

Urbanisation and Mixed-Income Residential Development in South African Townships: A Case Study of Olievenhoutbosch

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1 ABSTRACT

The legacy of the poor apartheid planning system still prevails in South African cities, with people of colour mostly being placed on the outskirts of the cities in townships where there is a lack of economic opportunities. Despite the policies that have been implemented in post-Apartheid South Africa to address inequalities and social, environmental, political, and economic challenges, there is still much that needs to be done to achieve a South Africa that is inclusive. Currently, citizens can democratically choose to reside wherever they want, but the ability to afford always determines where one will reside. To promote inclusivity, mixed-income residential development approaches have been applied both locally and internationally to ensure that access to resources and services is shared equally among people of different economic classes. This paper examined the impact of rapid and high levels of urbanisation on mixed-income residential development in South African townships, focusing on the township of Olievenhoutbosch. It also investigated how urbanisation rates have impacted access to and availability of mixed housing. The paper reviewed literature on the impact of urbanisation on the development of mixed communities in the context of South African townships. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with twenty-six residents of Olievenhoutbosch township in Johannesburg. The results highlight inadequate housing units to accommodate everyone thus leading to the invasion of new government-assisted housing projects before their completion and the illegal occupation of land that is not suitable for residential developments mainly attributed to high rates of urbanisation. Thus, to address the housing shortages, homeowners have resulted in building structurally inadequate backyard rooms for rentals to increase accessibility and availability. This study recommends that policymakers and urban planners prioritise the implementation of sustainable mixed-income residential developmental strategies. This will help to address the housing backlog, promote inclusivity, and integrate economically disadvantaged communities into urban centres while ensuring proper planning and infrastructure development.

Keywords: Olievenhoutbosch, Inclusivity, Mixed-income housing, Urbanisation, Planning

2 INTRODUCTION

According to Zhang (2016), despite the positive impact of urbanisation on global economic performances and advancing countries to high-income status, it also has its share of challenges such as housing shortages that need urgent attention, especially in cities of developing countries. Developing countries that are experiencing high urbanisation rates of more than 60% are likely to achieve 50% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Chen et al., 2022). This comes in handy for developed countries since they often experience more than 70% of the urbanisation rate, enabling them to combat the repercussions that come with urbanisation. Developing countries are still struggling to achieve SDG 11 where cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable even though the right to adequate housing is considered a basic human right in most countries. Despite the urban strategies that have been employed, most cities, especially in developing countries, still face challenges with integrating migrants into the urban economy (Migration and Its Impact on Cities, 2017).

By the year 2021, South African cities were able to accommodate almost 67.85% of the country's total population (Stats SA, 2023). The majority of the cities in Africa are urbanising at a fast rate but are facing policy challenges in addressing the good management of urbanisation, and failure to do so poses socio-economic and environmental threats to the communities (Abrahams et al., 2018). Despite Africa being the

least urbanised continent, South African cities such as Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province and Cape Town in the Western Cape Province are catching up.

The apartheid policies of the National Party government from 1948 to 1994 have immensely negatively affected urbanisation. The policies intended to create spatial inequalities, separating people due to their skin colour, with people of colour being placed at the periphery of the city centres, far from benefiting from economic opportunities. The restriction of people of colour in certain areas has led to the development of slums and townships on the outskirts of the city, where the cost of living is relatively lower (Bakker et al., 2020). Even though the post-Apartheid policies allowed people of colour to reside wherever they wished, the capability to afford always determines where one will reside. Most of the people of colour are found on the outskirts of the cities in townships and informal settlements, where the cost of living is relatively lower compared to the inner city. This calls for urgent attention, since in a world that is rapidly changing and urbanising, the provision of adequate housing becomes the biggest priority (Khan & Thring, 2003).

The township of Olievenhoutbosch is found in the province of Gauteng which is regarded as the economic hub of South Africa (Chakwizira et al., 2018); hence, it has attracted both international and local migrants. The township faces challenges in achieving a safe mixed-income residential area and adequate housing and shelter for all, despite the effort that has been made by the South African government to provide housing to those in need. The township has been awarded several housing projects that have been completed and aimed at assisting low-income and poor people. The recent low-income housing projects have been illegally occupied by the residents of Olievenhoutbosch and some from Alexandra, Atteridgeville, and Mamelodi, while the buildings were still under construction in 2020. The rightful owners are still residing in informal settlements (Ndlazi, 2021). The fights between the people who have illegally occupied the houses, the rightful owners and the Department of Tshwane Housing make it hard to achieve the integrated housing development that the township aims to achieve. There have also been several evictions of informal houses that were built on private land (Mokhoali, 2022).

3 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The incessant demand for urban housing can directly be linked to high urbanisation rates (Akinyemi et al., 2020). Despite the need for housing in cities, competent legislative regulation and good urban planning and design are required to achieve sustainable mixed-income housing communities (European Strategy and Policy Analysis System, 2019). Planning is an evolving process leading to alterations and removals of land use restrictions to accommodate the need for housing and the development of residential communities (Jenkins et al., 2006). Despite all the alterations that have been made to land rights, there is a lack of collaboration that keeps on persisting between the housing developers and the local authorities, with difficulties in obtaining clearance for housing planning authorisation (Yakob et al., 2013).

The mixed-income housing policies and projects that have been implemented are not only aimed at providing shelter to the needy and making housing affordable but also at bringing integration between the people who come from different economic backgrounds to combat the socio-economic challenges that were created by the poor apartheid planning that created segregation (Funde, 2023).

The well-developed mixed-income residential developments include Cosmo City mixed-income housing and the Fleurhof integrated residential. Cosmo City is the first fully integrated, sustainable human settlement to be successful in South Africa. It was founded by the Gauteng Department of Housing and the City of Johannesburg in 1998 but became successful in 2012 (South African Housing and Infrastructure Fund, 2020). Fleurhof is located between the township of Soweto and the suburb of Florida in the south of Johannesburg. It is similar to the Cosmo City mixed-income housing development as it has also incorporated different housing typologies and tenures, such as fully subsidised Breaking New Ground (BNG) housing, social housing, open-market rentals, and bonded housing (Mnisi & Karam, 2020).

Unlike the above two discussed case studies of the development of mixed communities in Cosmo City and Fleurhof, which have been designed at an initial stage to accommodate people who come from different economic backgrounds, the township of Olievenhoutbosch was earlier designed for low-income people. The recent development of middle- and high-income households within the dominating low-income households of Olievenhoutbosch is what gives it a sense of a mixed-income community. Currently, Olievenhoutbosch presents a variety of land uses, housing typologies, and people from different economic classes co-existing in

the area. The fully subsidised housing that has been provided by the government for the low-income class comes in different formats, from single-stand and semi-detached houses, which are mostly found in Extension 36 of the township, to row dwellings, enabling the residents to have more options and break the homogeneous setting that is mostly created by government-assisted houses (Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, 2016).

Most of the policies and legislations that have been put in place, even though they did not solely intend to create mixed-income residential developments, advocated for the provision of adequate housing. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 has highlighted that access to adequate housing is a basic right. The state is tasked with the responsibility of coming up with legislation and strategies that will ensure that everyone has access to housing (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Housing Act of 107 of 1997 has also highlighted that the government should intend on building affordable, sustainable housing that ensures access to the socio-economic benefits that the city has to offer. The legislation also aims to eradicate the development of informal settlements and eliminate descriptions that can be influenced by one's gender (Act, 1997).

The Breaking New Ground: National Housing Code (2009) aimed to establish the underlying policy principles, guidelines, norms, and standards that align with the existing programmes that address housing issues. It is aligned with the comprehensive plan for the development of sustainable human settlements (Department of Human Settlement, 2009). Fully subsidised (RDP) housing was introduced by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994 and aimed to address the historical inequalities caused by the Apartheid planning system to achieve economic progress. The programme does not only construct new buildings but also redevelop the abandoned existing buildings (Nokulunga et al., 2018).

South Africa implemented several housing policies and legislation in the post-apartheid period that aimed to address the poor apartheid spatial planning, however, mixed-income housing development plans have not generally received support from private property investors in townships such as Oliven. Most of the successful housing projects are those of low-income housing (Todes & Robinson, 2020).

4 STUDY AREA

The township of Olievenhoutbosch is located in Region 4, which is the southwestern part of the city of Tshwane. It was founded in the 1990s but was made part of the city of Tshwane in 2000 (South African History Online, 2020). Despite the new developments of middle- and high-income households, the township is dominated by low-income houses (Department of Human Settlement, 2016). During the early years of the development of the township, the area was used as a transit area, which has led people from other places to move to the township due to easy access to public transport. The following is a map of Olievenhoutbosch township.

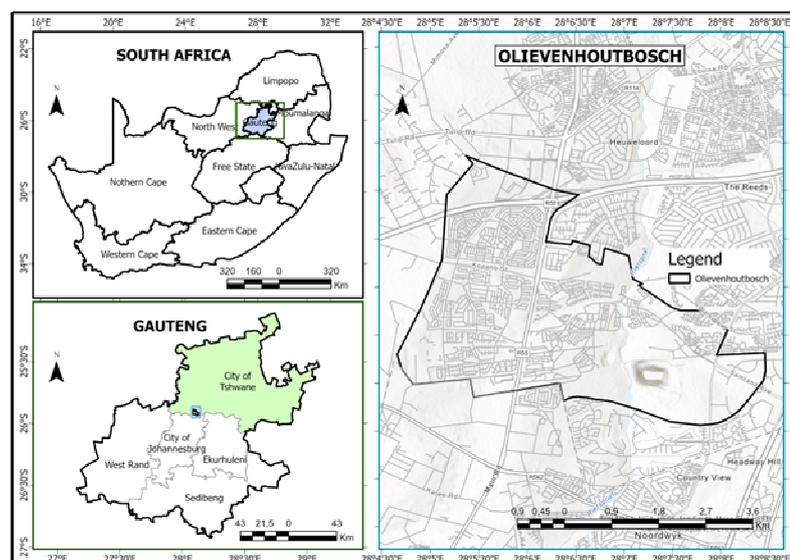


Figure 1: Locational map of Olievenhoutbosch township (Source: Authors, 2025).

The township of Olievenhoutbosch is found close to the borders of the City of Johannesburg, enabling easy commuting of the residents between the City of Johannesburg and the City of Tshwane.

Region 4, where the township of Olievenhoutbosch is located, has an estimated population of 379 349, with 70 863 people residing in Olievenhoutbosch in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2012). However, since there have been no updated general census data on the population of Olievenhoutbosch since 2011, the population seems to be increasing, and that is seen through the constant demand for access to housing and the high rise of backrooms and informal settlements.

5 METHODOLOGY

This study applied the qualitative research approach to examine the impact of rapid urbanization on mixed-income residential development in South African townships, with a focus on Olievenhoutbosch. The qualitative methodology allows the researchers to collect in-depth data as it incorporates the thoughts, opinions, experiences, and body language of the participants through its data collection methods. Qualitative research methods include interviews and direct observations. It allows physical and direct interaction between the participants and the researcher (Rahman, 2020). The research also applied the case study design, which focuses on a single case of the impact of urbanisation on the mixed-income housing developments in the township of Olievenhoutbosch.

The study adopted purposive sampling to select two (2) participants from each of the twelve (12) official extensions of the township of Olievenhoutbosch, as well as an official from the City of Tshwane human settlement department and the community councillor who is aware or involved in the development of housing in the township, was invited to participate in the study. For data collection, the researcher conducted field observation and interviews.

Despite the limited number of papers addressing the impact of urbanisation and the development of households for different economic classes in the township of Olievenhoutbosch, the need for adequate urbanisation management strategies and the need for housing in the township is seen through the growing number of backyard rooms for rentals, the illegal occupation of government housing projects, and private land that was not designated for residential developments.

6 FINDINGS

6.1 Housing projects

Currently, thirteen government-assisted housing projects have been implemented in the following extensions: 13, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 36, and 37. Some of the projects are similar in structure and were developed almost at the same time, and it is hard to distinguish since the boundaries of the extensions are not visible at times. The development of government-assisted houses has also incorporated different housing typologies, from stand-alone to semi-detached, that are mostly found in Extension 36 (Absa) and flats.

There is currently no available land for future residential developments in the township of Olievenhoutbosch. However, the government plans to engage with the private owners of land close to the area to develop social housing. Future developments in Olievenhoutbosch can be done on the north side of the township along N14. The city is currently hesitant to develop or build in the area due to the steep landscape of the area. It will be difficult and costly to develop service infrastructure such as water and sewage. The land is also sensitive; special material is required to build the houses.

6.2 Housing Diversity in Olievenhoutbosch

Below is a picture of the 919-flat housing project in Olievenhoutbosch Extension 36 which was illegally occupied by the residents in the year 2020, while the people who were approved to have the houses are still in need.



Figure 2: Illegally occupied housing project of 919 flats in Ext 36 in Olievenhoutbosch (Source: Authors,2023).

Picture A shows flats that were completely done, had streetlights, parking, water, and electricity, and were legally occupied by their rightful owners. Picture B shows flats that were illegally occupied by residents and were not yet completed.



Figure 3: Middle-income rental flats in the low-cost households of Olievenhoutbosch Extension (Source: Author,2023).

The township of Olievenhoutbosch present different housing typology. The above picture are rental apartments of middle-income earners and are found in the heart of low-income households in Olievenhoutbosch Extension 36 (Absa). It breaks the traditional feeling of residing in a township since it is placed close to the shopping centre and petrol station (approximately less than a 5-minute walk).

6.3 Social Mix in Olievenhoutbosch

The failure of Oliven to develop a mixed-income residential development that is sustainable is seen through the lack of social mix strategies that have been implemented in the area to achieve inclusivity and to break the stereotypes that might have existed between people from low-, middle-, and high-income households. There are no programmes that have been put in place to promote interaction between people of different classes.

7 STRATEGIES THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED IN OLIEVENHOUTBOSCH

7.1 Developing Rural Areas.

Despite urbanisation being a product and contributing immensely to the economic development of cities, a high number of people coming into the city strains accessibility to housing and other service deliveries from the government (Dufhues et al., 2021). The goal is to make urban migration a choice, not a necessity. The government can promote economic opportunities through specialised legislation and policies to reduce rural-

urban migration and give people a choice to migrate to cities by choice, not only because more opportunities are being presented in cities than in rural areas.

7.2 Developing programmes that promote social mix.

The use of social mix programmes has been applied in town planning for a while to achieve inclusive cities (Sarkissian, 1976). It is seen as an objective of good planning as well as a solution to bring a sense of modern life to the ageing social housing neighbourhood. The township of Olievenhoutbosch can use what they already have, such as parks and sports activities, to promote interaction.

7.3 Supporting other programmes that ensure access to housing.

7.3.1 Issuing serviced stands

To combat the issues of slums and the continuing housing backlog, the Gauteng province has implemented programmes that provide serviced stands rather than building houses. The community members who need houses are given a choice: wait for the houses to be built for them or be provided with the stands. The City of Johannesburg has already implemented a strategy of this kind. The township of Olievenhoutbosch can also adopt this strategy of providing serviced stands instead of building houses. This will help the municipality save money. The strategy can be developed in such a way that it restricts the building of backyard rooms and shacks for rentals. This will help with reducing informality.

7.3.2 Rental buildings by Government

Despite the effort that has been made by the City of Tshwane with the development of social houses that include rental and purchasing and are supported by FLISP within Region 4, where Olievenhoutbosch is found, such similar projects are not in existence in the area. The development of rental buildings by the government within the township will not only increase accessibility to housing but also bring diversity to a mixed-income community and give people a choice of place to stay. The generated money from the rental buildings can be used to provide free houses for people in the low-income class who require adequate shelter.

7.3.3 Supporting the Gauteng Partnership Fund to address the backyard rooms.

The majority of the backyard rooms in Oliven are shacks that were built close to each other, lacked sustainability aspects, and could be a risky fire if they were to start since the electricity cables were also exposed on the ground. Programmes such as the Gauteng Partnership Fund (GPN) can be useful in assisting individuals who would like to build backyard rooms for income but do not have financial means. It has programmes such as Kasi 4 Real, which enhances the township economy through the funding of rental room projects. Promotion of such programmes in Olievenhoutbosch will increase accessibility and availability of housing and ensure that the water, sewerage, and electricity needs of the new developments can be accommodated by the existing service infrastructure.

8 CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this study was to examine the impact of urbanisation on mixed-income residential development in South African townships, focusing on the township of Olievenhoutbosch. Despite the efforts made by the government to provide housing, the township of Olievenhoutbosch still faces a housing backlog. There has been illegal occupation of the recent housing projects, while the deserving residents of the houses remain in the informal settlements and backyard rooms. Unlike other implemented mixed-income communities in South Africa, Olievenhoutbosch was not initially developed to be a mixed-income community; the development of the new middle- and high-income households is what gives it a sense of inclusivity. The fights between the residents who have illegally occupied the provided social houses, the rightful owners, and the Department of Housing jeopardise the safety in the area and make it difficult to achieve an inclusive and sustainable mixed-income development in the township. The area has also seen a high number of residents hijacking private land that was not zoned for residential development and creating slums.

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