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# Multi-stakeholder perspectives on approaches for addressing the incidence of urban public open space encroachment: The case of Freedom Square, Bloemfontein

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## Abstract

Several studies have investigated the extinction of urban public open spaces in South Africa. However, a fixation by such studies on well-established primary cities has been noticed, whilst limited attention has been paid to emerging major cities. In addition, findings from these studies have resulted from the perspectives of either planning entities' representatives or representatives of the communities associated with open space encroachment. This implies the absence of a systemic and multi-stakeholder engagement. This article contributes towards bridging these observed gaps through the elicitation of multi-stakeholder perspectives on the enablers of urban public open space encroachment in major cities, using a Mangaung Metropolitan exemplar. Adopting a qualitative case study research design, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews. Participants were purposively recruited from Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality planning department and community members residing in Freedom Square township, Bloemfontein. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Significant enablers identified include low levels of sustainability literacy, low levels of citizen participation in the planning process, and planners' inability to manage extant value conflicts. The findings from this study contribute to a broader study that seeks to develop an urban open space planning and management framework for forestalling the incidence of encroachment in major cities. Accordingly, this study's findings have practical implications for relevant planning stakeholders who are keen on curbing the incidence of urban open space encroachment in South African townships.

**Keywords:** Bloemfontein, encroachment, sustainable neighbourhoods, urban public open space

## PERSPEKTIEWE VAN MULTI-BELANGHEBBENDES OM DIE BESETTING VAN STEDELIKE OPENBARE OOPRUIMTES AAN TE SPREEK: FREEDOM SQUARE, BLOEMFONTEIN

Verskeie studies het al ondersoek ingestel na die verdwyning van stedelike openbare oopruimtes in Suid-Afrika. Hieruit het dit geblyk dat die klem op goed gevestigde primêre stede was en dat slegs beperkte aandag aan ontwikkelende primêre stede geskenk is. Die bevindings van bogenoemde studies is gebaseer op die menings van die verteenwoordigers van beplanningsliggame of verteenwoordigers van daardie gemeenskappe wat geassosieer word met die besetting van oopruimtes. Dit impliseer die afwesigheid van 'n sistematiese deelname deur veelvuldige belanghouers. Hierdie artikel dra by om die geïdentifiseerde gaping aan te spreek deur die aandag te vestig op die menings van veelvuldige belanghebbers rakende die besetting van stedelike oopruimtes met die Mangaung Metropolitaanse Munisipaliteit as voorbeeld. 'n Kwalitatiewe gevallestudie-benadering is gevolg, terwyl data deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en fokusgroep-onderhoude ingesamel is. Respondente is doelbewus gewerf in die Mangaung Metropolitaanse Munisipaliteit se departement stadsbeplanning en inwoners van Freedom Square woonbuurt in Bloemfontein. Die data is deur middel van tematiese analise ontleed. Betekenisvolle kwalifiseerders is geïdentifiseer, wat lae vlakke van volhoubaarheid, lae vlakke van openbare deelname in die beplanningsproses, en die beplanners se bestaande onvermoë om waardekonflikte te bestuur, insluit. Die bevindings van hierdie ondersoek poog om by te dra tot die ontwikkeling van die beplanning van stedelike oopruimtes en die raamwerk vir die bestuur van die voorkoms daarvan in primêre stede. Gevolglik het die bevindings van hierdie studie praktiese implikasies vir belanghebbers wat die verdwyning van stedelike oopruimtes in woonbuurte in Suid-Afrikaanse stede wil bekamp.

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**Sleutelwoorde:** Bloemfontein, onwet-tige besetting, stedelike openbare oopruimtes, volhoubare woonbuurte

**MAIKUTLO A BANKA-KAROLO  
BA FAPANENG MABAPI LE  
MEKHOA EA HO SEBETSANA LE  
KETSAHALO EA KENELLO EA  
LIBAKA TSA BOIKHATHOLLO  
BA SECHABA LITOROPONG:  
TEMOHISO EA FREEDOM  
SQUARE, BLOEMFONTEIN**

Lipatlisiso tse 'maloa li ithutle ketsahalo ea ho fela hoa libaka tsa boikhathollo ba sechaba litoropong tsa Afrika Boroa. Leha ho le joalo, ho bile le thlokomelo ea hore boithuto bo joalo bo lekola litoropo ke kholo tse tsoetseng pele, ha litoropo tse nyane tsona li sa fuoe tekolo e kalo-kalo. Ntle le moo, liphetho tse tsoang liphuputsong tsona li hlalishitse ke maikutlo a baemeli ba mekhatlo ea meralo kapa baemeli ba sechaba se amanang le ho kenelloa hoa libaka tsa boikhathollo. Sena se fana ka maikutlo a ho ba sieo ha tšebeliso 'moho le bankakarolo ba mekhahlelo e meng ea batho ba amehang tabeng ena. Sengoloa sena se kenya letsoho ho koaleng likheo tsona tse hlokometsoeng ka ho hlohlelletsa maikutlo a bankakarolo ba fapaneng ketsahalong ea ho kenelloa ha libaka tsa boikhathollo ba sechaba litoropong tse kholo, ho sebelisoa mohlala oa motse-moholo oa Mangaung. Ka ts'ebeliso ea moralo oa lipatlisiso oa thuto ea boleng, lintlha li ile tsa bokelloa ka lipuisano tse hlophisitsoeng hantle le lipuisano tsa lihlopha tse khethiloeng. Banka-karolo ba khetiloe ka kotlolo ho tsoa lefapheng la meralo la Masepala oa Mangaung le litho tsa sechaba tse lulang lekeisheneng la Freedom Square, Bloemfontein. Lintlha li ile tsa hlalhoja ho sebelisoa mokhoa oa tlhahlobo-sehloho. Lintlha tsa bohlokoa tsesusumetsang ketsahalo ena li kenyetse maemo a tlase a ho bala le ho ngola, maemo a tlase a ho nka karolo ha baahi litabeng tsa ho rala, le ho hloleha ha meralo ho sebetsana le likhohlano tsa boleng metseng. Liphetho tse tsoang boithutong bona li kenya letsoho phuputsong e pharalletseng e batlang ho nts'etsapele moralo oa libaka se bulehileng tsa boikhathollo litoropong le moralo oa taolo ho thibela liketsahalo tsa ho kenelloa hoa libaka tsona litoropong tse kholo. Ka lebaka leo, liphuputso tsa boithuto bona li na le moelelo o sebetsang ho bankakarolo ba meralo ba ikemiselitse ho thibela ketsahalo ea tšenyiso le kenello ea

libaka tse bulehileng tsa boikhathollo makeisheneng a Afrika Boroa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Open spaces have been described as "any unbuilt land within the boundary or designated envelope of a village, town or city which provides, or has the potential to provide, environmental, social and/or economic benefits to communities, whether direct or indirect" (Kit Campbell Associates, 2001: 62). This definition highlights the relationship between urban public open spaces (UPOS) and sustainable neighbourhoods, especially as it relates to the social, ecological and economic roles of such spaces in structuring sustainable neighbourhoods, whilst sustaining the character of cities or communities. The environmental benefits and opportunities of UPOS focus on three main components, namely maintenance of biodiversity through the conservation and enhancement of urban habitats; landscape and cultural heritage; reduction of pollution; moderation of extreme temperatures and contribution to cost-effective sustainable urban drainage systems, and provision for sustainable management practices (Swanwick, Dunnett & Woolley, 2003: 104; Wooley, 2003: 49). In addition, UPOS contribute to habitat protection, lower air-pollution levels, flooding alleviation, and water management. To justify the economic sustainability of UPOS, Cilliers, Timmermans, Van den Goorbergh, and Slijkhuis (2015: 215) state that UPOS make cities attractive, enhance tourist spending, and attract external visitors and investment.

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) (2005: 9) postulates that the aforementioned aspects enhance neighbourhood identity and sense of belonging; attraction of an economically active workforce and businesses for investment purposes; creation of job opportunities, recreation and enjoyments as well as cultural festivities that attract visitors, and have a positive impact

on the value of the surrounding properties. Scholars such as Zhou and Rana (2011: 175) and Bromell and Hyland (2007: 13) maintain that UPOS provide social benefits to the citizens, and promote social inclusion, integration and interaction, recreational opportunities, social cohesion, and identity. There is significant environmental awareness and education regarding the value and usefulness of these spaces (CABE Space, 2005: 9; Wakaba, 2016: 26).

Li, Sun, Li, Hao, Li, Qian, Liu and Sun (2016: 1) affirm the integral role of UPOS within urban environments through fostering resilience. However, these spaces are becoming extinct, due to rapid urbanisation, poor sustenance and management, poor enforcement of land-use regimes, and a low level of prioritisation. This reality is affecting the spatial patterns of urban land, thereby making it difficult for planners to achieve sustainable neighbourhoods (Toba, 2020: 446). In addition, urbanisation has been identified as a major contributor to UPOS extinction (UN-Habitat, 2016). Li *et al.* (2016: 2) and Mensah (2014: 6) reiterate that some countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia have lost open spaces, due to rapid urbanisation. Poor sustenance and poor management of UPOS have created a gap for encroachment. This challenge persists in a number of African countries (Mensah, 2014: 6).

Whilst limited studies have sought to investigate the nexus between UPOS planning and management and encroachment in developing country contexts, particularly within South Africa, fewer studies have sought to explore the incidence of this phenomenon in townships around major cities (McConnachie & Shackleton, 2010: 244-248; Shackleton & Blair, 2013: 104-112). Further to the scant attention accorded to UPOS in these contexts, the paucity of studies is seeking to elicit multi-stakeholder perspectives towards the identification of enablers of UPOS encroachment. In Shackleton and Blair (2013: 104-112), Willemse (2018: 915-934),

and Busayo, Kalumba and Orimoloye (2019: 1-9), respondents comprised households dwelling in urban areas where these parks are situated. This article, through its findings, contributes towards filling these gaps. It elicits the views of the planners at local government level within the township context, using the Freedom Square township exemplar within the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality and relevant community stakeholders in the factors enabling the encroachment of UPOS in their locality. It is expected that the identification of these factors from a multi-stakeholder perspective will facilitate the development of an inclusive strategy for curbing the rising incidence of UPOS encroachment, thus allowing the community to derive the benefits associated with sustainable neighbourhoods. This assumption is premised on the criticality of user perceptions concerning the utility of open spaces to their sustenance thereof (Abbasi, Alalouch & Bramley, 2016: 194).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Criticality of urban public open spaces in engendering sustainable neighbourhoods

Urban public open spaces (UPOS) are indeed integral parts of sustainable neighbourhoods and do contribute to the sustenance of such neighbourhoods (Stessens, Khan, Huysmans & Canters, 2017: 329; Nochian, Tahir, Maulan & Rakhshandehroo, 2015: 29). They are known to promote physical activity, psychological well-being and health, improve the urban living environments, maintain biodiversity, and promote sustainable development (McConnachie & Shackleton, 2010: 248; Meyer, 2011: 12; Nochian *et al.*, 2015: 29). UPOS have been associated with various uses such as parks, gardens, sports fields, cemeteries, and golf courses (Stessens *et al.*, 2017: 329), streets and squares, city parks, festival prayer grounds, playgrounds, spaces within residential areas,

as well as shopping malls and entertainment complexes (Mandeli, 2019: 1). Based on the foregoing, the contributions of UPOS towards achieving sustainable neighbourhood through space management, space function, and sustainable landscape (Herzele & Wiedemann, 2003: 111; Al-Hagla, 2008: 3; Liu, Zhang & Zhang, 2020: 2) are easily discerned. Whereas space management refers to aspects such as sustainable lifestyle, community participation, sense of space, and resource management, the space function focuses on car reliance and the need to travel, while a sustainable landscape promotes self-sustaining and regulatory systems (Al-Hagla, 2008: 3). All these aspects are essential requirements for the development of a sustainable neighbourhood.

Having established the significance of UPOS in the propagation of sustainable neighbourhoods and improved liveability for citizens, the increasing disappearance of such spaces is cause for concern. The disappearance of UPOS in developing countries remains worrisome and has necessitated investigation by academic scholars working within such contexts (McConnachie & Shackleton, 2010: 244; Mehta, 2014: 53; Nochian *et al.*, 2015: 32). These scholars have sought to determine the factors contributing to the extinction of UPOS within the context of the developing countries. South Africa fares no different from other developing countries regarding UPOS encroachment (McConnachie & Shackleton, 2010: 244). The country's chequered apartheid history is reflected in UPOS distribution between sub-urban areas and 'townships', thereby negating the ability of the latter to attain sustainable neighbourhood status. This position, as well as the class-related influence on UPOS availability, access and usage have been succinctly articulated in previous studies (see McConnachie & Shackleton 2010: 244-248; Shackleton & Blair, 2013: 104-112; Willemse, 2018: 915-934).

Besides this, the distinction in perception regarding the utility of such spaces between developed and developing country divide has been known to influence the attitude and perspectives of planning practitioners within these contexts towards UPOS planning and management (Shackleton & Blair, 2013: 104-112). Shackleton and Blair (2013: 104-105) elucidated distinctions pertaining to the perception of UPOS benefits within the context of developed and developing countries. Chronicling the views of various authors, Shackleton and Blair (2013: 104-105) reiterate that, whereas UPOS were deemed beneficial within the contexts of developed countries, due to their contribution towards meeting the recreational, social and psychological needs of the citizenry, benefits associated with similar spaces within the contexts of the developing world comprised the following: provision of shade, fuelwood, fruits and medicinal plants.

### 2.2 Understanding the perceptions of urban stakeholders towards open space encroachment

#### 2.2.1 Mapping urban stakeholders for sustainable neighbourhoods

Freeman (1984: 46) defined 'stakeholder' as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". According to Walker, Bourne and Rowlinson (2008: 73), the term 'stakeholder' refers to "individuals or groups who have an interest or some aspect of rights or ownership in the project, and can contribute to, or be impacted by either the work or the outcomes of the project". To delineate the 'urban stakeholder' from the conventional definition, Campbell (2016: 41) described this stakeholder category as referring to "a group of individuals with different backgrounds, roles and expertise who represent different aspects of the urban complexity". Urban stakeholders are categorised into two broad classifications. The



first category of urban stakeholders consists of those who are involved in the delivery of projects. This category consists of experts such as planners, project managers, developers, investors, environmentalists, and human settlement practitioners. Campbell (2016: 41) maintains that the group of individuals who may be affected directly or indirectly by a project belong in the second category. The users of urban land (urban public open spaces), property owners and community members encroaching on open spaces belong to the latter category. All these individuals have a common interest in planning practice, or even in the creation of sustainable communities.

### 2.2.2 Value conflicts of urban stakeholders on urban public open space

Urban stakeholders involved in planning projects display different values and perceptions regarding the usefulness and values of UPOS. According to De Groot (2006:177), these values are based on ecological sustainability, equity, cultural perceptions, and cost-effectiveness. In addition, Carmona, De Magalhães and Edwards (2002: 147) suggest that urban stakeholder perceptions range between economic, social, and environmental values. For urban planners, the main concern lies in achieving the creation of sustainable communities while meeting the demands for recreational space and environmental quality (Campbell, 2016: 16). In terms of the economic value, investors and developers are mainly concerned about securing investment. UPOS make cities attractive and enhance tourist spending, thereby engendering economic growth. Furthermore, ecologists and conservationists aim at conserving open space, thereby protecting the existing natural values. This refers to the demand-and-supply approach (Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007: 4). The demand approach puts emphasis on the satisfaction of communal needs, whereas the supply approach focuses on the conservation of the natural environment.

However, community members concern themselves with safety and security, increased cultural and social vitality, better quality of life that include better and improved health, more inclusive open spaces, sense of place, and accessible environments (Carmona *et al.*, 2002: 167). For example, community members without adequate shelter tend to place housing value on any open space, hence the incidence of UPOS encroachment. Toba (2020: 443) attributes the gradual disappearance of open spaces to the premium placed on housing value by urban stakeholders in various communities. Politicians are expected to abide to the code of conduct and set of ethics stipulated by local government (Watson, 2003: 397). Watson (2009: 158), however, observes that community members are not keen to accept decisions taken by politicians if they impact negatively on the well-being of the communities. In planning projects, as stated by Watson (2003: 400), politicians normally deviate from the norms and standards as set by the municipal code of conduct to ensure that projects go ahead. Often, this is done to enable re-election. For instance, politicians would support UPOS encroachment, leaving planners with no choice but to enforce rezoning of urban land to accommodate such encroachments.

From the foregoing, it can be discerned that different urban stakeholders' values and perceptions lead to value conflicts that negate the quest for sustainable neighbourhoods. Such value conflicts also contribute to rapid changes in land use and occupancy patterns on UPOS. This is evident in the gradual disappearance of urban public open spaces, the emergence of informal settlements, and urban sprawl. Haaland and Van den Bosch (2015: 764) indicate that these conflicts result from a lack of understanding of different existing perceptions about the value and usefulness of open spaces. These value conflicts influence urban open space encroachment. Other factors that contribute to the encroachment of urban open spaces include planners'

failure to manage and implement land-use regimes, planner's use of outdated town-planning schemes, and delays in approval of land-use change applications (Haaland & Van den Bosch, 2015: 765).

Planners and other urban stakeholders involved in planning and managing open spaces need to develop measures to curb the incidence of encroachment. Effective planning, strategic and holistic plans, as well as legal frameworks must be formulated and implemented by urban stakeholders. In addition, the social sustainability dimensions must be considered, by enabling linkages between neighbourhoods, open spaces and community assets to address issues concerning accessibility. Poor accessibility, due to location of UPOS, has been flagged as making salient contributions to the encroachment of such spaces (CSIR 2005: 1; Rahman & Zhang 2018: 3; Nasution & Zahrah 2014: 589).

Improved levels of sustainability literacy must be encouraged, as this renders community members knowledgeable about the need for the protection and conservation of open spaces (Cohen, Wiek, Kay & Harlow 2015: 8710). In addition, Nature-based Solutions (NbS) offer solutions to tackle socio-environmental challenges. The European Commission (2015: 5) define NbS as solutions that are inspired and supported by nature. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2016:13), such solutions are cost-effective and provide environmental, social, and economic benefits, thereby playing an integral part in fostering human health, well-being, and social cohesion.

However, the non-participation of community members during the planning of projects for sustainable neighbourhoods remains worrisome, as this negates effective management of value conflicts at the planning stages. Haaland and Van den Bosch (2015: 764) suggest that the involvement of different urban stakeholder categories in UPOS planning and management

processes remained crucial to curbing encroachment. Furthermore, such inclusion of, and interaction between stakeholders increases the sense of place and ownership among community members. Without such levels of ownership among the community members, attracting their commitment to the management of such UPOS will prove an arduous task (Mashalaba, 2013: 98). In addition, such engagement with the community enables the identification and incorporation of cultural attributes in the planning, design and management of UPOS (Mwaniki, 2019: 1587-1599; Woolley, 2003: 31; Özgüner, 2011: 600). Therefore, it is imperative that the perspectives of these stakeholders be elicited towards enabling, identifying, and managing their diverse values concerning the utility of UPOS.

### 3. STUDY AREA: MANGAUNG

Over the years, Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, like many municipalities in South African cities, has lost a sizeable number of UPOS in the townships to encroachment for residential purposes. The incidence of encroachment of the UPOS in Freedom Square township in Bloemfontein has become a societal malaise. With different urban stakeholders involved in the planning and management of UPOS in Bloemfontein/Mangaung townships, there is often a lack of understanding concerning the value and usefulness of open spaces. This has created value conflicts in terms of the quest for sustainable neighbourhoods in Freedom Square township, Bloemfontein. Evidence of these value conflicts include divergent perceptions from different urban stakeholders, namely planning, recreational, environmental, housing, cultural, and economic (Sinxadi & Campbell, 2020). The difference in values has brought practical and theoretical difficulties upon the planners. Even though the municipal Council took a resolution in 1998 indicating that families who occupy urban land illegally, which was hitherto not

earmarked for residential purposes, will not be accommodated in terms of town planning, surveying and provision of services, certain open spaces in Mangaung townships were rezoned from "Public Open Space" to "Residential". This affected the spatial patterns of urban land within the municipality as the encroachment on UPOS became common practice in Mangaung townships (Figure 1).

### 4. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative case study research design was adopted for this study. Scholars such as Creswell and Poth (2018: 96) and Gay, Mills and Airasian (2011: 446) allude to the utility of the case study research design in availing the researcher with unbridled opportunities to explore a bounded system and to collect thoroughly detailed, in-depth, contextual data pertaining to the phenomenon being investigated. The case study research design also allows the researcher to deploy various tools for the purposes of data collection and analysis within the bounded system (Yin, 2011: 130). Accordingly, three UPOS case studies (erven 37321, 35180, and 50763, Mangaung) were selected to serve as multiple cases for the

research. In selecting the cases, the authors decided to explore making a comparison between the open spaces that were encroached for housing purposes and for recreational purposes. The aim was to gauge the perceptions of different stakeholders involved in planning and management of open spaces regarding the value and utility of such spaces. The authors also ensured that the participants involved in planning for UPOS, community members who encroached the open spaces and those owing properties surround the open spaces were selected. These criteria were developed to engender the selection of cases to support the principles of theoretical and literal replication (Yin, 2014: 61).

#### 4.1 Sampling

Data were collected through a mix of semi-structured interviews and focus-group interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 114).

Whereas the former was used for collecting data from a purposively selected sample of 10 planners working in the local government department, the latter was utilised for data collection from a purposively selected sample of 10 community

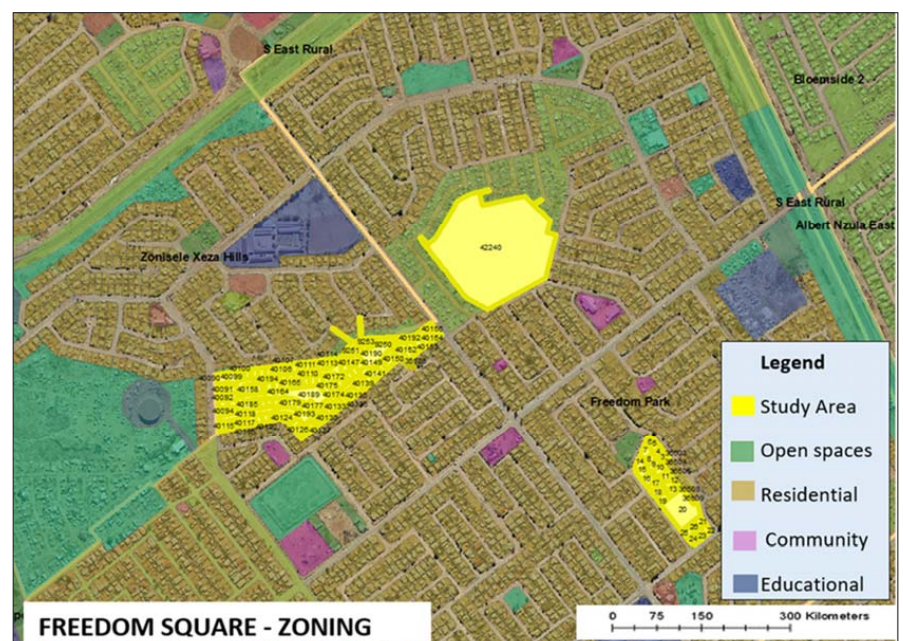


Figure 1: Urban public open spaces in Freedom Square township, Bloemfontein encroached by dwellers

Source: Maps retrieved from MMM GIS Division, August 2019



representatives dwelling in residential neighbourhoods within the selected cases or in proximity to these cases (see Table 1). Purposive sampling, as applied to qualitative research, involves the selection of participants who are deemed able to contribute to the phenomenon being investigated, due to their possession of relevant knowledge or experience (Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2015: 332). Furthermore, this sampling method allows the researcher to rely on his/her own experience or previous research in selecting the sample and, in most cases, the researcher is familiar with the study area and the participants (Wagner, Kawulich & Garner, 2012: 93). Semi-structured interviews avail researchers with the flexibility to explore the complexity of the research problem from the interviewee's perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 110). Open-ended questions were employed to elicit answers from interviewees. Central to the interviews was the need to establish the intrinsic values, which the planning professionals working within the study context brought to bear during decision-making processes pertaining to UPOS planning and management within the study area.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 344) have buttressed the potency of focus-group discussion in facilitating the elicitation of group beliefs and perceptions in qualitative research. In this study, the focus-group discussion session was used to engage community representatives in terms of their perceptions concerning the enablers of UPOS encroachment. The focus-group discussion protocol was designed accordingly and

included discussion points pertaining to the perceptions of participants regarding the value and usefulness of urban public open spaces.

The lead author had worked as a town planner at the municipality and the study area formed part of a project with which she had previously been involved. The familiarity with the context contributed immensely towards the ease of participant recruitment. Ward councillors were engaged as gatekeepers for the study area. The author conducted focus groups at Atang Primary School in Freedom Square township with the previously described sample.

The sample population selected for both the semi-structured interviews and the focus-group discussion sessions was considered information rich, as it included town planning professionals, human settlements and parks and cemeteries professionals, ward councillors, residents of Freedom Square occupying urban open spaces, and those staying in the vicinity of the encroached-upon urban open spaces.

#### 4.2 Data collection

The municipal manager of MMM granted, by written consent, permission to interview the municipal officials involved in planning projects. Consent was also granted to access the necessary archival records from the employees of the Municipality. Municipality officials and other interviewees were interviewed for an average of 40 minutes at their offices between July and September 2019. Two weeks prior to the interviews, the interviewees were provided with a detailed background

of the study. Questions posed were divided into three parts. The first part (questions 1-5) sought to explore the participants' understanding of urban public open space planning. The second part (questions 6-7) addressed the impact of community participation, while the final part (questions 8-10) sought to elicit their perceptions of probable challenges affecting UPOS management.

#### 4.3 Data analysis

The author took notes during the interviews, whereas the focus group discussion session was recorded using an audio recorder, with the consent of the participants. These recordings were subsequently transcribed *verbatim*. The authors categorised various statements as contained in the interview and focus-group discussion transcripts independently according to a combination of pre-set and emergent themes after having read through the transcripts severally and compared notes on the similarities and dissimilarities. By so doing, authors engaged in multi-investigator triangulation (Patton, 1999:1193) as a means of verifying and validating the qualitative analysis process. The process adopted for data analysis is referred to as thematic analysis, a variant of the qualitative content analysis (Creswell, 2013: 185). In deciding on the appropriate pre-set themes to use, the authors initially relied on the study's theoretical construct and aim. This culminated in the choice of the main theme: enablers of UPOS encroachment in townships situated within major cities. Having arrived at a consensus on the main theme, the authors engaged with the transcripts with the objective of identifying the enablers, as mentioned by the participants. In the aftermath of the identification of these enablers, the authors proceeded with the categorization of these enablers into sub-themes based on similarities. They also tried to identify any patterns in the data sets. For instance, they sought to establish if any of the identified enablers were peculiar to a certain urban stakeholder category. Based

Table 1: Participants for UPOS1, UPOS2 and UPOS3

Category	Planning professions	Code	Cases	Total
Interviews	Town planning	TRP1-4	UPOS1,2,3	4
	Human settlements	HS1-4	UPOS1,2,3	4
	Parks and cemeteries	H1-2	UPOS1,2,3	2
Focus group	Ward councillors	WC1-2	UPOS1,2,3	2
	Community members	CM1-8	UPOS1,2,3	8
Total				20

on the entire data set, these enablers were refined into five specific themes which are defined as: Location/access, Education/literacy, Maintenance, Value, and Culture.

## 5. FINDINGS

Findings from the semi-structured and focus-group interviews are the views elucidated by the planning professionals and the community representatives and are shown concurrently according to the final defined themes for the “enablers of Urban Public Open Space Encroachment in Townships situated in Major Cities”.

### 5.1 Location/access

This theme captured the participants' general views on the location/access issues regarding UPOS. Access to UPOS is critical, because it is regarded as one of the challenges that users encounter, depending on its location. Evidence from the interviews indicates that planning of UPOS1 and UPOS2 was mainly done using the opportunistic model of planning. This led to non-functionality and thus encroachment of such spaces. Admittedly, there was consensus among interviewees that UPOS1 and UPOS2 were located in areas that were considered to be problematic and undevelopable during the planning phases. This creates problems of invasion for residential purposes, whilst limiting access for recreational purposes by intending persons. During the focus-group discussions, community members raised concerns about the threat constituted by such open spaces to their safety and security, due to the poor levels of maintenance and attendant state of disrepair evident in a UPOS. A similar sentiment was reported in Nasution and Zahrah (2014: 589). Accordingly, encroachment for residential purposes emerged as a credible option for ensuring that such spaces were not used by miscreants. These suggestions indicate the need for proper evaluation of decisions pertaining to the siting of these UPOS. CSIR

(2005: 1) maintains that open spaces should be appropriately located and vegetated, sufficiently large and interconnected with sustainability function within a neighbourhood. They should also incorporate natural environments. There must be a balance between the natural and the built environments. In situating the UPOS within a settlement, care must be taken to ensure that access is prioritised. Access in this sense relates to the maximum distance that the users should travel for them to use these spaces. The farther away such space is, the greater the propensity for such areas to be encroached upon for residential purposes. To promote access, these UPOS must be connected to the parkways, where possible, and must promote multi-functionality and visual interest. Smaller UPOS can be located within easy walking distance, close to business and community facilities. Rahman and Zhang (2018: 3) outline the criteria of accessibility to UPOS and this includes linkages, walkability, connectedness, and convenience.

### 5.2 Education/literacy

This theme captured the planners' and residents' existing literacy levels on sustainable development of UPOS. Næss (2001: 506) indicates that a neighbourhood must ensure that the residents have their vital needs met in a sustainable way and it must not conflict with sustainable development expected at a global level. In planning for sustainable neighbourhoods, the level of sustainability education/literacy possessed by relevant stakeholders must be considered, especially prior to and during community participation workshops. Cohen *et al.* (2015: 8710) allude that planners have been challenged by community members with low sustainability literacy levels regarding what is expected to deliver sustainable neighbourhoods. Planners also need to have an in-depth understanding of the value of UPOS in terms of its sustainability. This will improve their appreciation of the levels of sustainability ethos to incorporate

into sustainable neighbourhoods during the planning phases.

Furthermore, such appreciation will be evident in the nature of the UPOS being delivered within their planning contexts. With the gradual disappearance of UPOS in Mangaung townships, the sustainable literacy levels of planners and residents becomes questionable. Likewise, when community representatives were asked similar questions, they displayed low levels of sustainability literacy, feigning ignorance about the consequences of unsustainable neighbourhoods. Their interests bordered on the shortage of affordable housing, as they expressed their preference for residential dwellings instead of having open spaces for recreational purposes.

*“We understand the meaning and the importance of parks and we need them in our community, but we need a place to stay” – CM2.*

Residents in UPOS1 and UPOS2 showcased their lack of understanding of the usefulness of UPOS but indicated their willingness to be educated on this.

*“We need more educational awareness on the benefits of parks so that we can be able to manage them. We have seen a park in Kagisanong that is well maintained, fenced and secure ... we also want that in our area” – CM1.*

Within UPOS3, residents were engaged in an Adopt-a-Park process, thereby serving as an indication of their awareness about the utility of UPOS in their vicinity. The participants indicated that they maintained the recreational park as a voluntary initiative to foster a sustainable neighbourhood. Therefore, it is evident that residents from UPOS possessed a greater degree of sustainability literacy when compared to their fellow participants. As custodians of planning projects, planners must play a lead role in ensuring that the key objectives of planning are achieved. Planners must promote community sustainability as part of planning education. This can be achieved

when there is balance between environmental, economic, and social values through the prioritisation of context-reflective trade-offs among the three dimensions. However, the success of such endeavour will be predicated on these professionals' level of sustainability literacy.

### 5.3 Maintenance

This theme captured the participants' existing opinions on the state of maintenance or disrepair of the UPOS. The present state of maintenance or disrepair of UPOS created a gap for encroachment and thus led to changes in spatial patterns of land use. Most of the UPOS encroached were not maintained properly. The residents opined that this conflict could be avoided if they are allowed to participate, as key stakeholders, in the management of open spaces. Mashalaba (2013: 98) specifies that all stakeholders involved in planning projects must be part of the maintenance of UPOS. Interviewees also believed that the challenge of UPOS disrepair could be curbed by the conduct of open space audits. This audit includes the location, size, characteristics, quality, type, and functioning of the open spaces (Kit Campbell Associates, 2001: 55). The needs of the users, the quality of the physical features, and the spatial structure of the space contribute to the effective use of UPOS. These have a positive impact on people's quality of life, including their physical and psychological well-being.

In addition, the state of maintenance of the UPOS depends on the level of prioritisation by urban stakeholders. Low prioritisation has led to open space encroachments. This was affirmed by a section of participants.

*"Parks in Freedom Square are not maintained as compared to the parks in town. Their state does not show any attractiveness at all and we end up dumping rubbish and they are also used for criminal activities"* – CM1.

The SPLUMA (RSA, 2013: 19) maintains that each municipality must have a land-use scheme for enforcing relevant laws. Excerpts

from the interviews and focus groups position UPOS1 and UPOS 2 as an exemplar of the dysfunctional nature of land-use regimes. The interviewees acknowledged that these spaces were poorly maintained, hence the encroachment.

*"Most of the open spaces are not developed and maintained and people think that it is land for grabs. They are neglected and this lead[s] to encroachment. Also, the state of open spaces attract[s] people to them and some are desperate for residential sites if they see that nothing is done to them."* – TP1.

Still, from a town-planning perspective, the challenge of the disrepair of UPOS lies in the absence of strong support by the municipality and budget constraints for open spaces. This was found to be the major barrier for the state of maintenance. The interviewees also raised the issue of low levels of prioritisation. During planning, other land uses such as residential, business and community facilities are given high priority in terms of the monetary value with which they are associated.

Other challenges mentioned by the interviewees include lack of resources, poor management, and dysfunctional by-laws for open spaces. HS1 highlighted this, stating:

*"Funding for management of public open spaces is lacking, therefore, in order to prioritize such spaces, a special grant must be set aside to manage them. Also, adopting the catalytic programmes will assist in curbing the issue of low prioritization of public open spaces"*.

The Adopt-a-Park process was raised as an option for better maintenance of the UPOS. This has been successful in UPOS3, where the volunteers to the process were assisted by the municipality in the form of issuing the equipment for managing the recreational park. Surprisingly, community members of UPOS1 and UPOS2 commented that the state of the UPOS within their neighbourhood was a major concern, as compared to UPOS3, which is secure and well-managed. They are willing to be educated

on how to value and manage the open spaces that are still vacant in their community. The existence of such levels of willingness has been highlighted in a similar study (Abbasi *et al.*, 2016: 204).

### 5.4 Value

This theme captured the participants' existing opinions regarding the value conflicts on the UPOS utility to the community. Carmona *et al.* (2002: 147) state that urban stakeholders have different perspectives about the urban environments, in general. Their perspectives range from economic, to social, and to environmental values in planning. In addition, the different values of urban stakeholders lead to value conflicts in planning and managing sustainable neighbourhoods. According to Haaland and Van den Bosch (2015: 764), there must be an extensive interaction among the urban stakeholders involved in planning projects. This can help curb the incidence of UPOS encroachment. A balance theory, as stated by Luomala, Laaksonen and Leipamaa (2004: 568), is used to understand how the urban stakeholders can resolve value conflicts on the UPOS utility to community. Drawing from the interviews, values such as planning, environmental, economic, recreation, housing, and cultural experiences were identified. For instance, participants CM1 and CM2 reiterated that:

*"We cannot prioritise parks while we do not have houses"*.

*"It is better if these spaces are used for housing because they are not safe spaces?"*.

Obviously, planners face problems in managing these conflicts. This much was attested to by TP3:

*"Truth is, there are value conflicts attached to the value of public open spaces. The community members value open spaces for housing as it is their primary need, not open spaces. People staying in this park encroached because they are in desperate need of housing. Another perception includes economic value ... As town planners, we are tired of fighting, if we are instructed to*



*subdivide municipal land, we comply. All the blame goes to us as town planners”.*

UPOS1 and UPOS2 were earmarked for recreational purposes but are currently used for residential purposes. The interviewees indicated that these open spaces are currently settlements for infill planning. Amendment of the General Plan by means of the closure of a park and the rezoning process is followed to accommodate people who have encroached upon these spaces. Surprisingly, community members for UPOS1 and UPOS2 lamented that they understood the value of open spaces, but their priority was housing as their primary need, not open spaces. This was buttressed by CM2’s assertion:

*“We have realized that only two parks are left in the whole of Freedom Square and we have also failed ourselves in that we dump rubbish there. We can form a team and manage these spaces, but our challenge is that we cannot manage parks (which we see just as a desert) while we do not have proper housing (which is the main course)”.*

UPOS3 is used for recreational purposes by the community. Interviewees agreed that this was one of the successful recreational parks in Mangaung townships that had been adopted and maintained by the community members.

## 5.5 Culture

This theme captured the participants’ existing views on the lack of accommodation of cultural/contextual peculiarities of the community in the design of UPOS. UPOS have a cultural component that is usually connected to the prevailing contextual social and environmental values. Different approaches to planning, design and management of UPOS are used to promote ethnicity. These include “symbolic reference, experiential reference and facility provision, with the proviso that the approach taken should respond to the local community, the site and the context” (Woolley, 2003: 31). Furthermore, these approaches play a crucial role

for people from different cultural backgrounds. UPOS must also respond to the needs of the diverse cultural groups and their cultural contexts. The cultural aspects for UPOS influence the perceptions and preferences of the users (Özgüner, 2011: 600). CM2 highlighted this challenge when he stated that

*“We are people of different cultures ... if we reside in flats where we cannot claim that this is our property, how are we expected to perform ancestral rituals. How will we be recognised by our ancestors if we do not have proper yards? Where will we perform any cultural ceremony?”*

Planners must, therefore, understand the different cultural contexts of the communities for which they are planning. This is important in developing the appropriate planning, design, and management strategies for the UPOS in sustainable neighbourhoods. Due to different perceptions on the utility of the UPOS, involvement of different urban stakeholders in the design of these spaces is important. The inability to communicate properly among different urban stakeholders involved in the planning, design, and management of UPOS has created challenges for open space planning. This includes lack of accommodation of cultural peculiarities of the community in designing UPOS. The interviewees confirmed that there was a disconnect or gap in communication regarding the planning of UPOS1 and UPOS2.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the lack of collaboration among stakeholders.

*“They do not regard us as essential. We have a role to play in providing or enhancing recreation and help[ing] the communities – CM4*

Such collaboration has been deemed important for fostering the successful delivery of urban open spaces (Mwaniki, 2019: 1587-1599). Most of the planning projects are outsourced to planning consultants who are not knowledgeable about the project area. Evidence gathered from the focus groups shows that community members from UPOS1 and UPOS2

were not involved in planning and design of planning project. From the foregoing, this challenge is linked to non-participatory level where the community does not have a voice. Professionals involved in the planning and design of UPOS1 and UPOS2 were, therefore, criticised by the community, because they did not consider the needs and preferences of the residents. One of the participants (CM2) enthused:

*“Even with just public meetings, sometimes we are side-lined and be told that the meeting is only for people staying in Freedom Square and this is confusing because we are part of this area but we are living in shacks”.*

However, this perspective was countered by an interviewee who indicated that the participation of community members in most instances was non-productive. According to this interviewee (H2),

*“[i]t was going to be ideal if the whole community was involved in community participation, otherwise, currently it just becomes the issue of compliance. Not everyone is represented at this stage. A few individuals or classes form part of the participation and because it takes place during the day, some people come drunk ... If you look into the outcome of that meeting, nothing is tangible from it”.*

Residents from UPOS3 formed part of the planning and design of the recreational park. The interviewees indicated that this was a project that had been identified by the community as an Integrated Development Planning. The preferences and expectations of the community were reached.

In summary, the enablers for UPOS encroachment can be listed as the lack of access, low levels of sustainability literacy, poor maintenance of the sites, poor management of the extant value conflicts between the community and the planning professionals, and the non-accommodation of cultural/contextual peculiarities of the community during the planning and design phases of the UPOS lifecycle.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to gauge the perceptions of different urban stakeholders regarding urban public open space planning. Planners are faced with theoretical and practical problems in achieving the key objectives of planning; that is, the creation of a sustainable neighbourhood. It is quite clear that different urban stakeholders involved in planning and management of UPOS have different perceptions regarding the value and usefulness of UPOS. These perceptions include planning, environmental, social, and housing values. The different perceptions have given rise to value conflicts and encroachment on UPOS. Evidence from the case studies highlights attributes resulting in the encroachment of UPOS. These include urban stakeholders' lack of understanding about the values of UPOS, dysfunctional use of land-use regimes, and disconnect among different urban stakeholders. Accordingly, it can be deduced that different perceptions of the urban stakeholders regarding urban open space planning impact on the encroachment of these spaces. From the study's findings, it is evident that the planner has a critical role to play in ensuring the effective planning, design, and implementation of the strategic plans, policies, and frameworks for open spaces. Planners can adopt the probable strategies to eliminate the incidence of encroachment on open spaces. From the foregoing, further research aims at developing and validating an appropriate framework for urban open space design and management by urban planning practitioners.

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