



“South Africa’s cities still reflect an apartheid geography and are low density in nature with the poorest communities tending to live far away from services and employment. This contributes to increased transport emissions.”
(South Africa, 2010: 26)

South African National Climate
Change Response Green paper
November 2010



1 Introduction

The Urbanisation Agenda
The Sustainability Agenda
Definition and History of Social Housing in South Africa

Identifying the challenges faced in the modern built environment, specifically in South Africa, focussing on the situation of human settlements and the need thereof.

The Urbanisation Agenda

According to international statistics in “Population Challenges and Development Goals”, a document compiled by the United Nations (UN, 2005: 10), the next 20 years will see the global process of urbanisation at its most intensive in developing regions across the world.

Although the more developed European and North American countries currently have a higher percentage of their population residing in urban settings, cities in developing countries are still experiencing a considerable growth rate. Whilst the year 2007 marked the point, on a global scale, where the number of urban dwellers surpassed the number of rural inhabitants, this same point will only be achieved for developing regions in 2017. Between 2005 and 2030 an increase of 1.7 billion people has been predicted for urban areas in developing countries. (UN, 2005: 10)

Local and internationally sourced statistics clearly indicate the dramatic migration of population from rural to urban areas in South Africa (South Africa, 2010: 25), (Human Sciences Research Council, 1996). The process of urbanisation has accelerated particularly since the 1990's , a trend which can be directly attributed to the abolishment of Apartheid and in particular the related Group Areas Act . (South Africa, 2010: 27)

The Green Paper on Climate Change published by the Department of

Environmental Affairs in 2010 emphasises the impact of the intensified process of urbanisation occurring in South Africa. Metropolitan areas have the highest rate of expansion and secondary cities are experiencing the second highest growth rate. This growth takes place at the expense of the population of rural areas. Currently 62% of South Africa's population is estimated to be living in urban areas. (South Africa, 2010: 25)

Even while trying to create sustainable urban settlements, the effects of this rapidly expanding urban population are often more concealed than apparent, unlike the case of their rural counterparts. Although the delivery of services to inhabitants is a more viable and cost-effective pursuit in the denser urban areas, these communities have a more extensive, usually negative impact on their environments than their rural counterparts. This impact stretches well beyond the municipal boundaries. (South Africa, 2010: 25)

This extensive influx of people into the greater urban areas requires an appropriate response from an urban and architectural planning perspective: a response which provides inhabitants with comfortable, liveable environments, whilst responding appropriately to the pressures of increased population density on the urban fabric.

Percent urbanised population

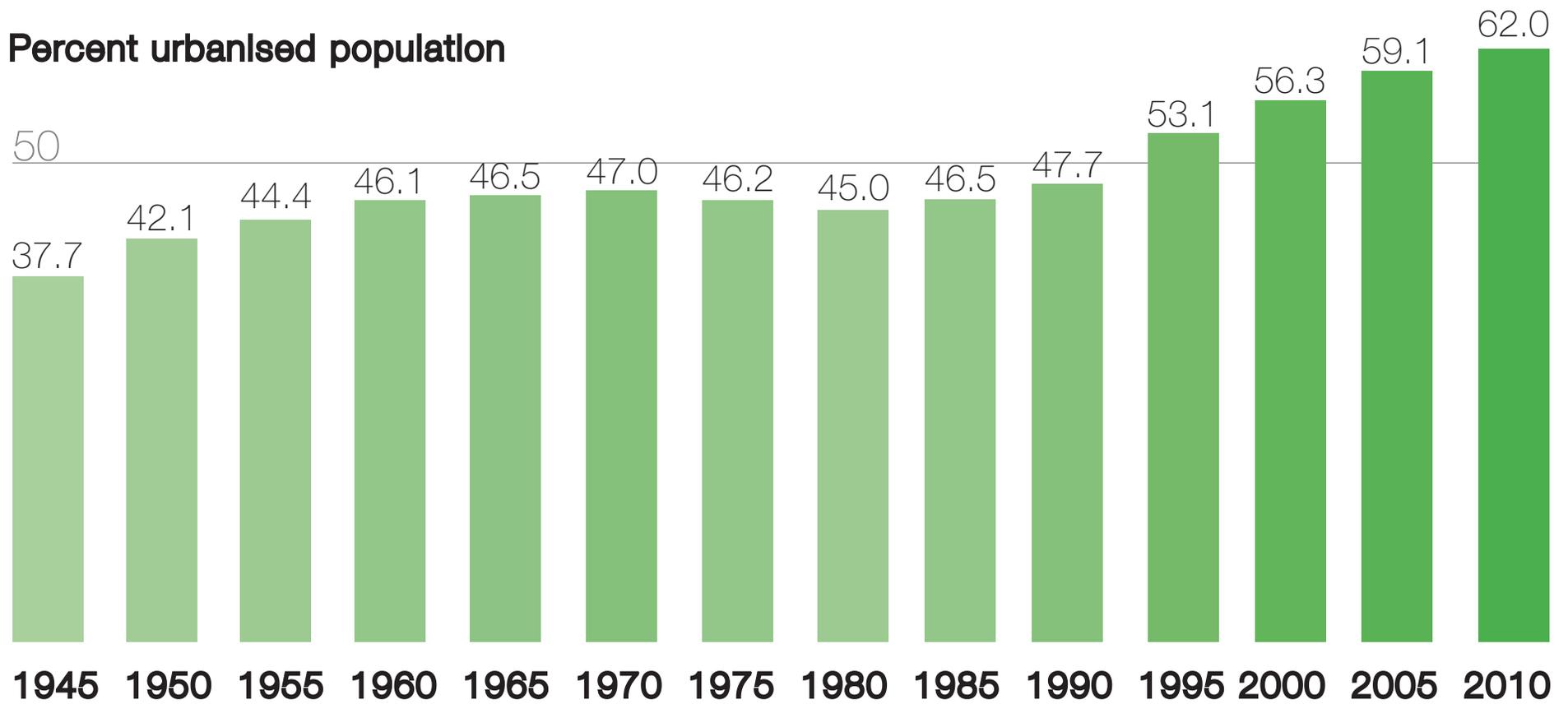


Figure 1.1 Five yearly incremental graph showing the percent of South Africa's urbanised population

The Sustainability agenda

South Africa's main contribution to the process of climate change is through the depletion of non-renewable energy sources. South Africa contributes 41.9% of the African continent's CO₂ emissions. This is due largely to the rich deposits of coal in the country which are used to produce electricity for local consumption and for a number of other Southern African countries. (du Plessis et al, 2003: 244)

It is the author's opinion that the sensitive planning and managing of urban realms is fundamental to creating a balanced and liveable city. However establishments which often claim to be "Green" or "sustainable" are often located far from existing services and infrastructure (a "non-green" set of circumstances in themselves). This developmental pattern contributes to the disintegration of South African cities by encouraging urban sprawl. According to Tonkin (2008: 19) these Greenfield sites offer the opportunity for the establishment of comfortable, low density homes. These superficial benefits are however considerably outweighed by the negative effects which these developments have on the supporting infrastructure.

The manner in which the current Government has delivered subsidised housing on the urban periphery has also exacerbated the problem of urban sprawl. The continuing implementation of the Apartheid city

model (Figure 1.2) ensures transportation difficulties with the majority of residents living on the periphery but working in the (distant) city and its supporting industrial regions. (du Plessis, 2003: 243)

The decentralisation that occurs, as a result of the increase in established periphery communities, including gated communities, is the chief contributor to the otherwise avoidable increase in consumption of fossil fuels due to energy required for transport. This urban sprawl creates a low density residential environment that not only inhibits infrastructure development, but also discourages small-scale economic activities because the minimum threshold population required to support them is too dispersed. This leaves local enterprises unable to compete with larger, more globalised operations, housed in regional shopping malls and department stores. Activities also become isolated as large plots becoming single-use, further promoting the notions of shopping malls and mono-functional landscapes. This is ultimately an inconvenience for the inhabitants of the peri-urban areas as daily tasks can no longer be completed without the use of private transport, a luxury beyond the reaches of a large majority of city dwellers. This pedestrian-unfriendly environment is often too widely dispersed for it to be even rudimentarily covered even by public transport. (Tonkin, 2008: 19)

This situation effectively alienates the poorer members of society and promotes segregation in its most class-specific form. Although this is a quiet hope for developers of gated communities, the process is exacerbating the ever-increasing divide between rich and poor. As concerns for the environment increase and as awareness of the “triple-bottom line” increases in all spheres of development, urban sprawl finds itself out-dated and inappropriate, despite still being the easiest short-term solution to the challenges of urbanisation (Tonkin, 2008: 20).

Increasing density through the provision of medium- to high-density housing is currently the most popular trend internationally. Should this approach be applied locally it could contribute substantially to the reversing of the degenerative and dangerous trend of urban sprawl. (du Plessis, 2003: 250)

A variety of suitable housing opportunities needs to be provided in areas that are close to work opportunities, schools and other public amenities. This can stimulate the growth of a more pedestrian-friendly environment with centralised services and a more concentrated and cost-effective infrastructure.

The Apartheid City

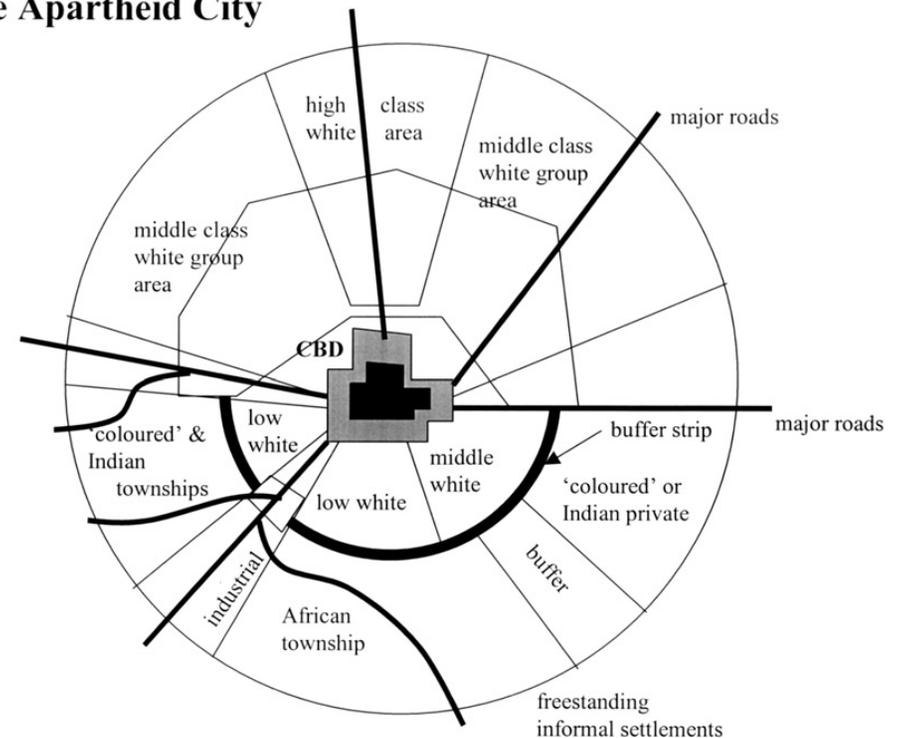


Figure 1.2 Apartheid city structure by M.Napier (2005)

Definition and History of Social Housing In South Africa

Definition

Social Housing in South Africa is housing which is usually delivered and managed by a non-profit social housing institute and spans a variety of accommodation types from transitional to temporary and permanent. Housing units are rented out, maintained and managed by the owning social housing institute. Government involvement includes financial support (with subsidies for the initial capital expenditure as well as for rental), and incentives in the form of reduced tariffs, fast-tracked approval and financial guarantees to encourage the private sector players to deliver these types of initiatives. (SHIFT 20010: 2)

History

Although social housing in South Africa has only been part of governmental vision since 1998 it has evolved dramatically in the this relatively short time, particularly when comparing it to international examples in Europe and elsewhere, where the delivery of social housing has been a “work in progress” for over 100 years. (SHIFT 2010: 1)

1995

The first institutional subsidies are awarded
Government subsidies are paid to institutions providing rental (or rent to buy) housing to households earning less than R3500 a month, in order to recover costs not supported by decreased rental.

The National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) is established
The purpose of NHFC is to manage the distribution of subsidies and development of various social housing institutes.

1996



1997

The Housing Act (No 107 of 1997) is implemented

This replaces all previous legislation as it defines the roles of the various spheres of government and sets out principles for housing delivery.

Social Housing Foundation founded

Established by the NHFC to facilitate the delivery of sustainable houses.

The Rental Housing Act (No 50 of 1999) is implemented

This further defines the role of government as well as expectations of tenants and landlords to ensure the proper functions of the rental housing process.

1999

2003

The Social Housing Policy of South Africa is proposed

This policy acts as a framework for the establishment of a funding regime for potential housing institutions, a policy which is later amended and then approved in 2005.

“Breaking New Ground” (BNG) is released

After almost nine years the Minister of Human Settlements (then Housing) releases the new policy which amongst other things drastically redirects the housing delivery from a product based to a process based system

2004

2008

The Social Housing Act (No 16 of 2008) implemented

The latest act further defines the roles of national, local and provincial government in promoting a social housing environment whilst also establishing a regulatory authority to accredit social housing institutions before they receive government funding

Adapted from “History of Social Housing Internationally and in South Africa” by the Social Housing Foundation” (2010: 6-11)