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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Spatial Development Policies in Promoting Spatial Justice and Integration in Johannesburg

Nolwazi Nompumelelo Kakana, Thulisile Ncamsile Mphambukeli, Eric Nyembezi Makoni

(Nolwazi Nompumelelo Kakana, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg. Cnr Siemert & Beit Streets, Doornfontein 0184 Johannesburg, South Africa, nolwazikakana24@gmail.com)
(Assistant Professor Thulisile Ncamsile Mphambukeli, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg. Cnr Siemert & Beit Streets, Doornfontein 0184 Johannesburg, South Africa, tmphambukeli@uj.ac.za)
(Dr Eric Nyembezi Makoni, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Johannesburg. Cnr Siemert & Beit Streets, Doornfontein 0184 Johannesburg, South Africa, emakoni@uj.ac.za)

1 ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the effectiveness of spatial development policies in addressing spatial inequalities in the City of Johannesburg (CoJ), a city marked by historical exclusion and segregation. Despite efforts through Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs) to promote spatial justice and integration, significant disparities still persist, particularly for marginalised communities who continue to face barriers to essential resources such as housing, transport, and public services. By analysing the evolution and implementation of these policies, the research revealed that while they aimed to rectify historical injustices, their impact remains uneven. The study contextualised spatial justice within broader social and economic transformations, examining how urban policies interact with power dynamics and resource distribution to affect the residents' daily lives. The findings underscored ongoing challenges related to urban inclusion and exclusion, highlighting the disconnect between policy objectives and real-world outcomes. The paper advocates for transformative approaches that prioritise participatory governance and equitable resource distribution as critical components of sustainable urban planning. Ultimately, this research enhances the understanding of spatial justice complexities and contributes to discussions on fostering more integrated and just urban environments in cities facing similar spatial challenges.

Keywords: spatial development, spatial justice, integrated development planning, urban governance, Johannesburg

2 INTRODUCTION

The CoJ remains a manifestation of old apartheid geographical planning, where race, class, and spatial locations were isolated one from the opportunity to have access to housing, transport, and economic opportunities. Johannesburg, or Joburg as it is commonly known, was established in 1886, following the discovery of gold. Not only did it develop rapidly from a small mining town to a thriving city, but also made significant contributions to the national markets (Beavon, 2004; O'Meara, 1996; Roodt, 2012).While the CoJ is characterised as one of the most economically affluent neighborhoods in Africa, there also exist areas of abject poverty in informal settlements and townships, as well asinformal settlements such as Diepsloot which are located close to the wealthy neighborhood of Steyn City (Huchzermeyer, 2004). These areas face persistent struggles due to decades of intentional socio-spatial division that has its roots in colonial/apartheid spatial planning, as well as the post-1994 inefficiencies in urban governance (Mabin, 1990; Parnell and Pieterse, 2010; Turok, 2016).

This colonial/apartheid racial planning legacy has resulted in the creation of Johannesburg and other South African cities as arguably the world's most spatially divided cities, where social, economic, and environmental inequalities continue to define the urban landscape (Bremner, 2000; Nleya, 2017; Turok and Visser, 2018).While policies that are aimed to remedy these inequalities such as the IDPs, theSDFs, and the Integrated Urban Development Framework aim to address these gross disparities, many residents of Johannesburg still experience exclusion and economic marginalisation (CoJ, 2021).It ultimately justified the promotion of spatial justice through higher levels of infrastructure, affordable housing, urban regeneration, and the reintegration of informal settlements (Harrison and Todes, 2017; Parnell, 2019; Sutherland, 2020). Beyond access to services, spatial justice advocates for equitable access to resources and a voice in the economy and community (Soja, 2010).However, the apartheid-era segregation is still apparent in many of our communities that are still without reliable public transport, opportunities work work, and access to education. This exacerbates rather than ameliorating socio-economic inequalities (Mabin, 2020).

This study undertook a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for understanding complex social problems such as spatial justice and urban planning (Creswell, 2013). This approach enables an exploration of policy formation, policy implementation, and policy perceptions, particularly about the complexities of an urban environment such as that of the CoJ.This research specifically used content analysis as the method of analysis to be applied to key spatial policy documents. In this capacity, it will help reveal how spatial justice, alongside urban integration, is conceived and accounted for within the CoJ's strategic intent and projects outlined in these documents.This method will contribute to understanding the trajectory and prominence of commitments towards spatial inequalities and consolidating cities through the analysis of the rhetoric, priorities, and strategic direction enshrined in these documents.

3 STUDY AREA

The CoJis a metropolitan municipality, and one of the three metros located in the Gauteng province. It is also the largest metropolitan municipality in South Africa (Johannesburg City Profile, 2020). With the fastest-growing urban area on the continent with over 5.6 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2022), it is South Africa's most populated city.The city boasts exceptional infrastructure such as world-class telecommunications, transport, water, and electricity, in addition to world-class healthcare and education.The city has a diverse range of ethnic groups, which are broadly reflective of the national demographic, including those identified as African, White, Coloured, and Indian/Asian. The majority of the people, about 80% of the city's residents, have African roots. The rest of the population blends well with the existing cultural fabric of the city(CoJ, 2021).

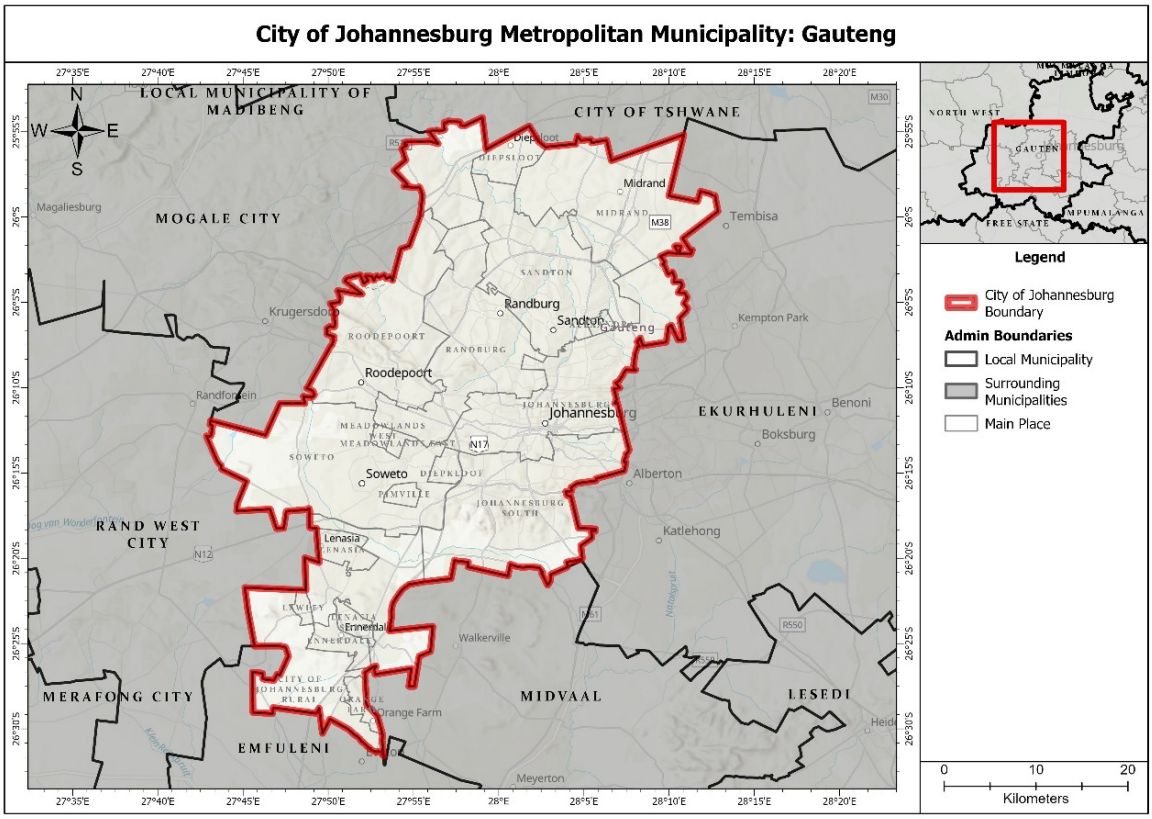

Fig. 1: Locality map showing the study area

Johannesburg has to reconcile its practices around urban development and spatial planning with a history of inequalities and the need to sustain urban growth. For example, the apartheid legacy in South Africa has heavily influenced the spatial configuration of cities characterised by segregation, uneven development, and poor access to resources for impoverished groups (Turok, 2016).To overcome the above-mentioned challenges, a plethora of policies which are referred tospatial development policies have emerged with the purpose of fostering spatial justice and integration. This study examined how these policies have fared in terms of inclusivity, equity, and balanced growth in the CoJ.

The spatial disposition of Johannesburg is informed by the sociopolitical landscape of South Africa, more specifically the apartheid era (1948–1994). This resulted in stark racial segregation, an apartheid tool for control and marginalisation of the non-white majority that informed the urban planning vision. Policies such as the Group Areas Act dictated people's residency in a segregated urban landscape, with separate public services available for each group, effectively creating a well-resourced, predominantly white city, next to townships that housed non-white communities (Creswell, 2013).This history has proven spatial injustices embodied in walls that segregate communities along racial and class lines, unequal allocation of resources, and large discrepancies in infrastructure, public amenities, and economic opportunities in disparate neighborhoods (Harrison and Todes, 2017). Moreover, the lack of an efficient model of public transport hinders disadvantaged communities from accessing their jobs and social services.

4 SPATIAL JUSTICE IN JOHANNESBURG'S SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION POLICIES

Scholars such as Harrison et al. (2019) and Robins (2018)stated that in Johannesburg, spatial transformation has been a key policy objective since the end of apartheid, as the city sought to address the spatial inequalities rooted by decades of racially discriminatory urban planning. Furthermore, in Johannesburg, spatial transformation has been one of the primary objectives of post-apartheid policy as the city strives to overcome and address the spatial inequalities that were compounded by years of racially discriminatory urban planning. The spatial planning of the apartheid state was manifestly evident through legislation such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 that forcibly segregated urban space, relocating non-white people into township peripheries, leaving the city centre and white northern suburbs for the whites(Makhura, 2020; Nleya, 2017; Turok, 2016). The end result is a deeply segregated city, marked by a geographic distribution of socio-economic opportunities and unequal access to essential services such as housing, jobs, and transport.However, post-apartheid space policy (for example, the IDP and the SDF) has sought to address the legacy of spatial inequality, mainly through the promotion of spatial justice via urban integration, mobility, and equitable access to services (Harrison et al., 2019). One such policy approach introduced was the Corridors of Freedom initiative, which aimed to dissolve the spatial restrictions of apartheid by establishing transit-orientated development corridors linking peripheral areas to economic centres, thus improving marginalised populations' access to jobs and services (Tomlinson, 2018). This was an effort to try to connect the direct economic regeneration of space back to the notion of social justice in space, to make sure the communities that had historically been excluded were brought into the socio-economic mainstream of the city.

Besides the IDP and SDF, the spatial development of Johannesburg was informed by various policies such as the Growing Gauteng Together 2030, the Gauteng Environmental Management Framework, the 25-year Gauteng Integrated Transport Master Plan, the Gauteng SDF 2030, and the Johannesburg Growth and Development Strategy 2040. The Growing Gauteng Together 2030 focused on the regeneration of townships and transit-orientated development, but does not radically change spatial inequalities. Also, the Gauteng Environmental Management Framework does guide land usage, referring to the structure of land used for the production of disclosure services, such as agriculture, tourism, and industry;however, it is not actually a tool for spatial restructuring but is more like a regulatory system. Moreover, there are the 25-year Gauteng Integrated Transport Master Planthat focusseson effective and efficient transport connectivity between residential and economic zones, and thestratigraphies of ecologies of scale: the SDF – Good Soil Development Facilitator. The Growth and Development Strategy 2040, however, is an aspirational document, and its plans for moving beyond deep inequalities are modest (SDF 2040, 2024).

Overall, these spatial plans are well linked to the national and provincial frameworks, but there are limits to their efficacy in enabling transformative spatial outcomes. According to Berrisford (2021), the CoJ'spolicies have had some positive impact, but fragmented governance, financial limitations, and market-mediated gentrification continue to limit their effectiveness. Gentrification, as an unintentional consequence, has been a significant driver of a central polemic in the spatial transformation–spatial justice nexus: the material enhancement of infrastructure can make neighborhoods more connected and accessible for some but can also increase property values, leading to the displacement of poorer neighborhood residents from areas activated for development (Tomlinson, 2018). Such displacement undermines the broader pursuit of spatial justice, whereby marginalised populations are pushed further outside of important spaces, reinforcing cycles of spatial exclusion.

Informality remains one of the most urgent concerns regarding the relationship between Johannesburg's spatial transformation and spatial justice. These include settlements such as Alexandra, Diepsloot, and Ivory Park, which accommodate a large percentage of the low-income population of Johannesburg and are typified by poor access to basic services, insecure land tenure, and limited access to economic opportunities (SACN, 2020). Johannesburg's spatial policies have sought to formalise and integrate these settlements into the wider urban fabric, but progress has been slow, and precarious living remains the default for many residents. The battle of informal settlements remains a key obstacle to spatial justice in Johannesburg. As asserted by Turok (2016), spatial justice will not be achieved without addressing the housing needs of those living in informal settlements, who are among the most spatially marginalised groups in the city. Meanwhile, efforts to regularise these settlements often meet resistance from both residents and the state: upgrading infrastructure and service provision involves a high cost, and many informal settlers would prefer to keep their homes if their settlements are regularised. This mimics broader tensions in spatial justice discussions, such as how to balance the short-term needs of marginalised communities (CoJ, 2020); and what spatial transformation should look like in the long run.

The plans are central tools through which the city confronts the structural challenges it faces and are updated over time to embody the city's changing strategic priorities. This means the city will address issues like spatial segregation, economic inequality, and equal access to essential public services, through these plans. Grounded in their location and their impatience to build a just society, the desire for integration and transformation from the heritage of apartheid, they were meant to unmake and remake Johannesburg as a more connected, spatially just, and integrated city. But the impact of these policies and strategies is contested; it is important to interrogate their effects on spatial justice and urban integration.

5 CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JOHANNESBURG'S SPATIAL PLANNING TOOLS

5.1 City of Johannesburg Integrated Development Plan 2016–2021

The IDP 2016–2021 was meant to tackle these spatial inequalities through interventions such as the Corridors of Freedom and transit-orientated development.These are strategies that aimed to change the apartheid-era settlement of the city by consolidating high-density housing and mixed-use developments around public transport corridors.Intended to enable accessibility and promote spatial justice by connecting historically disadvantaged communities to economic opportunity, the initiative sought to create equitable access to transport systems.These existing policies, overall, enhanced the urban fabric in terms of connectivity due to the investment in the Rea Vaya BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) systemand the Gautrain stations, although the spatial and socio-economic inclusiveness of such developments were not universally experienced across the entire landscape.

Housing development mentioned preceded focus, especially in places like Diepsloot, Zandspruit, and Soweto, over informal settlements and overcrowding. The IDP also aimed to expedite affordable housing delivery by using public–private partnerships as a funding supplement to the government. However, the strategy was incomplete as adequate infrastructure was not provided, while delivery rates were slow, which further restricted living standards.Many low-income communities ended up far from economic centres, aggravating spatial inequalities, not alleviating them. This was further compounded by the introduction of a small number of mixed-income housing projects that never attracted the level of private sector investment necessary to create fully integrated communities, resulting in continued segregation by status and race.The IDP also emphasised infrastructure investment in marginalised areas, especially Soweto, Orange Farm, and Diepsloot. These neighborhoods, which have in the past been excluded from essential services, had been marked for upgrades in transport, water, sanitation, and energy supply.While there was extensive investment and some gains were made, infrastructure development always played catch-up to population growth, decreasing the overall effectiveness of these investments. In Diepsloot, for instance, "rapid urban expansion outstripped service delivery", resulting in a "pervasive struggle for resources" and deteriorating living conditions.This disconnect of infrastructure in these regions resulted in the unreliability of electricity supply and road conditions, which hampered economic opportunities as they would not encourage business developments, infrastructure establishments, and investment.

The IDP also specifically concentrated on service delivery in Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm, with the aim of boosting local economic development. Although these initiatives sought to incorporate townships into

the formal urban structure, inequalities persisted. Specifically, there was more development of the private sector in richer areas, such as Sandton, but less development of the private sector in townships.Such spatial inequalities were exacerbated as job opportunities and investments continued to cluster in areas that have always benefited from the machinery of planning, and the IDP, rather than ameliorating this inequity, perpetuated it. The absence of concrete land planning worsened these issues, as some of the people living in informal settlements still lacked any kind of formal development, increasing the vicious cycle of informality and marginalisation.

One of the main components of the IDP was to expand the public transport system as a way to improve the linkages between the peripheral townships and the economic centres. The Rea Vaya BRT system was expandedin an effort to be more accessible and help residents of low-income areas cut costs. However few routes were covered, which resulted in many areas being disconnected, such as Midrand, Lenasia, and Fourways.Even worse, without a fully integrated and expansive transit network, true spatial transformation for Johannesburg is unlikely to ever be achieved. Moreover, due to the inefficiencies and financial sustainability issues of public transport systems, they were also unable to induce substantial spatial restructuring, with many residents continuing to rely on informal and unreliable transport modes.

Figure 2 shows the number of land development applications within 1 km of each 400 m hexagon used in the Nodal Review policy. The figure also shows that formal development is limited in some areas, especially in previously Black-only townships like Soweto. It compares the location of land use applications over two periods: the six years before the 2016 SDF and the six years thereafter. This provides a visual representation of major trends, such as increased development around key urban nodes located in the already affluent northern parts of the city.

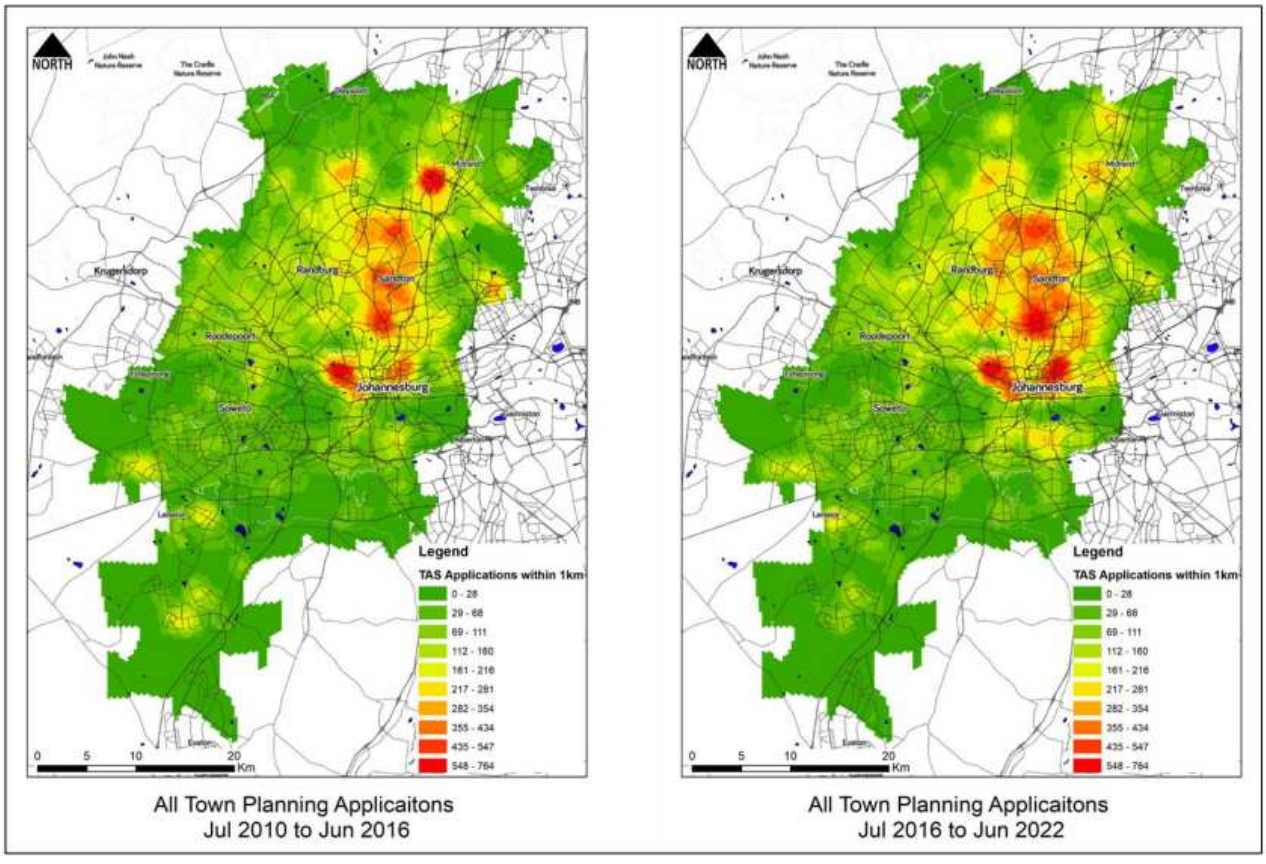

Fig. 2: All town planning applications within 1 km before and after the SDF 2016 (Source: CoJ 2040)

Long-term investments in the area, significant infrastructure developments, and the existence of major economic hubs have meant that Johannesburg's northern suburbs are still favored in terms of the spatial distribution of town planning applications.Northern areas continue to attract the bulk of development proposals, establishing an already prosperous part of the city while stifling growth in other parts.This trend persists despite demographic data indicating that population growth is quickening in the southern and other

historically marginalised areas of Johannesburg, including Ledwaba's cross between Soweto, Orange Farm, and parts of the inner city.Given this disconnect between growth and planning applications, there are difficulties in achieving spatial transformation for spatial justice.

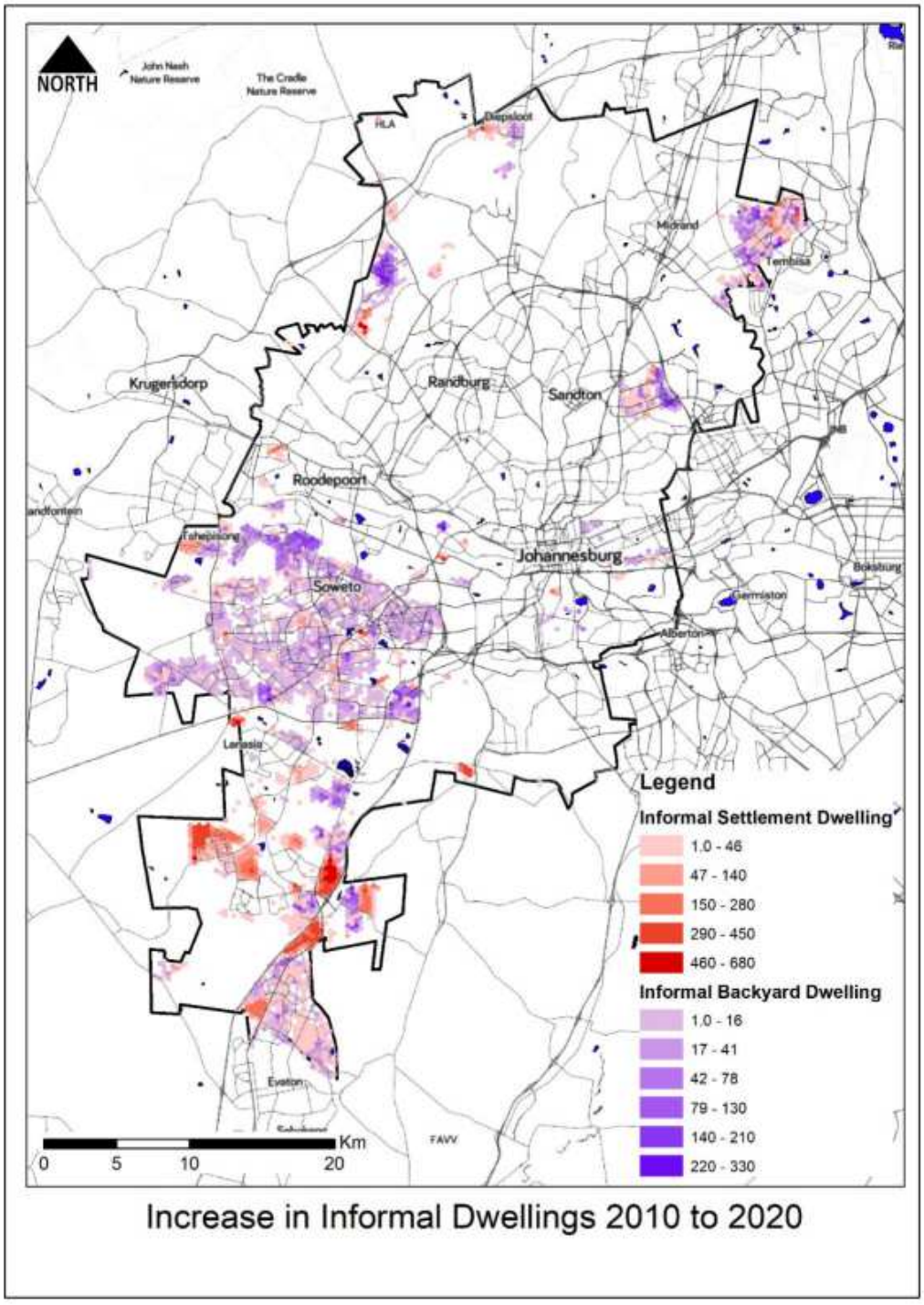

Fig. 3: Increase in informal dwellings 2010 to 2020 per 400 m hexagon (Source: CoJ, 2021).

The primarily northern nature of town planning applications is largely driven by economic and infrastructure benefits.The northern suburbs have historically served as the commercial and financial centres of Johannesburg and have attracted businesses, investors, and high-income residents. These areas tend to have better roads, efficient public transport systems such as the Gautrain, and far superior service delivery to that seen in the suburbs, making them a great option for real estate developers.The legacy of apartheid-era spatial planning also meant much greater investment in infrastructure and zoning in the north and underdevelopment in the south and west. This historical bias still informs investment decision-making, as developers view

projects north of Johannesburg as more financially viable due to stable property values and perceived security.

However, this trend has to be reversed since population data suggest that the strongest population growth has recently occurred in the southern and peripheral areas of the city. Soweto, for example, is still the largest township in Johannesburg and keeps growing, partly as a result of natural population growth and rural–urban migration.If the planning applications continue to be concentrated in the north, there is a danger that the city will become blind to where demand for housing, commercial diversity, and essential services is greatest. Also, pushing development north only exacerbates spatial inequity, entrenching economic and social divides within the city. A more balanced view of typed planning applications would call for town planning applications in historically deprived areas to be balanced with applications in historically wealthy areas.To that end, increasing infrastructural usage in underutilised zones of underdeveloped regions will also be critical to Johannesburg's long-term urban sustainability. Many areas in the south, like Lenasia and Orange Farm, for instance, have underutilised infrastructure that is needed as a population explosion is experienced (CoJ, 2021).A better way: Rather than swelling the already sprawling northern suburbs, invest more in enhancing and expanding services in these robustly growing regions to meet consumer needs (Harrison et al., 2019). Yet if the city does not change course, facilitating urban inefficiency, congestion, and informal settlements will continue. Economic decentralisation should be incentivised through investment in the south and west, forming new concentration areas of business out of over-reliance in Sandton and the central business district. Such part-time work would create jobs, facilitate access to services, and ensure an economically strong urban way of life.

CoJ should also work towards making town planning applications across the southern and western regions more conducive.Tax breaks for developers, fast-tracked rezoning, and prioritised upgrades to infrastructure in these areas are incentives that can help channel investment.Particularly, public–private partnerships must be encouraged to establish mixed-use development that combines housing with commercial and economic centres in emerging growth centres.Johannesburg can address those discrepancies in its urban strategies and ensure that they are tailored to their citizens in an inclusive way.

5.2 City of Johannesburg Integrated Development Plan 2022–2027

While the previous IDP covered a wide range of issues, the 2022–2027 IDP gives greater emphasis to urban regeneration and emphasises it as a solution for urban decay, a means for promoting economic growth as well as attracting investment.The plan focuses on the inner city with the same spirit in mind, with significant concentration on areas such as Hillbrow, Braamfontein, Newtown, and Jeppestown, which have been neglected, over-occupied, and have poor infrastructure.Although this regeneration is intended to make the area safer and with better infrastructure, and also to attract businesses, the gentrification of the area and the displacement of lower-income residents is still a major problem. This has been clearly articulated through the vision of the CoJ to transform Johannesburg into a world-class African city; however, this must extend to ensure that activities can be spatially just.Gentrification is a major issue surrounding urban regeneration, with price increases in housing and cost of living forcing long-term, low-income residents out of the area. Maboneng provides a case in which regeneration efforts have resulted in such steep rent increases that lower-income groups can no longer afford the area. Areas such as Hillbrow, which have significant low-income and immigrant populations, are especially vulnerable.While the IDP recognises these risks and suggests social housing and affordable rental units as potential solutions, the proposed actions remain policy-orientated rather than tangible steps toward addressing the issues at hand. This demonstrates that faster on-track usage needs more vigorous intervention to force urban renewal spreading to all residents, instead of just investors and upper-income groups.The IDP also includes projects that will deliver affordable housing to help address socio-economic segregation through the integration of different income groups within the same neighborhoods. The goal is a socially cohesive city with access to essential services, and better mixed-income communities.Land and construction costs in urban areas can be prohibitive, which remains one of the principal challenges to delivering affordable housing, often leading to new developments in the suburbs. Unfortunately, this means that the areas these people move to have even fewer access to the essentials of life, such as affordable and quality housing, quality education, health care, and jobs, which only amplifies the economic status of the area against achieving true equity in accessing housing.

As with the 2016–2021 IDP, infrastructure development is another important dimension of the IDP, with the focus on historically marginalised areas like Soweto, Alexandra, and Orange Farm. These regions have historically experienced poor access to basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and public transport along with the aforementioned challenges. Through investments in infrastructure upgrades, the city hopes to enhance the quality of life of its residents in ways that address long-term spatial inequality. It will facilitate more equitable living conditions and sustainable urban development to improve public services in these two areas.The focus on targeting those areas mentioned above is because these areas were historically marginalised under apartheid and were severely socio-economically disadvantaged, leading to the current socio-economic challenges we find ourselves in today. Soweto, for all the vibrancy of its community, still suffers from high unemployment and crumbling infrastructure. One of Johannesburg's most overcrowded areas, Alexandra, suffers from serious sanitation and housing problems. Orange Farm is not immune to the scourge of inadequate basic services and much of the population live in informal settlements. Concerned with past disparities in geographical development, the IDP aims to improve the social well-being of the people in these locales if properly operationalised.

5.3 Evolution and progress between the two 'generations' of integrated development plans

The IDPs of the CoJ for the years 2016–2021 and 2022–2027 mark two unique yet interrelated phases in the ongoing journey to tackle urban challenges and foster economic prosperity for the city. The previous IDP is characterised by ambitious, large-scale initiatives, while the latter reflects a shift to more pragmatic, incremental approaches, incorporating lessons learned from its precursor's successes and failures.

The 2016–2021 IDP set ambitious targets that promised exciting responses such as the Corridors of Freedom as well as growing the Rea Vaya BRT services. The Corridors of Freedom was a project around high-density mixed-use developments along major transport routes, tying previously disconnected areas like Orange Grove and Westbury into economic nodes like Sandton and Rosebank. As towns in the developing world grow, urban transport systems must keep pace; this was the broader rationale behind expanding the BRT system to link residents in peripheral townships such as Soweto and Diepsloot with the spatial and economic opportunities of the urban core.However, the conceptual nature of these initiatives posed major challenges. Those objectives, while consistent with advancing spatial justice and urban regeneration, faced a multitude of challenges due to a lack of capital investment, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and, above all, a lack of support from the local population. In Alexandra and Ivory Park, for example, residents resisted urban regeneration projects for fear of expulsion, while others complained about housing delivery in new developments in Kliptown and Jabulani being too slow. These challenges demonstrated the ambitious scope of the 2016–2021 IDP, with many of its goals proving difficult to meet in the given timeframe.

The 2022–2027 IDP provides a more pragmatic stance, drawing from the lessons of the preceding IDP, and containing more attached to what is realistic.Rather than focusing on big transformative projects as it did in the past, the updated plan signals a shift to creating incremental improvements, strengthening collaborations between the public and private sectors, as Curbelo (2023) added. Public–private partnerships are now viewed as crucial to solving the funding shortfalls that constrained the last IDP goals (Smith, 2022). One can clearly see this in how mixed-income housing projects in places such as Fourways and Randburg are developed, offering a mix of affordable and market-rate housing with the city receiving deliveries through private developers.

6 CONCLUSION

In a worst-case scenario, the IDPs from 2016–2021 to 2022–2027 reveal startling evolutions in focus and intention but also reveal repeating failures and unfulfilled promises. The lingering of certain risks, in particular those related to spatial justice, urban integration, and public transport, illustrate that many of the city's most pressing problems are still to be solved.Integration of informal settlements is probably the most visible sense of being repeated. These include informal settlements in areas of Zandspruit, Thembelihle, and Diepsloot, which have been identified in both the 2016–2021 and the 2022–2027 IDPs and the need to address them. These settlements, often remote from basic services and economic opportunities, were identified as major contributors to spatial inequality. The unfulfilled promises from the earlier IDP repeat themselves in the latter, the provisions in both plans promising the city better housing and infrastructure.

This marked a significant evolution in theIDPs, as they worked to learn from previous years, culminating in the 2022–2027 IDP being grounded in a strategic approach to address challenges and issues within the built environment. The 2022–2027 IDP acknowledges deficiencies in previous plans, placing greater emphasis on public–private partnerships which serve as an avenue for overcoming some of the challenges that led the 2016–2021 plan to fall short.The issues of spatial justice, integration of informal settlements, affordable housing, and public transport are still in the centre of attention for IDPs, but real progress on the ground remains limited. As such, the relevance and effectiveness of the 2022–2027 IDP hinges on the revelation of what went wrong, the reorientation towards attainable goals, and the resource mobilisation and utilisation towards enabling actions that achieve the spatial transformation objectives.Until these and other persistent challenges are addressed, the city runs the risk of slipping back into a cycle of unfulfilled promises, repeated goals, and continued obstacles to the realisation of spatial transformation.

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