

Land use decision-making: The case of Diepsloot and Steyn City

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The case explores three adjacent areas on the northern edge of the Johannesburg metropolitan area. One is the Diepsloot settlement, the second is the Riverview Settlement and the third is an upmarket residential development called Steyn City. These three areas are explored separately so that comparisons can be drawn and key challenges identified related to land use development.

Diepsloot

Diepsloot is positioned close to the Johannesburg-Midrand-Tshwane growth corridor, nestled between the high-income residential areas of Dainfern, Chartwell, Waterfall, Steyn City, Lanseria, Northgate, Fourways and Sunninghill, as well as in close proximity to the less affluent areas of Cosmo City and Zandspruit. As a dense and impoverished settlement with high levels of informally built housing structures and backyard dwellings, Diepsloot stands in contrast with its surroundings. These comprise high-income private sector mixed-use (largely residential and commercial) developments such as estate housing projects, business parks, shopping centres and office developments¹.

In 20 years Diepsloot has grown into a bustling settlement covering approximately 5 km² with a population of more than 160 000². The population of Diepsloot is ethnically diverse, consisting predominantly African black residents including those from Mozambique, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Somalia, Pakistan and Bangladesh³. "A large group of young and upcoming adults makes up 55.9% of the population. Those who are economically active comprise 73.7% of the population, 47% of whom are employed in mostly elementary or blue-collar occupations, including craft and related trades, service work, shop and market sales and machine assembly. Diepsloot residents experience low to moderate living standards, 52.4% in the LSM 1-3 category and 34.6% in the LSM 4-5 category. The Diepsloot community relies heavily on public transport, mainly on minibus taxi services⁴.

Diepsloot residents are faced with a multitude of challenges such as the shortage of quality RDP houses or good quality owner-built houses; the prohibitive costs of bonded houses, water and electricity; and the significantly overcrowded high school, forcing residents to send their children to schools 25 kilometers away. Protests have been staged to bring these issues to the attention of the authorities and residents are angry about unhealthy conditions they live in because of the pervasive sewage spills; they are also unhappy about the poor quality of roads and they are concerned that high crime levels are worsened by the absence of visible policing and by high unemployment rates.

Due to its location and direct highway access, airport freight access through Lanseria, and proximity to executive and worker housing, JDA anticipates growth in the Diepsloot area in the coming years. It offers investment opportunities in property development sectors such as retail and wholesale warehousing and distribution; light industrial property; residential property; office development; private medical and educational market⁵.

Is this the way of the future for urban land development?

Steyn City

Steyn City is a new development that was initiated by Douw Steyn, an insurance entrepreneur, and his long-time friend, business partner, and director of Steyn City Properties, Giuseppe Plumari. They conceived Steyn City as the development of a city within a city.

¹ Diepsloot: Ready for Development p3

² Diepsloot: Ready for Development

³ Unnamed author s4.ad.brown.edu/.../Johannesburg/Diepsloot.pdf;

⁴ Diepsloot: Ready for Development p2

⁵ Diepsloot: Ready for Development p7

Their vision is:

“to create a lifestyle estate unlike any other in South Africa built on the foundation of quality of life. A country estate offering country living, but with all amenities conveniently within reach. Too much time is wasted in cities sitting in traffic and commuting between home, work, schools and the shops. We want to bring all these elements of daily life into one estate and give residents back the precious commodity of time, in a secure, upmarket environment.”⁶

The development includes infrastructure spend of R6 billion to include the internal and external utilities beyond the boundary walls, such as water, sewerage and roads. Other plans for Steyn City include “educational facilities; state-of-the-art medical facilities to residents; a retirement village; pedestrianised network of paths allowing for traffic-free estate navigation on foot; acres of green belts and parklands; a selection of recreational and sporting facilities; a city centre piazza (scheduled for completion in 2018) that will include retail outlets, restaurants, boutiques and delicatessens and 2 000 parking bays”⁷.

The big questions are whether and how this type of development contributes to the urban futures and the pursuit of inclusive, productive and sustainable cities? Upmarket residential and retail developments around metro areas may be criticised when they appear to provide only for the interests of the wealthy. Speaking about a development to the north of Johannesburg, a trade union spokesperson commented: “It is almost a form of apartheid, not in a strictly racial sense, though in practice those who are the target of restrictions into certain areas tend to be black people.”⁸

At a recent meeting of civil society organisations consisting of community leaders, trade unions, leading political parties and a consortium of black business leaders, concerns were raised about what they perceive as the city’s continuation of apartheid spatial design and planning. Rather than creating integrated and sustainable cities that fundamentally transform the experience of most of the city’s population who want to live in integrated, well-run and governed cities. The issue is not simply about the separation and disconnectedness of wealthy people from the rest of the city; it is also about what that separation does spatially to the city and how it creates dysfunctional communities.

Question: This case illustrates the complex interface between public sector policy priorities, private sector interests and societal needs in relation to land use decision-making. How can this ‘wicked problem’ be better understood and better addressed in the context of South African cities of the future?

⁶ <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/south-african-billionaire-douw-steyn-builds-his-own-city/>

Accessed on 19 March 2018

⁷ Steyn City Fact Sheet

⁸ <https://www.thesouthafrican.com/south-african-billionaire-douw-steyn-builds-his-own-city/> Accessed on 19 March 2018