The Small Town Research Unit (STRU) is a research unit seated in the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies. The STRU specialises in a range of geographical research pertaining to small towns as well as secondary cities.

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**Small Town Research Unit (STRU)**

Numerous literature reviews over the past decade affirmed that small towns are a neglected component of the urban hierarchy in South Africa. With around five hundred small towns of less than 50 000 persons, accommodating about one tenth of the country’s population, small towns have seldom been conceptualised as key elements in South Africa’s national development. In the National Development Plan for example there is hardly any reference made to small towns as settlement type. Small towns are generally seen as entities for rural administration mostly with a single sector development strategy.

The Western Cape Government’s commissioned 2010 research study into the growth potential of small towns in the province and the edited book of Donaldson and Marais on small towns in 2012 ignited a continued interest in non-metropolitan urban research by scholars in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Stellenbosch University. In 2021 the Small Town Research Unit was officially established.

At the STRU we recognise the greatness of small towns. Over the past decade a range of studies were conducted on small towns (mostly in the Western Cape) which include aspects on the growth potential of small towns, privatisation of public golf courses, local economic issues, small town gentrification, small town tourism development, music festivals, gated and retirement villages, second homes, and wind energy. Although the unit’s name reflects an emphasis on small towns are those towns that have over the past two decades transitioned to secondary city status also a major research focus. In many of these secondary cities the population numbers may have grown exponentially yet the small town mentality and sense of place have largely remain intact.

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**Small town and secondary city research since 2010**

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**People**

Prof Ronnie Donaldson

Dr Manfred Spocter

Prof Gustav Visser

**Contact**

Prof Ronnie Donaldson

rdonaldson@sun.ac.za

021-8082395