



Growing vibrant, integrated cities – gearing transformation to the future

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Growing vibrant, integrated cities – gearing transformation to the future

The CSIR has been asked to assist the South African Cities Network (SACN) with compiling the 2016 State of Cities report. In spite of tremendous progress in addressing backlogs, some of the key challenges for the country's cities, which will be highlighted in the report, are the ongoing growth in the demand for services and economic opportunities, coupled with continued urgency for transformation.

South Africa's complex cultural history and the legacy of apartheid have since the democratic dispensation in 1994 made city development and urban spatial planning a particularly daunting challenge for government. "The government has since '94 invested a lot in infrastructure development in our cities. Despite that, most of our cities have remained largely segregated," says Mark Napier, a CSIR principal researcher. "Traditional townships have over the years expanded, but have remained poor, underdeveloped and culturally exclusive. We haven't seen enough integration and transformation in cities and because it is very hard to build low-income housing on higher value, well-located land, the poor still live on the fringes of our cities and are forced to make long commutes to areas of work."

However, several governmental departments from the National Treasury, the country's metropolitan municipalities and local governments, the SACN, NGOs and stakeholders in the private sector are now joining forces to holistically address the fair, sustainable and efficient growth of SA's cities, and the CSIR is helping to shape the conversation.

"There has been a fair amount of integration in many of the suburbs, but outside of the suburbs there is still a lot of work to be done," says Napier. "Inequality in land ownership is still a big concern. Housing policies currently do not allow much funding for land purchase, which means low-income housing and free basic services are only found where land is cheap, in other words far from city centres. Spatially this creates a problem, because if the working class is located far from work on the fringes of cities it puts a strain on their living expenses, on the roads and on the economy. It also continues to promote income segregation and halts integration."



Elsona van Huyssteen, principle Urban and Regional Planner at the CSIR, indicated that the CSIR, DST and participating metro's have over the last few years made significant progress through the stepSA initiative in building the capability to support such housing and infrastructure investment decisions within cities and settlements, and avoid costly mistakes with long term structural implications.

Research and spatial trend analyses (conducted by CSIR and HSRC as part of the stepSA initiative) highlights the dynamics of an increasingly youthful population, a growth in households living in poverty, and the fluidity of people-movement between cities, towns and rural settlements.

The outputs of this research were used by the Department of Cooperative Governance's draft policy statement known as the Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF). In February the CSIR hosted a roundtable discussion around the IUDF and facilitated conversations on how urbanisation, city planning and land could be best managed to ensure integrated spatial planning and efficient land governance.

According to Napier the IUDF roundtable was a "success" as it resulted in all parties agreeing that a coordinated spatial planning and transformation strategy was needed, and that all departments, stakeholders and investors needed to collaborate closely to pull in the same direction, guided by sound policies.

One of the ways that cities can increase integration is by making better use of underused, underdeveloped land.

"We're looking at city-wide strategies to identify underused, underdeveloped land that can be earmarked for low-income housing," says Napier. "We have also investigated a range of value capture instruments including land readjustment approaches where local government approaches private land owners who have informal settlements on their land adjacent to publicly owned land. The idea is to pool the land, redevelop and subdivide it, and include a range of residential and commercial developments. This will be done in such a way that the original land owner not only gets compensated but also gets an opportunity to collaboratively invest, along with poorer residents and local government, in low income housing and much needed infrastructure that will be beneficial to all parties involved."

At the recent State of Cities Conference hosted by the South African Cities Network, the research conducted by CSIR through the stepSA initiative was used to introduce the plight of cities in the conference's opening session. Sithole Mbanga (the CEO of SACN) acknowledged the value of this contribution in kick starting the conversation and contributing towards "fruitful discussions" shaping the themes for the SACN's 2016 State of the Cities report.

"For the first time, we are able to track key growth and population-movement trends within, as well as between cities, towns and rural areas, and start utilising that to simulate the implication of growth scenarios in our cities and towns. This can make a critical contribution in supporting government's massive housing and transport investments to have real impact in addressing the increasing transformation as well as sustainability challenges in cities and settlements," says van Huyssteen.

She considers one of the most crucial challenges and opportunities for South Africa's cities and for government as a whole, to address urgent short term service delivery and job creation challenges by actively utilising its drive for infrastructure investment, sustainable human settlements and spatial outcomes, to contribute to increased opportunities and a transformed urban experience for the youth and households living in poverty.



Cities are crucibles where all the different spheres of government, the private sector, industries and institutions and the needs of citizens hit the ground. The complexity involved in the institutional, spatial, financial, infrastructure and integrated planning processes and instruments within cities is immense.

“Effective and strategic co-ordination between the plans, budgets, investment frameworks, key performance targets and catalytic project investments of the range of metropolitan, provincial and national line departments and agencies, can be a big challenge,” says Van Huyssteen.

“Identifying major growth dynamics and exploring potential implications of major housing and transportation investments (such as BRT) under certain growth scenarios within cities and settlements, provide an invaluable platform for all involved parties and stakeholders to explore the potential impact of public investment - not only in support of key public sector targets, but also in bringing about transformation geared towards the future, supporting resource sustainability, robust development in cities and towns, and the differentiated and fast changing needs and requirements of the highly mobile urban population.”

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