

Are urban development projects in

JOHANNESBURG PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY?

Research looks at housing city projects in Waterfall and Fleurhof to assess if inclusivity policies are translated into spatial reality



Despite the adoption of a number of policies to promote United Nations SDG 11: Inclusive, resilient and sustainable human settlements in the City of Johannesburg, there are notable shortcomings in the

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implementation thereof.

A study conducted by a team of local researchers from the University of Johannesburg and international researchers from Austria and Netherlands, reveals that spatial and economic inequalities from the past are still being reproduced

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in new housing development projects in the city due to policy gaps and dysfunctions in the built environment.

According to the study, partly funded by the National Research Foundation, the city runs the risk of not overcoming spatial barriers and meeting the goal to provide adequate, inclusive housing for 50% of the black African, low-income households. This is because low-income households continue to be located in high-density areas with poor infrastructural access, while high-income households continue to reside in safe, well-equipped gated estates surrounded by urban amenities.

The study assessed the extent to which inclusionary policies in the City of Johannesburg are translated in the built environment by analysing recent urban development projects in Fleurhof and Waterfall. It found that:

- Conformity to inclusionary policies by developers is driven by the “tick-the-box” behaviour;
- On paper, the developers adhere to minimum standards of inclusivity in terms of housing; land use mix; proximity to public transport or social infrastructures; and provision of public spaces. But in reality, the two areas show significant dysfunctions and inequalities;
- Developers are using loopholes of definition in the policy framework to legitimise upscale housing developments to align them with inclusive housing policy goals. For example, developers in Waterfall, an upmarket, low-density residential development, offer small-scale units of approximately 40m² (considered inclusionary units as per definition)

Spatial inequalities are still being reproduced in Jhb’s new housing development projects

which are unaffordable for low-income groups.

Mobility provision is strongly focused on private cars while public transport is accessible within 2km of the developments. In both projects, affordable transport, such as minibuses, is informal and without a schedule while high-scale mobility services, such as the Gautrain service, is too expensive for low- to middle-income households.

Thus, poor connections of bus or railway stations within the developments as well as car-centred road designs are promoting commuting by bicycle and/or walking as well as multimodal travel behaviour.

The favourable policies are currently not leading to the implementation of a more inclusive spatial reality for the residents of the City of Johannesburg. This is attributed to ambiguous policy goals; a lack of monitoring; and the public sector having less power over developers in their daily practices due to their financial and economic power. If these policies are to result in a spatial change and thus improvement in the lives of Johannesburg residents, a more vigorous approach by the public sector at different levels will be necessary. The study recommends that:

- Consistent objectives must be set for different departments of the municipality, as well as at the regional and national level in order to avoid loopholes for the developers;
- Effective monitoring must be implemented after the approval process; and
- An increase in public financial capacities for (social) infrastructural connections and affordable housing, e.g. through subsidies, could also reduce political dependencies towards developers.

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