URBAN FUTURES CONFERENCE
Johannesburg, South Africa
10 – 14 July 2000

Focus of conference:

Aspects of city life

Identifying key issues facing metropolitan structures in the new millennium

THE URBAN FUTURE:
ENCLOSED NEIGHBOURHOODS?

By

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Abstract:

In many neighbourhoods in South Africa, especially Johannesburg, residents have acted in an apparent attempt to prevent crime in their areas. In several instances this results in enclosed neighbourhoods with controlled access. These people firmly believe that life within an enclosed neighbourhood provides a solution to crime and an improved quality of life. Yet, conclusive evidence of its effectiveness is lacking. City planners are being confronted with requests for permission to enclose entire neighbourhoods. The question is however, what the implications of these types of developments are for future urban environments.

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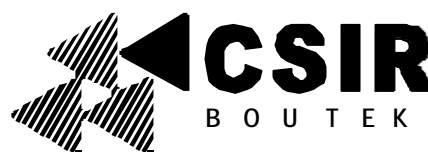
1 INTRODUCTION: THE WRITING ON THE WALL?

In many neighbourhoods in South African cities, especially in Johannesburg, residents have acted in an apparent attempt to prevent crime in their areas. In several instances this resulted in enclosed neighbourhoods with controlled access. These people believe that life within an enclosed village or neighbourhood provides a solution to crime and an improved quality of life. But does it? Conclusive evidence of the effectiveness in South Africa is lacking.

Several municipalities and local authorities across South Africa are receiving proposals and requests from groups of residents to close off their neighbourhoods or local roads and to control access into these areas. Some groups even enclose roads without formal permission. Despite all the requests, a limited number of Local Authorities have any form of policy in place to address this issue. Meanwhile, the phenomenon is escalating daily and there is a great need for a proper debate around this issue.

Internationally, especially in the United States, enclosed neighbourhoods and security villages have raised several questions. These questions address issues such as the legal implications of enclosing public space, the values of properties within the enclosed area, the fragmentation of urban areas, the privatisation of public functions such as road maintenance and its implications for taxes, the loss of social contact and the effectiveness of territorial control to establish a sense of community. Another important issue relating to neighbourhood enclosures is the perception of safety versus actual reports of crime in these areas.

CSIR Building and Construction Technology has been conducting research on crime prevention through environmental design for the past three years and is currently engaged in attempting to understand the effects and effectiveness of enclosed neighbourhoods in South Africa. This paper will address the occurrence and impact of enclosed neighbourhoods in this country. It will focus on the heritage of the past, the fear of crime, and the prevalence of neighbourhood enclosures in South Africa at present, a possible future scenario and the implications of neighbourhood enclosures on the urban future.

In South Africa, despite many attempts at reconstruction, cities still reflect the footprints of the past in their spatial and use patterns, which serve as constant reminders of a past of inequity and segregation. Many questions remain unanswered, and almost unwillingly one has to face the message expressed in the growth of gated communities in this country. The question is whether these are signs of an inevitable urban future. Are they only a temporary reaction to crime and the fear of crime, or is the writing on the wall?

1 THE PAST: MILESTONES OF MISFORTUNE

Town planning approaches and political ideologies can be very powerful. This has also been the case in South Africa. Not only have they shaped the country's cities, but they also have a major influence on the lifestyles and urban use patterns of the residents of these cities, up to the present day.

Modern town planning ideas were used very effectively to create the "apartheid city" in South Africa. Many of these ideas originated in England and the USA. As a consequence of the massive

changes that took place in England during the Industrial Revolution, the *Garden City concept*[1] developed. This, along with the *neighbourhood unit*[2] model from the United States, had a definite influence on planning and development in South Africa. Together these concepts provided the paradigm for South African cities, which aimed to achieve community convenience through the careful balancing of internally exclusive community facilities; the separation of uses, particularly by green space; and low densities, with each dwelling unit surrounded by open space, to ensure adequate light and air (Dewar et al. 1990).

Protagonists of apartheid also saw in this paradigm an opportunity to implement their own ideology. With the aim of separation and segregation, different neighbourhoods were allocated to and planned for different race groups. These manifested in the form of separate (through buffer-strips in the form of open space or rapid transport routes) and internalised neighbourhoods for different groups, ranging from well-developed suburbs around the CBD to poorly developed dormitory townships along the city periphery. Later many informal settlements also grew around the townships (see Figure 1).

It is this city form that became known as the "apartheid city" - a product of separation policies and government control that dominated the country for almost forty years.

Figure 1: *Typical development pattern of SA cities in the late 20th century.*

Planning ideas and political ideologies, however, have not only shaped the country's cities, but also had a major influence on the lifestyles and urban use patterns of the residents of these cities. Even today, many South African cities are characterised by fragmentation and spatial dislocation, separation and mono-functional zoning, as well as low-density sprawl. The result is a city of inequity and in many cases an environment of fear.

THE PRESENT: FORTS OF FEAR

In the nineties there has been a move towards the post-apartheid city in South Africa. Current planning and development policies reflect this attempt to change. Two of the main policy documents regarding planning and development, the *Green Paper on Development and Planning (1999)* and the *DFA (Development Facilitation Act of 1999)* both advocate an integrated and holistic approach to planning and development in South Africa.

The aim of integration

The *DFA* introduced a new paradigm for planning and development by providing the basis for a coherent framework for land development, according to a set of binding principles. According to the *DFA,* the term

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[1] The Garden City concept was formulated by Ebenezer Howard in England and described in his book, "Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Social Reform" (1898).
[2] The neighbourhood unit concept initially emerged in the USA in response to rapid urbanisation. It was based on the following principles: 1) separation of residential land-use; 2) self-contained and "inwardly orientated" residential areas; 3) "buffer strips" around these areas; 4) limitations on the number of people living in each area; and 5) access to green space (Dewar et al. 1990).
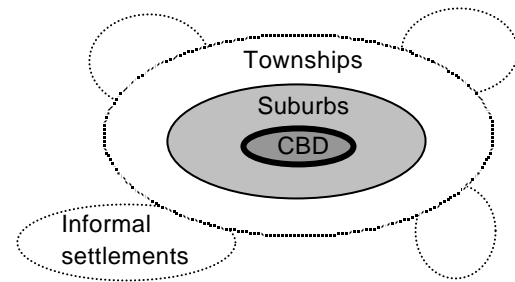
"planning" is concerned with the following objectives:

- Promoting equity
- Promoting efficiency
- Protecting the public good
- Ensuring the good use of scarce resources
- Protecting the environment (1999: 5).

In the later part of the *DFA* the central concerns of the principles are highlighted and the first concern refers to "a need to create new forms and structures for South African settlements to improve their performance" (1999:11). One way to achieve this is through "positively performing settlements". One of the aspects of positively performing settlements refers to "the central significance of integration" (1999:12). In this regard the DFA explains: "The term 'integration' is one of considerable importance in the principles. It calls for a rejection of past practices of fragmentation and separation. The term evokes the principle of reinforcement. All parts and elements of a settlement should reinforce and complement each other. A number of forms of integration are inherent in the term:

- Integration between rural, urban and primeval landscapes
- Integration between elements of spatial structure
- Integration between land uses
- Integration of new development with old
- Integration of different classes" (1999:14).

The DFA strongly emphasises the **need for integration** and advocates **equity**, **efficiency** and **planning for the public good**.

The *Green Paper on Development and Planning* is strongly based on the *DFA,* which serves as conceptual framework.

The Green Paper endorses all the principles formulated in the DFA and attempts to provide ways in which these principles can be implemented in practice.

The Green Paper therefore endorses the whole approach set out in the DFA. "The DFA sought to place a set of principles, central to the planning system [which] apply to all land development and spatial planning in South Africa. They are intended to bring radical changes to the characteristic form and structure of South African settlements. They represent an outright rejection of the low density, sprawling, fragmented and largely mono-functional forms of development, which resulted under apartheid in both urban and rural areas. They call for more compact, integrated and mixed-use settlement forms" (1999:36).

Both the Green Paper on Planning and Development and the DFA therefore call for a **paradigm shift** and advocate a more **integrated approach** to planning and development in South Africa.

However, reality reflects a different picture. Despite the aim of integration and equity, many of the patterns of the past, such as separation and fragmentation, are still present in South African cities.

Apart from the spatial patterns, the social dynamics and crime patterns also play an important role in the shaping of South African cities today. Despite a decrease in - or at least a stabilisation of - incidences of the most serious crimes (for example murder) the rates remain unacceptably high (CIAC Crime Statistics: February 2000). Many communities have little faith in the police to protect them. Perceptions that the criminal justice system and the police fail in their protective duty are

resulting in an increased use of private security by the wealthy, and the establishment of vigilante groups by the poor (Napier et al. 1999).

The fear of crime becomes an everyday concern and statistics have shown that South Africans generally display high levels of fear of becoming victims (Napier et al. 1998). The reality is that crime affects people and their perceptions; it influences their use patterns and lifestyles. Crime and the fear of crime are powerful forces in the minds of many South Africans.

Reaction through urban fortification

Crime is changing the face of cities and affecting functions and opportunities within cities. High crime rates and the fear of crime in South Africa are leading to the fortification of many buildings and parts of the cities. Urban families are trying to keep themselves safe by turning their houses into bastions. However, for many this does not afford sufficient protection. In their anxiety for safety, they do not only fortify their houses and other buildings, but entire complexes and neighbourhoods as well. The incidence of gated or walled communities has grown tremendously in the past five years in South Africa.

"**Gated communities** refer to any physical area that is fenced or walled-off from their surroundings, either prohibiting or controlling access to these areas by means of gates or booms. In many cases the concept can refer to a residential area with restricted access so that normal public spaces are privatised or use is restricted. They do not, however, refer only to residential areas, but may also include controlled-access villages for work (office blocks), commercial and/or recreational purposes. Gated communities can include both *enclosed neighbourhoods* and *security villages*" (Landman 2000b:2).

Within this framework, the CSIR embarked on a project investigating the issue of enclosed neighbourhoods and street closures.

"**Enclosed neighbourhoods** refer to neighbourhoods that have controlled access through gates or booms across existing roads. Many are fenced or walled off as well, with a limited number of controlled entrances/exits and security guards at these points in some cases. The roads within these neighbourhoods were previously, or still are public property and in many cases the local council is still responsible for public services to the community within. An enclosed neighbourhood usually refers to an existing neighbourhood that has been closed off" (Landman 2000b:3).

Figure 2: An enclosed neighbourhood in Johannesburg protected by a security guard controlling access into the area. Cars are stopped and the details of persons in the cars are requested and kept on record.

The first phase of this CSIR study identified current trends and some of the critical issues relating to neighbourhood enclosures. As part of this first phase, a questionnaire was sent to 100 Local Authorities in South Africa. Forty-three areas responded.

These questionnaires revealed that, although enclosed neighbourhoods are predominantly encountered in Gauteng

and specifically in larger cities, smaller towns are also increasingly receiving requests for street closure. Out of 20 cities and towns that indicated that they had received requests for road closures, 60% were towns with fewer than 500 000 inhabitants, such as Bethlehem and Port Shepstone. One of the local council areas of the Greater Johannesburg has already had 220 applications for road closures and the number of requests, is increasing daily. Statistics obtained from *MBS Consulting Engineers*, Johannesburg, show that not all the existing enclosures are legal and currently there are approximately 360 existing enclosures in this specific area.

Some of the critical issues identified in the report emanating from the study included the following:

- An enhanced/decreased sense of community
- Safety and security
- Social exclusion
- Urban segregation and fragmentation
- Urban management
- Financial implications
- Legal issues (Landman 2000b).

These issues address the potential impact that neighbourhood enclosures can have on urban planning and management and highlight some concerns regarding this form of development. Some of these are more concerned with the short-term impact, such as urban management issues (access of service vehicles, response times of emergency vehicles, etc.), as well as the legal issues (procedures of applications, relevant legislation, etc.). Others, however, are more likely to have their greatest impact over the long term. These include aspects such as social exclusion, and especially urban segregation and fragmentation. As this paper is concerned with the urban future, the author will focus only on the two last mentioned aspects.

Urban fragmentation and separation

Neighbourhood enclosures have the potential to influence the urban form dramatically in the future. If one considers the occurrence of gated communities in the Eastern Metropolitan Local Council of Greater Johannesburg, the potential impact of neighbourhood enclosures is already becoming evident. The map (see Figure 3) indicates a number of enclosures scattered over the area, especially in the northern area. If one then highlights all the enclosed areas in black, the picture starts to raise concerns. An ensemble of separated, and fragmented cells (see Figure 4), are spread across the area (Landman 2000b). This could have a negative affect on traffic patterns, choice of roads and pedestrian throughfare.

Neighbourhood enclosures, therefore, have the potential to influence the life-styles of urban residents - not only those living inside the enclosure, but also those living in the surrounding environment. At a forum for neighbourhood enclosures in South Africa, a woman was complaining about how the enclosure of the neighbouring area has influenced her lifestyle. Not only can she no longer use her regular road through the neighbourhood, but she also has to pass through the access control point every time she wishes to collect her post (Landman 2000b).

Neighbourhood enclosures, therefore, do not have the potential to influence the urban future in terms of physical patterns alone, but also through the impact that the patterns can have on the social dynamics in future cities.

Social exclusion through physical barriers

For many, gated communities provide an illusion of stability and control. It allows those who can afford it to opt out of shared public services and public places. Many residents reflect the

Figure 3*: Map of the Eastern Metropolitan Local Council showing a number of enclosures scattered over the area. (Original map done by MBS Consulting Engineers, Johannesburg).*

mentality of taking care only of themselves and their immediate neighbours. This reflects a stance of social exclusion (Landman 2000b).

Gated communities can also create a barrier to interaction among people of different races, cultures, and classes and may add to the difficulty of building social networks, which form the basis of

social and economic activities. Gates, walls and fences are, therefore, not only physical barriers to keep out criminals. They have the potential to convey a strong message and a powerful signal to "outsiders" (Landman 2000b).

And in this sense, they touch on the very issue of individual rights to public

space and the fundamental principle of democracy. Many residents feel very strongly about their human right to free and unhindered access to public spaces and the right to free movement. However, with a growing number of physical barriers and controlled access points, free movement and access to public spaces could be challenged in a significant way.

4 THE FUTURE: SIGNPOSTS OF SEGREGATION

It is the year 2020. Johannesburg has become a city of urban forts. These forts are scattered across the city, creating an intricate maze of illegible urban cells. Wealthy citizens live, work and play in these bastions of brick and iron. Many of these fortified buildings or protected enclaves are connected by enforced bridges across public throughways. However, when the residents of these enclaves are forced to leave their safety zones, they do so within the safety of their cars, dreading every moment they are "out there", exposed to the mercy of the "criminals" in the violent public realm.

These public areas are the war zones of the city – a den of deadly forces that threaten the very existence of those seeking safety in their private fortresses. They are also the living places of the urban poor who have to face the dangers of unprotected areas. These people are without any means or choice. They are the street people of the "dead-spaces" – literally and figuratively. No longer are these public spaces used by and shared by all the urban residents as in times gone by. It is only those who do not have a choice that are left to live their lives in these derelict and dangerous areas. The city has been taken over by the many private micro-governments and the poor, the homeless and the unfortunate

are left the victims of a system of enclosed fortresses for the privileged.

This describes a possible worst-case scenario of what a city such as Johannesburg could become in 20 years. Perhaps it is too exaggerated and hopefully it will never become reality. However, the signs of segregation are there, a warning to all those concerned with the nature of the built environment and the social well-being of South Africa.

In fact, this prospect is not entirely far-fetched. If one considers the example of Sao Paulo in Brazil, the signs may be more real than we would like to believe. The increase in violence, insecurity and fear in Sao Paulo is changing the city's landscape and the patterns of daily life, people's movements and the use of public transport – as crime and violence discourages people from using the streets and public spaces. Streets and public spaces where children used to play, where neighbours used to congregate, and where it was common for people to stroll are now much less used. Increasingly, higher-income groups are living, working, shopping and taking their leisure in what are essentially fortified enclaves. They are no longer making use of streets or public spaces, which are left to the homeless and the street children (Habitat: Global Report on Human Settlements 1996:124).

Is this the future we envisaged for the new South Africa? Earlier it was pointed out that this country has the noble aim of integration, a vision of a spatially integrated city. However, enclosed neighbourhoods could impair this and put the country back into the trap of the apartheid city and ideals of enclosed neighbourhood cells. The example of Sao Paolo should therefore be a signpost for South Africa – a warning for future urban development.

CONCLUSION: THE URBAN FUTURE – ENCLOSED NEIGHBOURHOODS

Enclosed neighbourhoods are not only the concern of those living inside or directly outside these areas. They are also the concern of all those interested and involved in planning and considering the urban future in the 21 century. Enclosed neighbourhoods have the potential to radically transform the urban environment in this century.

Economic and social segregation is not new to this country. South Africa has a tradition of apartheid planning, where neighbourhoods where designed to accommodate certain racial or socio-economic groups. However, since the 1990s there has been a definite attempt to reconstruct the city and aim for more integrated planning. But, what about the development and increased occurrence of enclosed neighbourhoods? In essence, gated communities and enclosed neighbourhoods have the potential to re-establish segregation and in several respects go further than other means of exclusion. They create boundaries and physical barriers to access. They also privatise public space. Some neighbourhoods even go as far as to privatise civic responsibilities like police protection and services such as road maintenance, park maintenance and recreation.

Inevitably, the question arises as to what the reasons are behind this. Is it primarily to enforce segregation or to privatise space, or is it just another attempt alongside so many others to try and address the current high crime rate in the country?

Gated communities have the potential to impair the implementation of the goals and vision of the major South African planning and development policies, since many of these developments negate the very idea of integration. Gated communities therefore hold the potential to be a major factor influencing both decision-making and policy formulation and implementation on national and local government levels.

Gated communities, and especially enclosed neighbourhoods, have the potential to privatise public space and amenities, and reduce government resources through demands for tax reductions for public functions performed privately. This could in the long run serve to benefit only the higher income areas and their residents, leaving the poor exposed to an increased amount of undeveloped public open spaces. In this way gated communities could have a very negative effect on the opportunities and quality of life of the urban poor, who already are at the mercy of the public sector. In this sense, they have the potential to threaten not only the aim of integration, but also the long-term goal of sustainability in the urban future.

There is an urgent need for an active debate on gated communities in South Africa. This country is unique and hosts a set of characteristics that is unlike those elsewhere in the world. A contextual approach to gated communities is needed, as well as a clear understanding of local physical and social dynamics. City planners and other role-players will need to ask themselves what they want to achieve in the future. They need to have a vision, to take a position and to act accordingly. Neighbourhood enclosures are not likely to disappear overnight. At the same time, answers will not come easily. Ultimately, it is up to those involved in the debate to ask the questions, determine the answers and guide all other role-players.

Crime rates are high in South Africa. Nobody disputes this fact. But does this justify any action, regardless of its consequences? What about social and

political democracy? Can crime just be walled away? Ultimately, what is our urban future likely to be: militarised public space, fortified enclaves, or integrated neighbourhoods?

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