies, and community dynamics. Their lived experience enables them to navigate the complexities of border regions with greater sensitivity and effectiveness, fostering trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders (Maila, 2025).

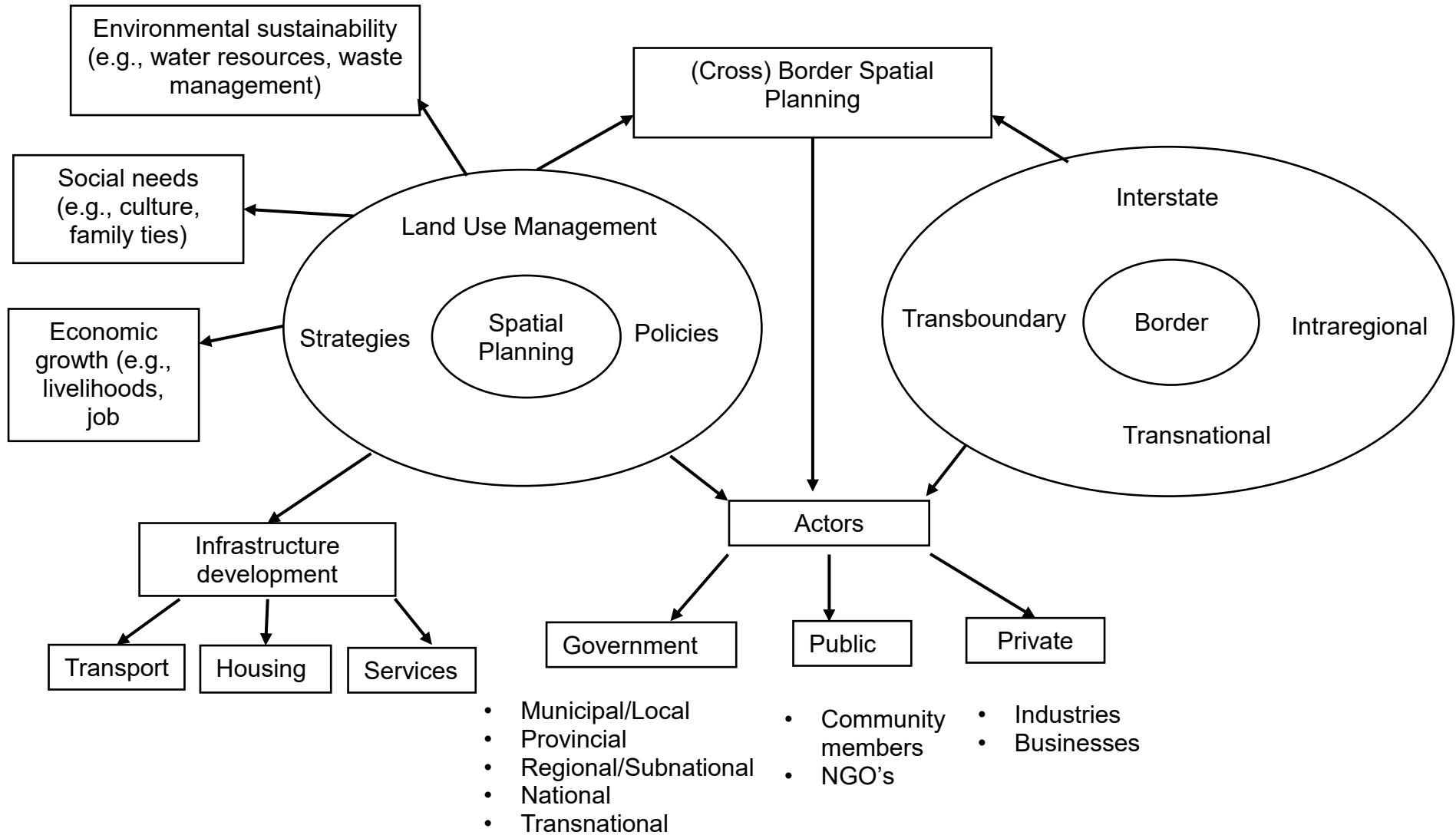
However, this recommendation must be approached with caution. While lived experience provides a valuable foundation, it does not automatically equate to professional competence. Planners must still demonstrate the ability to translate their personal insights into actionable, inclusive, and context-sensitive strategies. Municipalities should, therefore, pair this hiring approach with robust professional development programs that emphasise reflective practice, ethical decision-making, and adaptive leadership. By integrating planners with lived experience into their teams, borderland municipalities can create a planning workforce that is not only technically skilled but also deeply attuned to the realities of border regions. This approach aligns with the growing recognition that effective planning is as much about understanding people and places as it is about applying technical solutions. It also reflects a commitment to equity and inclusivity, ensuring that planning processes are informed by the voices and experiences of those who call borderlands home (Maila, 2025).

Thus, contextual sensitivity is essential in planning for borderland municipalities, where conventional models often fail to address the complexities of spatial, cultural, and institutional fragmentation. Community-led local development (CLLD) approaches offer promising avenues in such contexts by fostering participatory processes that acknowledge local agency and cross-border interdependencies. For instance, the Eurocity of Guadiana (Portugal-Spain) implemented an integrated governance model combining CLLD, the EU Urban Agenda, and the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). This approach enhanced organisational capacities and

facilitated inclusive action plans tailored to cross-border needs (Felicidades-García and Pazos-García, 2023).

5.2.6 Develop Cross-Border Regional Spatial Development Framework

The development of a Cross-Border Regional SDF can be essential for fostering coordinated and sustainable planning between adjacent nations, particularly in border regions where shared challenges and opportunities necessitate a unified approach. This framework could be grounded in long-term strategic goals that align the developmental priorities of both countries and with three spheres of government, ensuring that spatial planning initiatives are mutually reinforcing and contribute to regional integration. A critical component of this process is the establishment of mechanisms for data sharing, which will enable the collection, analysis, and dissemination of accurate and up-to-date information on socio-economic, environmental, and infrastructural dynamics. This data-driven approach will provide a robust evidence base for informed decision-making, ensuring that the Cross-Border Regional SDF is both scientifically rigorous and responsive to the needs of border communities. Figure 19 presents a guiding framework for considerations in the formulation of a Cross-border Regional SDF.



Source: Author's own

Figure 19: Guiding framework for Cross-Border Regional SDF

5.3 Conclusion and Future Research

In conclusion, this research calls for a fundamental reappraisal of spatial planning and development in South Africa's border regions. Borders are not just lines on a map; they are lived spaces where governance, policy, and community agency intersect to shape economic and social outcomes. The systemic challenges identified highlight the need for a more integrated and contextually grounded approach that actively addresses the enduring spatial inequalities of the postcolonial and post-apartheid eras. Rather than treating borders solely as logistical corridors for the movement of goods and people, spatial planning should be reoriented toward cultivating functional cross-border regions that share resources, facilitate knowledge exchange, and build collective platforms for advocacy. Also, make efforts for communities to exert greater influence over the policies that shape their everyday lives. In doing so, municipalities such as Setsoto can begin to redefine their border identity, shifting from spaces of marginalisation to sites of agency, cooperation, and equitable development. By fostering cross-border cooperation, implementing equitable planning strategies, and embedding sustainability at the core of policy decisions, it is possible to create more functional and inclusive border regions in South Africa and beyond. The road ahead is complex, but it holds immense potential that can only be realised through sustained commitment, innovative thinking, and a collective effort toward spatial justice.

This research was confined to the South African side of the border, which limits the extent to which its findings can be generalised to communities situated across the border. A further limitation is that the perspectives shared by planners during interviews reflect their individual professional experiences rather than the official stances of their respective institutions. Future research should extend this analysis through comparative studies between border municipalities to identify broader trends in border governance, policy implementation, and development planning across varying provincial and local contexts. Comparative analysis between South Africa's municipal structures and Lesotho's district administrative frameworks would also provide valuable insights into cross-border institutional alignment. Further investigation is needed into the extent to which border-related considerations are integrated into planning education, particularly in the formulation of university curricula that prepare future planners to address the unique challenges of borderland

development. Another important area for inquiry concerns the role of urban planning and design in responding to crime and security-related challenges in border regions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of Spatial Planning and Development Documents

Sphere of Government	Legislation/ Policy	Aim
National (South Africa)	SPLUMA	Establishes a framework for coordinated, equitable, and efficient spatial planning and land use management across South Africa (all three spheres of government). It aims to address historical spatial inequalities, promote uniformity in development decisions, and ensure inclusive growth through policies, monitoring systems, and Municipal Planning Tribunals. The Act also streamlines procedures, enforces compliance, and aligns land use management with broader developmental goals. All three spheres of government—national, provincial, and municipal—are mandated by Section 12(1) of SPLUMA to develop SDF as a strategic approach to South Africa’s post-apartheid development.
	NSDF	Aims to drive South Africa’s spatial transformation in line with the Freedom Charter, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, and the NDP. It addresses the enduring effects of past spatial injustices, incorporates lessons from national reconstruction efforts, and emphasises the need for targeted state intervention to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. Aligned with SPLUMA , the NSDF provides a strategic framework for coordinated spatial planning and action.
Province (Free State)	PSDF	Seeks to guide sustainable development and address regional inequalities. It aligns with national frameworks like the NSDF and SPLUMA , focusing on promoting inclusive growth, improving spatial justice, and fostering economic development. The PSDF outlines the provincial government’s role in coordinating development efforts and ensuring alignment with broader national and local planning objectives.
Local Municipality (Setsoto)	IDP	Guide a municipality’s development by aligning local priorities with national and provincial goals. It aims to coordinate resources, services, and projects to address socio-economic needs, promote sustainable growth, and ensure equitable service delivery. It is mandated by MSA and SPLUMA .
	SDF	Translates the priorities of the IDP into spatial terms, providing a spatial representation of the municipality’s development goals. It aligns with the NSDF and the PSDF , ensuring coherence with national and provincial spatial planning objectives. The SDF guides land use, infrastructure development, and resource allocation to promote sustainable and inclusive growth within the municipality.

Appendix 2: Semi-structured Interview Questions: Borderland Residents

1. Interview Questions

Topic	Interview Questions
Introduction	1. Could you describe and introduce yourself?
Information about the current situation	2. How long have you been living in this area? 3. What do you do for a living? Where does the activity take place? (Lesotho or the South African side of the border) 4. Could you describe how is the daily situation in the area? In what ways does living near the border affect your daily life? What are the opportunities and challenges of living in a border area?
Cross-border Interaction	5. How often do you travel across the border to Lesotho? What are the reasons that you travel or not travel across the border? If you crossed the border, describe the positive and negative experience that have to face when you cross the border? If not, describes challenges that prevent you from crossing the border? 6. How often do you get into contact with people from the other side of the border? For what reasons (family, work, shopping, sports, events, education, etc.)
Development	7. In your opinion, does the border have positive or negative influence on the development of Setsoto Local Municipality? Can you provide example? 8. How effective do you find the current spatial planning and development initiatives in your area? In addressing (i) Infrastructure development i.e transport, housing & services-sewage (ii) Economic growth i.e job opportunities (iii) Social needs i.e safety & security, parks, community halls, cultural and heritage preservation (iv) Environment sustainability i.e waste management
Participation	9. Have you ever participated in a community meeting? What was the meeting about? When was the last time? (if not, why?) 10. <i>Have you ever participated in an activity that involved people from across the border? What was the activity about (private/public, economic, social, cultural, educational, etc.) and how would describe your experience?</i> 11. <i>Would you be open to a cross-border joint activity that involves or affects people from both sides of the border? What kind of joint activities could you associate yourself with?</i>

Social attitude	<p>12. What do you really like or dislike about living near the border?</p> <p>13. <i>Have you ever felt that you are in a disadvantageous situation because you live in the border region? If yes, what makes you feel this way?</i></p> <p>14. <i>Do you feel a need to get to know people from Lesotho and their culture?</i></p> <p>15. What are your hopes and aspirations in life?</p>
National Identity	<p>16. How do you describe your national identity, and how has living in the border region influenced your feelings about you national identity?</p> <p>17. <i>How does living in the border region influence your sense of connection to your community and country? Do you feel more connected, less connected, or a mix of both?"</i></p> <p>18. <i>Which language do you speak daily?</i></p> <p>19. How does your cultural background influence your interactions with people from the neighbouring border area?</p>
Suggestion	<p>20. What recommendations would you suggest to the Setsoto local municipality to improve living conditions in the border area?</p> <p>21. Do you have anything to add regarding the situation of living in the border area?</p> <p>22. What do you think of this interview?</p>

2. Background information

Which gender do you identify with?	
What is your age?	
What culture do you identify with?	
Which racial group(s) do you identify with?	
What is your employment status?	
What is your highest attained education level?	

Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview Questions: Planners

Warm-Up Questions

1. Can you describe your work, including your role and main responsibilities?
2. In light of your work, to what extent does it impact border areas? Or to what extent do the border areas impact your work?

Cross-border Spatial Planning and Development

3. Can you describe the extent to which planners cooperate/ engage with officials from neighbouring countries in the spatial planning and development of border areas? (daily/weekly/monthly, only formal or also informal, intensive/moderate, etc.)?
4. Can you share specific examples where collaboration with neighbouring countries positively influenced spatial planning and development? Can you describe your experience of the collaboration (as good or bad)? i.e. (cooperation projects, funding, seminars, meetings, etc)?
5. What factors influence the decision to collaborate or not to collaborate with officials from neighbouring countries in the spatial planning and development processes?

The Relationship Between Local and National/Provincial Government in Border Areas

6. What specific mechanisms or channels are in place to facilitate effective communication and collaboration between municipal planners and national/provincial-level authorities in spatial planning and development of border areas? How effective are these mechanisms in practice?
7. In what ways does the national/provincial government provide support to municipalities in managing the unique spatial planning challenges specific to border areas? Can you elaborate on the types of support provided, such as technical assistance, funding, or policy guidance?
8. What strategies and processes does the national/provincial government use to ensure that the needs, perspectives, and priorities of local municipalities in border areas are integrated into national/provincial-level spatial planning initiatives? Can you discuss any recent examples where this integration has been successfully achieved?

9. Has there ever been an instance where there was a need for alignment or negotiation between municipal and national/provincial spatial planning priorities in border areas? What were the main challenges encountered, and how were they addressed or resolved?
10. What role do different levels of government (Local, District/ Metropolitan, Provincial or National) play in dealing with spatial planning and development in border regions?

Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation

11. Who are the main actors dealing with spatial planning and development in the border region?
12. What strategies do you employ to engage and gather input from communities located in border areas? How would you describe the involvement of the local communities in the development of cross-border relations? (active, pro-active, passive, etc.)
13. Can you provide examples in the past of how inputs of border area communities influenced planning decisions?
14. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that the interests of local communities in border areas are represented in spatial planning and development?

Perceptions of Planners about the Border

15. In your opinion, does the presence of the border positively or negatively influence the development of municipalities in border areas (Setsoto Local Municipality)? Can you provide examples?
16. What do you think are the main spatial planning and development challenges in border areas?

Future Directions and Innovations

17. How can governmental policies and regulations be enhanced to optimize spatial planning and development in border areas effectively?
18. In your opinion, which level of government should have a greater role in spatial planning and development in border regions? Who should be the main actors, *i.e. Department(s) /Committees/Working Groups*? Why?

Additional Question

19. Are there other individuals you would recommend to be interviewed for this research?

Background questions

Job title	
How many years of working experience in the profession	
Highest attained level of education	
Level of Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Local Municipality2. Provincial3. National

Appendix 4: South Africa Borderland Municipalities by Province*

	Lesotho	Namibia	Botswana	eSwatini	Mozambique	Zimbabwe	Namibia-Botswana	eSwatini-Mozambique	Botswana-Zimbabwe
FS	1. Maluti a Phofung 2. Mantsopa 3. Mangaung 4. Mohokare 5. Setso 6. Dihlabeng								
EC	1. Elundini 2. Matatiele 3. Senqu								
KZN	1. Inkosi Langalibalele 2. Impendle 3. Greater Kokstad 4. Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma 5. Mpofana 6. uMngeni 7. Okhahlamba 8. Umzimkhulu			1. uPhongolo 2. eDumbe 3. Abaqulusi 4. Big Five Hlabisa 5. Nongoma	Umhlabuyalingana			Jozini	
NC		1. Khâi-Ma 2. Richtersveld 3. Kai !Garib 4. Nama Khoi					Dawid Kruiper		
NW			1. Kagisano/Molopo 2. Ratlou 3. Ramotshere Moiloa 4. Moses Kotane 5. Joe Morolong 6. Mahikeng						
LIM			1. Thabazimbi 2. Lephallale 3. Blouberg		1. Ba-Phalaborwa 2. Greater Giyani 3. Collins Chabane	Thulamela			Musina
MP				1. Mkhondo 2. Msukaligwa 3. Chief Albert Luthuli 4. City of Mbombela	Bushbuckridge			Nkomazi	

*FS= Free State; EC= Eastern Cape; KZN= KwaZulu-Natal; NC= Northern Cape; NW= North West; LIM= Limpopo; MP= Mpumalanga

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DEDICATION

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Revelation 22:20