

Competitive Cities: An Exploration of Location and Human Capital in South African Cities

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1 ABSTRACT

Cities drive the economic growth of any country. In a fast globalising and urbanising world, cities are competing not only to attract investment and lure skilled labour but also to provide solutions to urban and social challenges, as well as create spaces that are liveable for its citizens. The global south has experienced an exponential increase in the number of people living in cities, making it the fastest urbanising region in the world. This presents both challenges and opportunities for the cities. South African cities are not excluded from the current realities of urbanisation and globalisation in that the cities must also position themselves to be global players but also having to deal with past spatial injustices at the same time. Cities are pushed to ensure that they enhance and maintain their unique city advantages to contest in the global arena. This study investigates factors that contribute to city competitiveness within Gqeberha aiming to position the city for global competitiveness. The study examines geographical location, human capital and urban planning as contributing factors to global competitiveness. The research provides insights into the city's strengths and challenges. A comprehensive competitive cities framework for developmental states was developed through this research, that Gqeberha and other developing states can use to set their cities on a path to global competition.

The qualitative research approach was used in the study, and primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with nine key informants who are professionals working with land use management, spatial planning and economic development. Furthermore, the study collected secondary data that includes documents, maps and literature. A combination of qualitative data analysis tools that includes, thematic, document and triangulation analysis was employed in the study to analyse collected data. The key findings show that Gqeberha has strategic assets, such as two seaports and Special Economic Zones, but that their influence is hampered by underutilization and a disconnected location. The city also has a human capital shortage, which results from a mismatch between industrial demands and educational attainment and a reliance on foreign expertise. Deficits in urban planning, such as old MSDF and problems with internal collaboration, further hinder development. In addressing these challenges, the study proposes a framework for enhancing competitiveness in Gqeberha and other developing states. The framework highlights that emphasis and priority needs to be placed on infrastructure development, effective urban governance, strategic spatial planning and human capital development. The implication of this study is that by implementing these recommendations Gqeberha can position itself to be globally competitive. In addition, future research should investigate other developing cities' examples of successful urban planning, assess how SEZs affect social and spatial inclusion, identify skills gaps that exist between industry demands and education, and investigate best practices for port management for developing nations.

Keywords: location, human capital, city competitiveness, urban planning, urbanisation

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

In the rapidly changing landscape of the 21st century, cities have become crucial drivers of the global economy. Economically agile and entrepreneurial people are drawn to the promises and opportunities that cities offer. As a result, many cities are experiencing rapid urbanisation and globalisation (SACN, 2016). It is estimated that Africa, the fastest urbanizing region, has an annual urbanization rate of 3.6%, with some cities growing at an average rate of 5% per year, faster than other global regions. This rapid growth has led to a significant increase in the demand for housing, infrastructure, and basic services (Korah et al., 2019).

Cities are now faced with the challenge of competing for investment and attracting talent while also addressing urban and social issues (Ghahremani et al., 2021). South African cities, including Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth, are not immune to these trends; they must deal with the past consequences

of apartheid planning while also dealing with current realities brought about by urbanisation and globalisation.

The State of South African Cities Report (2016) highlights the following as issues currently faced by South African cities and towns: 'demographic changes, relative strength of metro economies, basic service provision, increasing inequality and exclusivity of cities, understanding of and support for local government' To address these challenges, cities like Gqeberha must focus on enhancing their competitiveness, wherein the city should exploit or create a competitive advantage resulting in sustainable urban environments and economic growth relative to its competitors (Van Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018; Porter, 2015).

The European Commission defines competitiveness as the "ability of a region to offer an attractive and sustainable environment for firms and residents to live and work" (Rand, 2017). Factors influencing city competition are multifaceted and context-specific, indicating that it's not a one-size-fits-all. This paper investigates factors contributing to city competitiveness in Gqeberha focusing on geographical location, urban planning, and human capital. These aspects have not been thoroughly investigated in previous studies of Gqeberha, which is essential for positioning the city for global competitiveness. The aim of the study is to develop a framework to enhance competitiveness in Gqeberha and other cities in developing countries of the Global South.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Defining city competitiveness

Over the past three decades, cities and urban centres have been increasingly focused on the competitiveness of their economies, firms and labour. This has been motivated by globalisation, which has integrated world economies and created mutual dependence (Jovović, 2017). For cities to be active participants in the global economy, they should adapt to technological advancements that enable interconnectivity and communication among all actors (Porter, 2000). Furthermore, cities must reshape their urban spaces to accommodate a new labour force with specialised skills, mobility needs, and demands for lifestyle and social amenities (Guaraldi et al., 2020). The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report (2016) describes the competitiveness of cities as "the set of factors – policies, institutions, strategies and processes – that determines the level of a city's sustainable productivity". Sustainability refers to a balance of economic, social, and environmental issues. Productivity is about utilising resources effectively to fuel economic development. According to Villamejor-Mendoza (2020), almost everything matters for competitiveness: schools, roads, financial markets, and citizens.

Although competition is context-specific to a country or city, general factors influence competition across the spectrum (Momaya, 2016). According to Ferreira and Ratten (2017), factors that also influence competitiveness are the resource endowments of a city. These resource endowments are tangible and intangible, including locations near major economic points such as major transportation routes, human capital, and knowledge in a region. The argument is that even if a city is geographically disconnected from other major cities, it can still be attractive and competitive based on its intangible assets, such as good urban planning strategies and policies, skills and knowledge. Baker et al. (2017) state that some of these factors that influence city competitiveness are outside the control of the city government and, by nature, are the mandate of the national government. However, a city's ability to be competitive may be hindered by urban policies that fail to address land management issues, poor business environment, weak infrastructure, low labour skills, and weak governance.

3.2 The Role of location

According to Ferreira and Ratten (2017), location is defined as a place or city with a distinct geographic space. However, it is argued that the determinants influencing location are not solely geographic; they also encompass infrastructure provision and service delivery. The competitive advantage of cities and locations presents a paradox: one might assume that, in an increasingly globalized world with open international markets and the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, location would be less significant. Therefore, when economic activity is carried out in a specific location, it is done with reason (Snowdon & Stonehouse, 2006). Some of those reasons may include soft location factors that a city offers, such as attractive landscapes,

recreational and shopping facilities, universities, and libraries. Such location factors are essential for firms and people who want to move and stay in a city (Gremm et al., 2018).

Gugler (2019), referring to Porter's diamond of four interrelated components of competitiveness, mentions that location comprises inherited and created factors. Inherited factors consist of natural resources found in a specific area, while created factors include efficient infrastructure, such as communication, transport, and energy infrastructure. Bam et al. (2020), elaborate on this by noting that location-related considerations also include natural advantages that comprises geography and climate, as well as the cost of capital, which includes physical capital, financial capital, and land costs.

Additionally, the quality and reliability of infrastructure play a critical role in location decisions. Infrastructure affects competitiveness in two ways. First, businesses depend on global access points such as airports, ports and digital infrastructure, to sell their goods and services both domestically and internationally. Second, a city's competitiveness is influenced by its ability to efficiently connect its people and physical assets for optimal usage (Parilla & Trujiilo, 2018). This indicates that industries tend to conform to pre-existing patterns of people and the resources on the land. Therefore, for cities to attract business, they must implement a development and beneficiation policy framework that accurately assesses and addresses the location determinants affecting firms' decisions on where to establish themselves (Bam et al., 2020).

3.3 Human Capital impact of city competitiveness

High levels of human capital provide cities with a competitive advantage. Human capital encompasses various education levels, including primary, secondary, college, and higher education. Universities and colleges serve as key reservoirs of human capital (Debra et al., 2018). The concept of human capital is rooted in the endogenous growth theory, which Paul Romer first advocated in the 1980s. It is defined as the skill sets and abilities of individuals, and can also include labor, skills, talents, and knowledge as forms of productive wealth. This expertise is developed through both formal and informal education (Osiobe, 2019). According to Antonenko (2021, p. 526), cities such as London, New York, Singapore, and San Francisco – considered among the world's most competitive – have achieved their success through clear municipal policies that prioritize human capital, strategic investments, and technological development. This emphasis has transformed them into global economic, social, and cultural hubs, attracting residents and businesses alike. To attract investments and foster a safe environment for all, other cities aiming for growth should prioritize human capital. Albach et al. (2018) argue that for a city to enhance its performance, it must be open to change, continuous improvement, and the adoption of new technologies. Additionally, the accumulation of knowledge is crucial for driving sustainable long-term growth in cities (Jones, 2019; Schilirò, 2019). This is why cities in developed countries tend to grow faster than their less affluent counterparts; they often act as custodians of innovation and technology (Chirwa & Odhiambo, 2018).

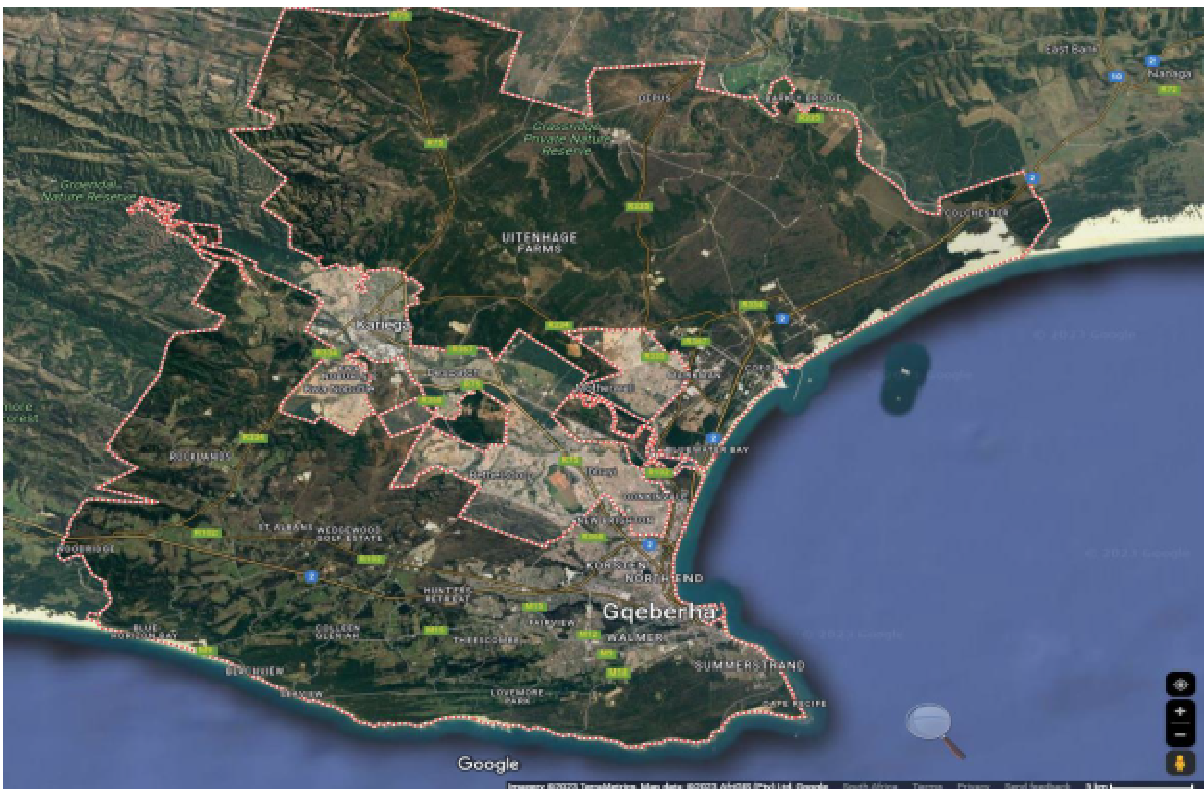
In addition to developing its own human capital, a city can also attract and retain talent from outside by offering a high quality of life and diverse opportunities. This concept is supported by Royuela (2014, p. 927), who emphasizes that a city's amenities and lifestyle options play a significant role in influencing the location choices of a highly skilled workforce. According to Katz and Wagner (2014), curriculum modifications that consider industry demands also draw talent and investments, boosting city competitiveness and growth.

Some scholars argue that for cities to effectively harness human capital through innovation and knowledge, they must promote the development of clusters. Clusters consist of interconnected businesses, universities, research institutions, and skilled individuals, serving as vital drivers of economic growth and societal progress. Nurturing and supporting these clusters has become a strategic necessity for cities aiming to succeed in today's dynamic and disruptive environment (Florida et al., 2018). To foster cluster development, cities need to ensure that their educational systems align with industry needs. This alignment helps create a workforce equipped with the critical knowledge and skills necessary for these industries to flourish (Porter, 1998). By facilitating partnerships between industry and educational institutions, cities can enhance workforce readiness and stimulate innovation (Bathelt & Henn, 2014). Additionally, Katz and Wagner (2014) suggest that adjusting curricula to meet industry demands can attract talent and investments, ultimately boosting city competitiveness and growth.

3.4 Urban planning and its influence on competitiveness

Urban planning and related spatial policies are essential tools for cities striving to succeed in an increasingly competitive global environment. The dynamic and transformative demands of the global economy have pushed cities to adopt strategic approaches to enhance their competitive edge. Consequently, urban planning and development have become important frameworks for improving city competitiveness (Yigitcanlar & Bulu, 2015). Urban planning involves the strategic organization of land use, transportation, infrastructure, and public spaces to achieve sustainable and equitable development within urban areas (Bibri et al., 2020). When combined with spatial policies that guide the distribution of resources, investments, and economic activities across a city or region, urban planning can shape both the physical and economic landscape, influencing a city's competitiveness and livability (Todes & Turok, 2018).

Effective urban planning can increase a city's competitiveness by creating efficient and attractive urban environments. This includes promoting compact, mixed-use development that reduces commuting distances and encourages walking, cycling, and the use of public transportation. By prioritizing pedestrian-friendly streets, well-connected public spaces, and diverse mixed-use neighborhoods, cities can attract more residents, businesses, and visitors (Buck et al., 2017). Moreover, cities should adopt spatial policy approaches that enhance urban conditions by leveraging their unique assets, knowledge, and human capital (Todes & Turok, 2018). However, to effectively improve competitiveness through urban planning and spatial policies, strong urban governance is essential. Good urban governance encompasses "the many ways individuals and institutions, both public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is an ongoing process that allows for the accommodation of conflicting or diverse interests and facilitates cooperative action" (Nissen, 2021). The collaboration among various urban governance actors can have a positive impact on a city's competitiveness (Parilla & Trujillo, 2018).



Map 1: Gqeberha locality Map. Source: (AfriGIS,2023)

4 CASE STUDY: GQEBERHA

Gqeberha is a port city situated in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. Formerly known as Port Elizabeth, the city has an estimated population of 1.26 million and encompasses a land area of 1,959 km², making it the largest metropolitan municipality in the Eastern Cape province (Cogta, 2020). Gqeberha is home to two significant ports that play a vital economic role in the province: the Port of Port Elizabeth and the Port of Ngura (Nelson Mandela Bay, 2022). Additionally, the city is recognized as South Africa's hub for automobile manufacturing (SACN, 2021). The city hosts major automotive companies such as Volkswagen,

ISUZU, FAW, and BAIC, which play a significant role in its economic growth. Additionally, the city has designated the Coega Special Economic Zone (SEZ) as a hub for industrial development. The SEZ features two ports and a cluster of heavy, medium, and light industries (COGTA, 2020; NMBM, 2021). This advantageous location provides a strong industrial cluster along the coast and key trade routes (see Map 2). Furthermore, the Automotive Industry Development Center (AIDC) offers skills development training and incubation programs for the automotive sector. In 2018, Gqeberha contributed 2.63% to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and was the largest contributor to the GDP of the Eastern Cape Province, accounting for 34.07% of the province's GDP in that same year (COGTA, 2020). The city's economy is primarily driven by four key sectors: manufacturing, community services, agriculture, and finance. The manufacturing industry is particularly diverse, encompassing automobile manufacturing, clothing and textiles, renewable energy, and chemicals (NMBM, 2021). A significant portion of the city's workforce is employed in this sector.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the factors that contribute to city competitiveness in Gqeberha and to develop a framework for enhancing that competitiveness. Both primary and secondary data were utilized for data collection. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants, including professionals in land use management, spatial planning, and economic development. These interviews offered valuable insights into the city's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Additionally, secondary data was collected from relevant documents, maps, and literature. To analyze the qualitative data, a variety of tools were employed, including thematic analysis, document analysis, and triangulation. This comprehensive set of analytical tools was used to ensure the credibility and validity of the results.

6 RESEARCH FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

6.1 Gqeberha fragmented cluster development

The study results indicated that Gqeberha has substantially developed clusters in Special Economic Zones (SEZs), attracting multinational corporations and foreign direct investment (FDI). These clusters are primarily manufacturing oriented. However, this has not translated into improved socio-economic conditions for local residents, revealing a disparity between corporate benefits and citizen welfare. The geographical isolation of SEZs and inadequate municipal integration contribute to this inequality, leaving surrounding areas underdeveloped.

To tackle these challenges and encourage inclusive prosperity, Gqeberha requires urban transformation. This means the city should become a central hub for addressing current urban issues. Initiatives must focus on incorporating the urban poor into the economic and social framework of the city, ensuring that all residents benefit from its prosperity.

6.2 Strategic location and assets underutilization

Gqeberha, the largest city in the Eastern Cape, boasts a strategic location with two seaports – Port Elizabeth and Ngqura – enhancing trade potential. However, these ports are underutilized due to infrastructure and management issues, limiting the city's urban development and international competitiveness. The city also has an airport in need of significant upgrades to meet global standards. While Gqeberha offers various social amenities, challenges such as high crime rates, housing backlogs, and informal settlements negatively impact liveability, particularly for economically disadvantaged residents.

Rapid urban growth is further straining ageing infrastructure, including power, water, and sanitation systems. Additionally, political instability hampers effective decision-making and development initiatives. Addressing these challenges through targeted strategies and ensuring political stability is essential for Gqeberha to capitalize on its strengths and enhance its standing as a sustainable, competitive city on the global stage.

6.3 Human Capital Deficiencies

The paper investigates the crucial components of human capital necessary for Gqeberha's development as a competitive city, emphasizing the significance of investing in education. It highlights that cities prioritizing education are better equipped to handle global competition. With only 8% of the population holding higher education degrees, and a substantial portion having only primary (69%) or secondary education (25%), Gqeberha faces significant educational challenges (SACN, 2021).

Despite a public university and several educational institutions, the city has launched various workforce development initiatives to address skill gaps, such as internships and community training (Mativenga et al., 2021). Gqeberha boasts a rich heritage and quality of life but struggles with branding and global visibility.

The university plays a role in addressing urban issues and skill development, yet its impact remains unclear. Gqeberha faces hurdles in creating a knowledge-driven economy despite its status as Africa's automotive hub, primarily due to inadequate tailored education programs and reliance on imported skills.

A deficiency in vocational training is evident, exemplified by a local boat manufacturing company that had to import skilled labor from Cape Town, indicating missed opportunities for local workforce development. The city's current initiatives to upgrade skills are insufficient, highlighting the need for enhanced training strategies and closer industry collaboration.

To remain competitive, Gqeberha must invest in human capital, focusing on education and vocational training to build resilience against global competition and ensure sustainable growth.

6.4 Urban planning Challenges

Urban planning is essential for shaping cities and integrating governance, social well-being, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. The findings indicate that Gqeberha's urban governance framework lacks internal collaboration, hindering cohesive development initiatives among various departments. This disconnection limits the city's ability to enhance competitive advantages and address urban challenges effectively.

In Gqeberha, there is growing demand for densification, evidenced by numerous rezoning applications. However, the city struggles with this demand due to inadequate physical infrastructure and relies on an outdated Municipal Spatial Development Framework (MSDF). The MSDF, crucial for guiding development and investment priorities, needs updating to align with current and future urban needs.

To realize the potential for densification and sustainable development, Gqeberha must enhance its infrastructure and revise its MSDF. The findings highlight both opportunities and challenges for the city, emphasizing the need for proactive strategies and a collaborative approach to foster growth and resilience in Gqeberha.



Figure 1: Competitive cities framework for developmental cities. Source: Author.

7 A FRAMEWORK FOR ENHANCING COMPETITIVENESS

Based on the findings, this study proposes a comprehensive framework for enhancing the competitiveness of Gqeberha and other developing cities. The framework focuses on seven key areas: hard infrastructure improvement, consistent planning policies & strategic spatial planning, enhancing human capital and knowledge-based economy, suitable location for SEZ development, entrepreneurial city approach to urban governance, safe environments, and political stability.

7.1 Hard Infrastructure Improvement

According to Eide's (2014) report for the World Economic Forum on the Competitiveness of Cities, urban planning is essential for providing hard infrastructure. Planners must be mindful of how they plan cities, avoiding overplanning or underplanning, which can lead to unpredictable, uneven growth. A balance between planning and organic growth is needed. Additionally, cities should increase their spending on infrastructure to accommodate urbanization demands. Without this, cities may face obstacles to sustainable growth, resulting in sprawl, congestion, pollution, and inadequate public services. However, cities must take a demand driven approach to infrastructure projects that respond to the demands of their local economies rather than a supply side approach that does not consider demand. The Successful implementation of these projects requires careful planning, budgeting, and financial support (Choe and Roberts, 2011).

7.2 Consistent Planning Policies & Strategic Spatial Planning

To thrive competitively, emerging cities must adopt a cohesive approach to development that shapes both public and private investment choices. Consistent planning policies are crucial for enhancing city competitiveness for several interconnected reasons. Firstly, such policies establish a stable framework for long-term investment and development, which fosters confidence among businesses and investors. When regulations and zoning laws remain consistent over time, companies can confidently make decisions about where to locate and how to expand, without fear of encountering sudden regulatory obstacles or changes in land use. This stability not only supports local entrepreneurship but also attracts external investment, ultimately driving economic growth and job creation (Kamana et al., 2023).

In addition, a transition needs to be made from conservative spatial planning, which is concerned with preserving order, to strategic spatial planning which is more concerned with dealing with challenges and transformation. Furthermore, this approach is a breakaway from conservative spatial planning that is project orientated rather than being goal orientated. In essence emerging cities need to adopt a strategy that effects change and set good strategic goals instead of the implementation of spatial projects that are effective today and ineffective tomorrow (Albrechts, 2015; Olsen, 2014). Key to strategic spatial planning is the setting out of objectives and the formulation and implementation of strategies to meet those objectives. cities should have a vision for the future assuming that current trends will continue (Salet and Faludi, 2000). Public and private sector coordination and public participation is fundamental in the successful implementation of a strategic spatial plan (Oliveira and Hersperger, 2018). Furthermore, strategic spatial planning appreciates the fact that challenges that are faced by cities that cannot be tackled only by local authorities, as some fall outside the scope of local government, therefore intergovernmental co-ordination is needed (RTPI, 2015).

7.3 Enhancing Human Capital and Knowledge -Based Economy

Cities must acknowledge the growing influence of technologies like AI, big data, and robotics. Thompson and Curella (2021) emphasize the importance of adaptation to these emerging trends. For emerging cities, aligning processes with factors outlined in the Knowledge Economy concept, such as skills development, global competitiveness, and entrepreneurship, is essential (Amo et al., 2017). The initial step for these cities is formulating appropriate policies and strategies. Although specifics may vary, the World Bank's Knowledge Economy Index suggests focusing on themes like education, economic incentives, institutional frameworks, and ICT infrastructure. Additionally, cities should consider factors like Research and Development(R&D), vocational training, government accountability, quality education and investment in innovation and technology as enhancing measure towards their goal (Asongu and Odhiambo, 2020).

The next crucial stage in improving their knowledge economy involves developing partnerships among various stakeholders. These stakeholders include the city government, businesses, research institutions, emerging entrepreneurs, creative individuals, innovators, and residents. Such partnerships serve as platforms

for mutual learning and knowledge exchange, facilitating the pooling of resources for collective advancement (Praharaj et al, 2018).

7.4 Suitable location for SEZ development

The geographical positioning of SEZs plays a crucial role in ensuring broader inclusivity and maximizing their positive impact on local economies and communities. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to SEZ development must incorporate considerations of both regulatory frameworks and spatial planning to foster holistic socio-economic growth which gives a city a competitive edge (Ahmed, 2020; Frick et al, 2019). Thus, the location of SEZs in emerging cities should be orchestrated to serve the collective interests of various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, investors, local enterprises, residents, and workers. The primary objective should be to address pressing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty. By situating SEZs strategically, cities can harness their potential to stimulate job creation, enhance economic opportunities, and alleviate poverty rates (Ali, 2020).

Cities and national governments need to undertake comprehensive feasibility studies where SEZs are to be located to determine the best suited location that is well connected and has the ability to convert a particular area from rural to urban. Furthermore, the location choice for an SEZ should look at the potential of developing other land uses around the SEZ, such as commercial or residential (Janjua, 2017).

7.5 Entrepreneurial City approach to urban governance

Both theory and practice demonstrate that for a city to be competitive and attract investment, an entrepreneurial approach to city governance is essential. This approach advocates for treating city governance like a business, with the government acting as an entrepreneur to market the city and foster its growth. This involves ensuring fiscal stability and access to financial markets to attract investment and boost investor confidence (Lauermaun, 2018).

At the core of this governance approach lies the establishment of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) for local government to secure external funding, create employment opportunities, and attract new direct investment (Delmon, 2017). Olsson et al. (2020) refer to these local government initiatives as "entrepreneurial governance," wherein opportunities are identified and assessed, resources are gathered and utilized, and opportunities are exploited.

Furthermore, this city governance model emphasizes the creation of institutions or municipal entities tasked with revenue collection and public service delivery on behalf of the municipality. These entities operate independently from the municipality and mitigate the bureaucratic constraints faced by public entities by adopting private sector delivery models. Although these entities maintain public accountability and transparency, they do not represent full-scale privatization. In addition to revenue collection, these entities are responsible for generating job opportunities across various skill levels (Mabalane, 2019).

7.6 Safe Environments

The UNODC (2016) highlights various factors that contribute to urban crime. Key among these is unregulated urban growth, large income disparities, and inadequate governance. To tackle these issues, cities, particularly those in developing nations undergoing rapid urbanization, need to establish robust regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms. It's essential that these efforts involve active engagement with local communities. Additionally, prioritizing socio-economic inclusion is crucial. This means integrating crime prevention strategies into a range of social and economic policies and programs, including those addressing employment, education, healthcare, housing, and urban planning. By doing so, cities can work towards creating safer and more inclusive urban environments.

Lastly, urban planning approaches in developing cities need to be re-evaluated to ensure the establishment of safe urban spaces. For example, mixed land uses should be encouraged in city development as well as a strengthened pedestrian traffic movement. This strategy not only increases the vibrancy of urban areas but also reduces the need for long commutes, which can contribute to safety by decreasing congestion and potential areas for criminal activity. Street layouts design should be in such a way that they deter criminals. This involves careful consideration of factors such as visibility, access points, and lighting to minimize opportunities for crime, while ensuring that housing density standards provide adequate space for community

facilities, natural light, ventilation, and open spaces for residents (Abdul-Kadhum Al-Ghiyadh and Neamah Al-Khafaji, 2021).

7.7 Political stability

Grøn and Salomonsen (2019) contend that the reputation of a city can be adversely affected by political instability. Consequently, it is crucial to proactively address potential conflicts between administrative and political entities. Public managers should also be mindful of their organization's historical reputation, as it could impede their ability to coordinate an effective and unified response when faced with threats to the organization's image. Furthermore, effective management of the discord between politics and administration in Gqeberha is essential to uphold a positive public image and foster collaboration between all actors.

8 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's findings have important implications for the future of Gqeberha. By adopting the suggested framework, the city can position itself to compete globally while tackling the urgent issues of urbanization and spatial injustice. The framework focuses on key elements related to location, human capital, and urban planning, which are essential for creating a sustainable and competitive city.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the potential for Gqeberha to become a model for other developing cities that are dealing with similar challenges. By sharing best practices and lessons learned, Gqeberha can contribute to a wider discussion on urban competitiveness in the Global South. The framework outlined in this study provides a flexible blueprint that can be customized to address the distinct challenges faced by different cities.

9 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Expanding on the findings from Gqeberha, future studies on city competitiveness in developing nations can further explore these several areas:

- (1) Assessing the effects of SEZ: Investigate whether the current SEZ model promotes economic inclusion or perpetuates existing disparities.
- (2) Enhancing port operations: Study effective port management strategies from prosperous developing countries to identify adaptable solutions for Gqeberha.
- (3) Aligning Education Curricula with industry needs: Conduct a skills gap analysis to identify specific mismatches between current educational offerings and industry requirements in Gqeberha.
- (4) International promotion: Investigate the impact of global promotion on driving economic growth and competitiveness for Gqeberha.
- (5) Urban Governance Collaboration and Spatial Planning: Identify successful instances of collaborative urban planning from other developing cities and evaluate their applicability to Gqeberha.
- (6) Contextualizing the competitiveness framework: Refine the proposed competitiveness framework by incorporating specific data and best practices relevant to the South African context.

10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the dynamics of competitive cities are shaped by various factors that influence the economic, social, and environmental landscapes. Cities that emphasize knowledge and innovation, allocate resources towards infrastructure, and utilize effective urban planning strategies are more likely to thrive in the global arena. As urban areas face changes in demographics and rapid technological progress, embracing sustainable practices will be crucial for long-term viability. Cities must evolve, experiment, and engage in collaboration to create lively and competitive environments that satisfy the needs of their inhabitants.

11 DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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