

URBAN SAFETY BRIEF

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Public Space and Urban Safety:

The SA Cities Urban Safety Reference Group's Briefs Series is designed to distil the state of current knowledge on urban safety-related topics for a policy and planning audience. It is presented quarterly to the City Budget Forum and other key stakeholders.



BACKGROUND

Public space is an expression and reflection of society, and many key historical moments have happened in public space. These include global events such as the Arab Spring, and local actions such as the Defiance and Resistance Campaign against separate development and the Soweto Student Uprising. Quality public space can play important roles in transforming society, contributing to safety, wellbeing and sense of community, as well as improving local property values. This urban safety brief focuses on public open spaces like streets, pavements, parks, bus and taxi ranks, town squares, market areas, public sanitation and ablution facilities. People use public space to interact with each other and the environment, for social, economic, and cultural reasons, celebrations and entertainment, leisure, exercise, to move around the city and as sites of democratic action.

Many South African cities have a shortage of quality public space, and much of our public space is considered unsafe, due to perceived and real crime and violence. Partly this is due to the historical spatial injustices of colonialism and apartheid which left a legacy of inadequate public space in disadvantaged areas like townships and informal settlements. Lack of safety in public space is a crucial barrier to a wide range of social, developmental and investment objectives related to transforming our cities, and the potential of existing safety interventions is undermined by decreasing investment in public open spaces. This relates to the under-recognised importance of public space for planning and managing human settlements in cities. Similarly, there is not enough legislative protection for public space, resulting in the sale of existing open space for development. The role of public space in supporting livelihoods through the informal economy, for example street vendors, is significant, and must be better supported and nurtured.

It is very important to acknowledge that the issues we see in our public spaces in South Africa, such as homelessness, informal trade, informal settlement, substance abuse, and criminality are linked to and partly caused by broad structural problems, including the triple challenge of spatial and socio-economic inequality, poverty and unemployment. These issues are often used to justify the privatisation, fencing-off, and displacement of vulnerable people from public space. This reinforces spatial inequality at the expense of more holistic social interventions. Crime and fear also cause a retreat from public life. This retreat is by those who can afford to and thus choose to avoid perceived dangerous places, and the more vulnerable



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such as women in low-income areas, even when they do not have adequate private space to retreat to. This undermines integration and inclusion.

We cannot think about public space without considering the 'culture of violence' in South Africa. The psycho-social roots of crime and violence are deep, therefore requiring holistic attention. Women, girls, and the LGBTQI+ community are uniquely vulnerable in public space, with crime and fear undermining their use of and movement in public space. Part of the reason for this is the historical focus on men in the planning and design of public space. Therefore, planning for safety must include gender as a key focus with holistic interventions targeted against gender-based and sexual violence. This planning must be informed by carefully listening and responding to vulnerable groups' voices and needs.

Crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic result in additional budget constraints and dimensions of public safety. The pandemic has highlighted spatial inequality, and the urgency of public space and services for maintaining and improving public health, especially in marginalised communities and informal settlements. The inadequacy of public space in such areas means that social distancing is not possible, and improved public space can help curb the spread of the virus as well as playing a role in supporting economic activity in the context of increased job losses. The crisis has changed the way we think about and use public space, and is an opportunity to think differently about public space as being at the core of urban development.

Key messages from experts and current, promising practices are similar to those from existing policy guidelines. Despite the ongoing challenges of alignment between policy and practice, implementation, and widespread state capacity challenges, shifts towards collaborative approaches are emerging, which can reduce demand on state resources. Based on consultations with a variety of experts and practitioners, this safety brief discusses key issues to do with integrating practice with policy. Following this, the brief discusses key principles for public space that also reference and respond to the current pandemic with lessons for informality and crisis management more broadly. The brief then turns to some examples of innovative and successful approaches, before concluding with recommendations for policy directions on public space and urban safety.

DISCUSSION

01 Policy, Practice and Integration

While policy documents do link public space to safety, the roles and mechanisms of public space in promoting safety are not detailed and clear enough. The Tshwane Open Space Framework is an example of a more detailed local policy; though parts of it, especially in terms of community engagement and participation, remain too vague¹. Local policies that are sensitive to the variety of urban contexts can significantly improve safety, especially with greater focus and clarity on public space design, development and management. Detailed local-level safety audits are a key starting point for allowing local policy to be more adaptive at the scale of a specific park or set of streets in a neighbourhood. Including a public safety focus at all phases increases the impact of interventions.

Since open space budgets are decreasing, creative ways of emphasising public space can unlock community resources. Participation with local individuals and groups in all phases, from design to management, has positive impacts. This is part of establishing community support for any project, which is essential for resilience. Shifts in city-planning towards 'co-creation' and 'co-production' improve community engagement and ownership; and include opportunities for up-scaling. In the medium- to long-term this pools resources and enables a clearer focus on common goals. Despite shifts towards institutionalising better participation, many successful interventions still depend on individual practitioners who play the role of 'champion' or 'maverick'. Implementation of existing policy remains a key challenge, and in some cases, there is a disconnect between public space uses and the by-laws, which are conservative and often not aligned with new strategies and policies.

02 Core Principles

Consensus has grown in the last decades around core principles for achieving safety in public spaces.



1. There is a chapter on Community Participation in the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, No. 32 of 2000. However, municipal policy must explore the possibilities for adapting this to local contexts in a way that is clearer on requirements of real participation, not just opportunities for consultation, in all phases of any development. NPC (National Planning Commission). 2012. National Development Plan. Pretoria: NPC, p. 386. CSP (The Civilian Secretariat for Police). 2016. White Paper on Policing. Pretoria: CSP, p. 20.



Participation not consultation

Substantive, ongoing engagement with as wide a range of local stakeholders as possible is critical to resilient safety interventions in public space. Municipalities are already mandated to engage in processes of community participation. However, interpretation of these policies varies across contexts and does not always allow for deep enough engagement to build trust and alliances. The realities of engagement are naturally messy, difficult with limited resources, full of potential conflict, and can be time-consuming. Consultation is often a tick-box exercise through which stakeholders have had little input, or their needs are not met. This undermines the nature of the participation process as a whole. Partly, this is because key local stakeholders are seen as 'communities-in-need' and not recognised for their crucial local knowledge and resources networks

Examples of genuine participatory processes focus on how existing systems for community engagement can be better used to encourage sustainable relationships between state and community actors. This can improve the impact of structures like Community Safety Forums, Community Policing Forums and ward committees, in combination with planning and urban development mechanisms, such as integrated development plans (IDPs)². This also helps planners and designers understand the dynamics of the communities they work in. More substantive, relationship-based processes of engagement provide key local knowledge that can inform local policies to be more detailed and specific to different contexts such as informal settlements, inner cities and suburbs as well as specific areas, precincts, and networks.



Local Context is Key

A thorough understanding of the local context requires a deeper, ongoing participation process. This is essential to ensuring genuine feelings of community ownership and buy-in, which will improve the sustainability and resilience of interventions. Regular, everyday users of a public space have critical insights into core safety issues as well as community needs. As such, understanding public spaces from the perspective of whoever uses those spaces - including homeless people, informal traders or waste reclaimers - and involving them in planning and management, is an important and beneficial approach. The work of Fear Free Life³ and its subsidiaries shows that this kind of engagement can and should extend to local gangs and criminals



Integrated approach

Siloed governance, especially at the local level, continues to undermine integrated approaches, and is related to a fragmented

understanding and management of public space. Clearer mechanisms with accountability checks are required to improve collaboration across government and with local stakeholders. These could be achieved through inter-departmental task teams, a dedicated public



Holistic Intervention

The cross-cutting realities of safety and public space are unique and crucial aspects to consider, as they prompt the necessity of holistic approaches. Existing national policy does not cater for the wide range of public spaces - most importantly, streets - and the different contexts in which they exist, such as business districts, informal settlements, townships, inner cities and suburbs. Far greater attention needs to be paid to the fact that public space is experienced as a network and needs to be planned for as such. Therefore, municipal public space strategies must pay careful attention to mobility, links between public spaces and amenities, and public transport, with a strong focus on safety.



Activated Public Space

Actively used public spaces are generally safer because the increased presence of users provides a form of social surveillance. It is important to facilitate and support activations by local individuals and organisations as part of the management of public space to improve safety in the short and long term. This also helps the participation process. Healthy activations⁴ are often built around sports, arts and culture, and should include employment and livelihood generation as well as social development facilities such as shelters and lockers for homeless people. Such a variety of activations can also bring together people of different races and backgrounds, which can help with social cohesion. Furthermore, interventions that are targeted at women, the youth, early childhood development programmes and lesbian, gay and queer people are crucial for resilient safety strategies as they take place in public places and serve a broader purpose of addressing risk factors for violence and crime. School group activations are successful and should be promoted, noting that successful activations need to respond to the unique features of a space.



Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles

Design guidelines for safety in public space provide important general lessons for practical interventions to improve safety. Key

2. South Africa. (2016). Integrated Urban Development Framework. Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. p33.

3. South Africa. (2016). Integrated Urban Development Framework. Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. p33.

4. In addition to the Park Activation Coordinator programme discussed below, notable programmes for activation include the Sport for Social Change Network (www.sscn.co.za). Also see the holistic intervention approach of the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading project (<http://vpuu.org.za/success-story/vpuu-manual-preamble-introduction/>) (Regulatory Authority). 2017. Annual Report 2016/17. Centurion: PSIRA

design elements that improve safety and reduce fear include lighting, surveillance, improved sightlines and visibility, clearer access-points and pedestrian routes through spaces, and services including ablutions and sanitation.⁵ These all increase use and activation of spaces and contribute to greater community ownership and social surveillance. It is important to rethink the positive role informal workers and homeless people can play in terms of social surveillance; examples in Section 4 show this. The example on informal settlement upgrading shows the application of CPTED principles⁶ in a South African city context. Use of durable materials, along with regular maintenance and management plans for key services, are important localised CPTED factors. The concept of placemaking⁷, which is part of CPTED and links strongly with the core principles in this section, is useful in finding the unique local meaning and value of different public spaces in South Africa.



Homegrown public space

While there is growing realisation that we need to move away from ideas of public space provided by the Global North, there has not yet been enough research and practice on developing our understanding of the local and vernacular meanings of public space. Compared to the Global North, many African public places are relatively chaotic and characterised by various types of informality, which is part of their strength and potential⁸. Research across contexts in the Global South suggests that supporting informality is a key part of making our public space more people centred. Placemaking can assist in developing ground-up solutions for public space that are focused on the local and collective identity of public places. In rethinking our public spaces, it is important to found them on core principles such as inclusion, dignity, equal access, empowerment and spatial justice.

03 Informality, public space and safety

The Covid-19 pandemic exposes the enormous inequalities in South African cities, and brings an added urgency and dimension to safety in public space, showing that safety goes beyond issues of crime. The crisis exacerbates existing safety issues such as those faced by informal workers like street traders and waste pickers, who are important public space users. During the pandemic they were classified as essential workers, but still worked in precarious conditions, partly related to the fact that the majority of informal traders are women. They should be protected and supported by law enforcement as a

key to improving safety through, for example, their proven role as 'eyes on the street' to reduce crime. In the context of communicable diseases like Covid-19, they provide safety by enabling customers to avoid queues and gatherings at large supermarkets; and play a crucial role in urban food security. Informal traders also make important contributions to cultural diversity through selling local

products such as arts and crafts. It is important to develop local strategies to protect and support informal workers and ensure they have good access to safe public space. This is critical for assisting subsistence livelihoods and recognising the contribution of the working poor to the local economy, both of which can help address root causes of crime and violence.

Informal traders also make important contributions to cultural diversity through selling local products such as arts and crafts. It is important to develop local strategies to protect and support informal workers and ensure they have good access to safe public space. This is critical for assisting subsistence livelihoods and recognising the contribution of the working poor to the local economy, both of which can help address root causes of crime and violence.

While traders have always needed more toilets, sanitation, and shelter, these have become even more urgent, in order to help reduce the spread of viruses like Covid-19. Collaborative production of public space and services (especially regarding sanitation) is an opportunity to negotiate this complex situation. The potential for public space to play a role in transforming society is based on better support for informal workers in public places⁹. With valuable lessons for other types of crises, the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown challenged official capacity and resulted in increased fiscal constraints and unemployment. It is critically important that policy and implementation strategies remain adaptable and flexible in accordance with rapidly changing medical knowledge on the spread of the virus. Responses are emerging locally¹⁰ and globally¹¹, and continued shared learning is essential.

It is ultimately up to individuals to protect themselves and others in public spaces by following essential precautions, such as social distancing and hand washing. Public space can be utilised for its potential to educate people towards safe behaviours as new knowledge becomes available, for example, through posters and public awareness campaigns

5. It must be noted that ablution and sanitation facilities can be places where women and children are especially vulnerable, and must be designed with this in mind.

6. Five key CPTED principles: "Surveillance and visibility; Territoriality; Access and escape routes; Image and aesthetics; Target hardening." From: <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/crime-prevention-through-environmental-design-cpted>

7. There are very useful guidelines for community-driven, low-cost placemaking online at: <https://placemaking-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/listing-uploads/file/2019/11/Navigating-main-streets-afbeelding.pdf>

8. <https://www.urbanet.info/towards-pan-african-spaces-of-public/>

9. Please note this helpful toolkit for local authorities to support informal livelihoods in public space: <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/Public%20Space%20Toolkit.pdf>

10. See, for instance, <https://www.wiego.org/covid19crisis>

11. See <https://www.pps.co.za/covid-19-coronavirus> and <https://www.placemakingx.org/article/public-spaces-during-covid19>

. Furthermore, measures to reduce the spread of viruses can be enabled through basic design interventions, from marks on the floor indicating social distancing at taxi ranks, to well-spaced public seating, to the provision of hand sanitiser stations operated by foot pedals. The pandemic has also highlighted the huge impact of alcohol on public health and safety, and harm reduction programmes that target the root causes of this are increasingly urgent.

04 Innovation and learning from best practice



End Street North Park¹², Johannesburg

Realising that local people were not using their local parks and public open spaces because of safety and other concerns, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ) embarked on a pilot project to test alternative ways of sustainably developing and managing parks, to make them safe and attractive. The approach aimed to be holistic and collaborative, involving not only the local users and stakeholders but also City departments. The End Street North Park upgrade¹³ demonstrated an integrated stakeholder approach to public space design and management. It involved sector contributions from different city departments as well as engagement with city residents and other park users in designing a safe, inclusive and sustainable public space through participatory tools and methods. The project was aimed at developing a sound governance model for integrated urban development that can be used in the City of Johannesburg and possibly in other South African cities as well.

The End Street North Park upgrade in the inner city of Johannesburg involved collaboration amongst a wide variety of stakeholders and improved several safety aspects, though evidence is still emerging on the details of this, as it is a pilot project. Critical to initial success was including park users in the design phase. These park users identified that a key safety issue was crossing the busy road to get to the park; an issue that was outside the usual mandate of City Parks. The collaboration between municipal entities and park users meant this could be resolved more directly than through the usual procedures in which siloed management prevented efficient cooperation between relevant departments. It resulted in significantly reduced traffic and pedestrian accidents as well as increased use of the park. Crucially, it also strengthened the connection between the park and the street, improving overall integration of public spaces in the area. As a pilot project, it included all stakeholders from concept through to development. Its status as a pilot project also meant that certain procedural and bureaucratic constraints could be avoided,

suggesting the need for greater flexibility at local level.



Congella Park, eThekweni

Congella Park is located in a light industrial area in eThekweni. It had become prone to crime and was largely occupied by homeless people.¹⁴ Since 2016, it has been revitalised through a variety of interventions aimed at improving accessibility and public use. This began with park clean-ups which included relocating many of the homeless population, and after this the remaining homeless people were included in activations for the park. Activations involved employing residents of the park in further clean-ups, the creation of a food garden and recycling project, and bringing in a wide variety of local stakeholders.

In addition to collaboration between local government, private sector and park users, individual champions of the project have been key to success. By focusing on common goals and opportunities, the Umbilo Business Forum (UBF) as a key private sector organisation was also involved. UBF continues to provide critical operational support, especially through paying wages for management, permaculture and recycling programmes. Given that many successful interventions have a champion in the sense of one capacitated individual deeply involved and committed to a project, identifying similar individuals and their skill sets is a useful strategy. Notably, planning approval had not been achieved for the project, but its unique nature and championing allowed these usual kinds of stumbling blocks to be overcome.



Park Activation Coordinator (PAC) Programme

The PAC programme is a creative approach to park management being piloted in eThekweni and Johannesburg that has had success in keeping public parks vibrant and well maintained with initial reports suggesting positive safety impacts, though further research is required. In both cases, funds were accessed successfully from the Expanded Public Works Programme¹⁵ (EPWP) and the Community Work Programme (CWP) to deploy six Park Activation Coordinators in each city. Coordinators help implement sport, games, reading clubs and debates that involve children and parents of different neighbourhoods in the inner-city and contribute to the well-being and social cohesion of its residents. Employing locals to drive activations is more likely to lead to participation of existing community groups, thus increasing ownership and resilience.

12. https://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/WEB_Co_Lessons_Learnt_public_spaces.pdf

13. <https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/inner-city-safer-parks-and-open-spaces-strategic-framework-end-street-north>

14. https://www.ierm.org.za/Congella_Park_Learning_Exchange_by_Jeniffer_Rampersad.pdf

15. The PAC programme fits within the requirements for the 3 key sectors of EPWP. http://www.epwp.gov.za/documents/Infrastructure/Infrastructure%20incentive%20manual/EPWP_Integrated_Grant_Manual_2018-19_

.As this programme is in its pilot phase, lessons for practice continue to emerge. An important aspect of the PAC training includes a focus on community safety, and includes skills training on facilitation and scheduling of activations and programming, stakeholder communication and building relationships with locals and community forums. Monitoring and reporting back to the city are a key part of sustainable management that helps link individual public places to broader planning and development strategies.



Informal Settlement Upgrading, Cape Town

Public space is a key lever for safety in informal settlement upgrading (ISU) in case studies, such as Site C in Khayelitsha and Monwabisi Park in Cape Town, through the Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) programme¹⁶. What also comes to light in these studies is that safety is crucial for any lasting upgrade. Therefore, ISU through public space is a direct way to address many of the most urgent issues of crime, fear and violence. In addition to the principles raised above, the success of these interventions depends on improving infrastructure such as basic services with a CPTED lens, tenure security, and local opportunities to more holistically address psycho-social aspects of crime, which are particularly high in informal settlements.



Conclusion

South Africa's high levels of inequality affect what is possible in public space. It is important to rethink and emphasise public space in terms of its transformative potential in society. The focus on deeper, more substantive participation between local government, public space users, and other stakeholders is key to building more inclusive and safe public spaces. Continuous engagement and collaboration with community leaders and structures (faith-based organisations, community-based organisations, ratepayers associations, friends of parks, local youth and sports-based organisations); local policing initiatives (community policing forums) and gangs and criminals; ward councillors; and the private sector (formal and informal) is a necessity for sustainable public safety interventions.

Engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and public space users must be built into local level practice throughout the conceptualisation, planning, design, development and maintenance phases. Engagements should inform clear local strategies for ongoing management with clear responsibilities for state and non-state actors, and must be tailored to the context. Mechanisms of accountability for processes of engagement need to be instituted. It must be clear to officials that, while the processes of engagement are challenging, they also allow projects to draw on a wider range of

relevant resources, and this enables greater success and resilience. Meetings and consultations are not enough; engagement must be ongoing, noting that the resources of communities and therefore the processes of engagement will be different from one suburb, township or informal settlement to another.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Detailed local-level safety audits with a holistic public space focus are required to prepare context-specific interventions based on the core principles identified in Section 2. The safety audits should inform localised public space policies and strategies in each city's Spatial Development Framework (SDF) and Integrated Development Plan (IDP), with special attention given to opportunities for ongoing collaboration between state and non-state actors. Detail at the level of IDPs is crucial for shifting these policy insights into performance management plans.



To address crime and violence, preventative measures must be taken. The focus must be on socio-economic circumstances, leading to a whole-of-society approach that must be integrated, holistic and participatory. Develop local policy from the ground up to increase community ownership, rather than drawing on best practice from the Global North.



While a one-size-fits-all national policy is too vague to be meaningfully implemented in different local contexts, the Integrated Urban Development Framework could incorporate placemaking principles with a gender and CPTED lens to support localised, ground-up solutions for public space.



Adaptability and creativity, which are supported through co-production and co-creation, are critical at local levels for resilience and safety. Flexibility in local procurement and supply chain procedure, without facilitating corruption, should be explored further to allow innovative approaches.



Participatory upgrading with safety in mind is increasingly urgent, and should include employment of local workers and contractors as well as skills training for local youth. Residents of informal settlements are uniquely at risk of being victims of crime and violence in public spaces like streets, linked to the difficult socio-economic and spatial conditions and lack of key services and amenities.

16. See <http://vpuu.org.za/>. Also see Isandla, VPUU, ACC, GDC, 2017. Promoting safety and violence prevention through informal settlement upgrading. Available 9 June 2020 from https://www.saferspaces.org.za/uploads/files/Guide_on_ISU_and_Urban_Safety_%282017%29_FINAL.pdf This report also includes a range of more detailed CPTED principles tailored towards the informal settlement context.

Covid-19 highlights and exacerbates many of these issues, especially in informal settlements but also for informal workers across urban contexts.¹⁷ Due to the pandemic and ongoing challenges for informal workers, urgent provision of public toilets and sanitation facilities is required, as well as better legal and practical support for informal workers. This relates to the importance of enhanced resilience of cities for disadvantaged communities, especially in terms of better health facilities. We need to improve our response, recovery and readiness for future crises.



Structured mechanisms for collaboration, learning and exchange within and across municipalities must be instituted to support the integration of public space planning into city-wide development strategies. The idea of establishing the Centre on African Public Spaces,¹⁸ an initiative between the City of Johannesburg and African universities, is an opportunity for this. Depending on circumstances, better collaboration could be through a new public space agency or through inter-departmental task-teams that have clearer funding and budgeting agreements, mandates, checks and balances. Employment of locals in Area Coordinating Teams can provide employment and provide critical site-level knowledge and support for localised public space solutions.



Existing public space must be protected.¹⁹ During the Covid-19 lockdown, the urgency of opening further public spaces and improving sanitation access increased, especially in dense areas like informal settlements and inner cities. Pedestrianising selected roads for safer exercise and informal trade is an emerging best practice globally during the pandemic, and all public parks should remain open due to their essential role in public health. Zoned public space should be reallocated from provincial and national government to local government to improve coordination with local SDFs.

This brief was compiled by the SA Cities Urban Safety Reference Group with support from Temba Middelmann, Simon Mayson, Alicia Fortuin and Rorisang Sojane

The Urban Safety Reference Group is a platform for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing amongst practitioners from the SACN member cities as well as other key government role-players on urban safety and violence prevention. It is convened by the South African Cities Network (SACN) with the support of the GIZ-Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention (VCP) Programme.

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17. Isandla.VPUU, ACC, GDC, 2017.

18. See <https://www.urbanet.info/towards-pan-african-spaces-of-public/>

19. The Tshwane Open Space Framework has useful guidelines for this, which can be adapted for other cities.