

On the margins

The city of Cape Town and organised crime

Khalil Goga

Recommendations

1 Sales of residential property should be monitored to identify exploitative transactions in which sellers are compelled to sell on account of odious debts owed to crime networks.

2 The reasons for illegality and illegal business should be better understood for effective solutions to be designed. For example, providing safe public spaces and legitimate regulated alcohol could reduce alcohol- and drug-related crimes.

3 It is important for planning and urban design processes to receive input on the effects of large development projects or redevelopments on crime trends.

4 The city should improve its relationship with communities in former non-white neighbourhoods. This should be done through working with a community while avoiding repressive policing practices. At the same time, incentives – which include enhanced safety – should be offered to encourage entrepreneurs to undertake economic activity in areas beyond the urban periphery.

Summary

This policy brief explores how the design of the city has affected the way criminal networks impact on governance in Cape Town. It does not purport to be comprehensive, but serves as an initial starting point for further study by highlighting some of the additional themes identified in broader research on crime and governance in contemporary African coastal cities.

AS CITIES AND ‘megacities’ increasingly become as important as nation states, their structure and design can drastically alter the fortunes and opportunities of their citizenry, whether positively or negatively. Within this context there has been a focus across disciplines on ‘shaping’ the city to be more functional, inclusive and sustainable.

Cities and organised crime

However, rapid changes have occurred in the global South, with states and cities becoming unable to deal with massive urbanisation and migration. This has led locals and immigrants alike to turn to informal or parallel sources of authority¹ for their social and economic needs. This can in turn lead to elevated levels of crime and an increase in the power of organised criminal groups. The United Nations (UN) report on human settlements states:

In rapidly growing cities, more people need food, housing, water supply, sanitation and employment to generate

incomes to buy basic services. This demand, in turn, generates many opportunities for productive, as well as criminal, responses to ever more stimulating and demanding social environments.²

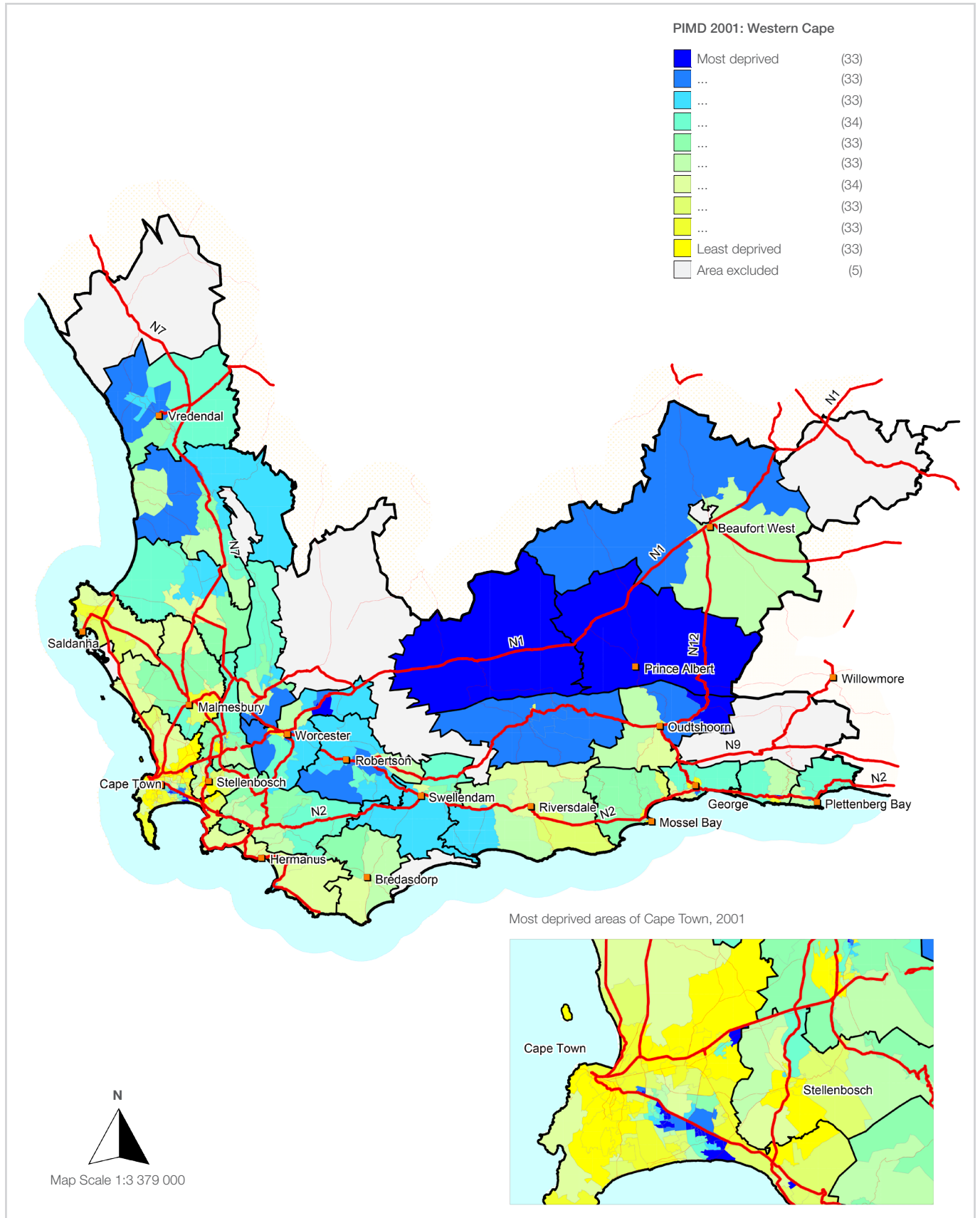
In terms of human security, the UN report states that urban crime has remained a major blight in both the developed and developing world that is continually exacerbated by inequalities between rich and poor.

However, urban planning and design have often focused on the safety and security of prospective residents from some forms of predatory and property crime, and often do not pay sufficient attention to networked and *organised crime*.

Cape Town in context

Historically, the roots of dysfunction in South African cities lie in their apartheid design. Cities were designed to prevent races from mixing, which was

Figure 1: Western Cape index of multiple deprivation 2001



Source: Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy, University of Oxford; Statistics South Africa; and Human Sciences Research Council, October 2005, <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/PMID/WCRoads.pdf>

entrenched by legislative tools and a repressive police force. Furthermore, the design of the cities also allowed the apartheid government to police non-white populations, and the government of the time undertook a number of measures to limit the movement and transportation of non-whites. Very little infrastructure development took place in non-white areas. Large areas – such as the Cape Flats in the Western Cape and Soweto in Gauteng – were regarded as ‘dormitory’ communities and ‘dumping grounds’ for non-whites. Historical, economic and social factors combined to render them growth zones for organised crime.

Within the city of Cape Town, like many other South African cities, non-whites were kept to the urban periphery, devoid of opportunity and out of the central business district (CBD). The concentration of wealth in white areas has reproduced the divisions on economic lines, with the urban poor (often non-white) remaining marginalised both economically and geographically.³ Figure 1 shows patterns of deprivation in Cape Town in 2001.

Despite the city’s claims of being a more ‘inclusive’ city, new projects such as WesCape⁴ outside of Cape Town have come under criticism by NGOs and academics for following ‘apartheid-style’ thinking in terms of ‘grand plans’ instead of creating inclusive and integrated cities.⁵

Successful urban interventions have been implemented in Cape Town on a smaller scale using urban design principles such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. Within the broader city these include the Urban Renewal Strategies initiated by President Thabo Mbeki in 2001 in Mitchells Plain and Khayelitsha and, more recently, Khayelitsha’s Violence Prevention Through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) strategy.⁶

VPUU exemplifies a holistic system of urban design, gathering both national and international attention and support.⁷ Areas in and around the CBD such as Woodstock and Salt River that had high levels of gang activity have benefited from a mixture of city incentivisation⁸ schemes, community–state partnerships, growing economic activity and gentrification. This had led to increases in public safety, less noticeable gang activity and rising property values.

Simple changes, such as increased lighting and activity on the streets, can significantly reduce crime

Crime prevention principles applied to organised crime

The design of townships has come under consideration as a structural cause of crime, because development in many townships tended to be unplanned and to sprawl incrementally. In these areas the absence of pertinent infrastructure such as adequate housing, transport, lighting and social facilities combined with social ills to create dysfunctional societies.

During the Khayelitsha Commission of Enquiry – a commission set up to study the alleged breakdown of community–police relations and high levels of crime in Khayelitsha – it was continually reiterated that many social and criminal issues in the area can be limited by developed and focused planning alongside increases in police efficiency.⁹ The South African Police Service (SAPS) blamed its inability to patrol these areas on the way in which they are developed. For example, shanty towns and informal dwellings often do not have formalised house numbers, making it very difficult to locate addresses in an emergency.

Similarly, the roads may not be developed enough or wide enough for police vehicles to patrol and gain access to crime scenes. Yet it is not only

in informal settlements that the urban landscape may change the ability of law enforcement to do its job. Roads also can greatly alter the ability of criminals to evade capture or commit crime. Mitchells Plain – a more formal area, for example, with a number of alleys and alleyways – is more difficult to police and criminals can escape using a variety of routes. With this in mind, city officials sought to limit these alleys and close a number of them off.¹⁰

Similarly, it is argued that simple changes, such as increased lighting and activity on the streets, can significantly reduce crime. Lighting and activity can provide safety for those walking in the street, while neighbours can be an active source of vigilance and surveillance.¹¹

Design and planning can be used to limit the levels of organised crime with some of the same principles of limiting predatory crime. For example, making shops and business visible and building them closer together with sufficient lighting can protect vulnerable shop owners from extortion, which is common in many townships. Similarly, drug dealing on a street level often happens in corners where dealers can conduct their business discreetly and from which they can easily flee. Making it more difficult to evade capture and opening public spaces force dealers into houses, making the streets safer.

Housing

Failure to provide adequate housing can also result in the involvement of organised crime in a variety of ways. For example, in Khayelitsha criminals take advantage of the low purchasing power of members of the community who are building or renovating their houses. Criminals use cloned or stolen credit cards to purchase building supplies,

which they then sell at reduced prices. They are thereafter able to launder the proceeds of their ill gotten gains. The community members concerned do not see the results of the crime, and there is a separation between them and the victims of credit card scams. The polarisation fuelled by the deep inequality in the city can partly be blamed for what is in some cases a collusive relationship with criminal networks. Furthermore, this is the only way in which poorer residents can afford renovations.

other safer areas, this has not necessarily happened in the Cape Flats.

Gangs and gang leaders able to call on their own private security and to use violent means to enforce their claims become important investors and land owners and de facto authorities. Power over land can also be used to extort payments. It was found that in townships in Cape Town ‘shacklords’ are also protection racketeers that demand payment from new arrivals.

The majority of economic opportunity remains in the CBD and a few formerly white suburbs

Research in the suburb of Belhar found that gangs and drug lords are involved in the financing of real estate.¹² Furthermore, the social and economic control they have in certain regions means they are also able to buy up existing houses from families in economic distress at prices below the market value. They are able to do this by initially ‘offering’ support to families in dire and deteriorating situations, simultaneously increasing their indebtedness. Further down the line, the family has no choice but to sell to the gangsters, as the economic pressure is complemented by threats of violence.¹³ The crime network can then rent the property back to the initial owners, rent the property to others or sell the property at a significant markup.¹⁴

In New Rest at Gugulethu new arrivals have to pay R1,000 to ‘the local committee’, in addition to paying R1,500 for a shack. In Brown’s Farm a ‘local area committee’ charges between R100 and R200 for each of about 600 sites – which the committee does not own. Once local authorities build brick houses and grant freehold title deeds, the shacklords lose their power to exact and extract such payments.¹⁶

Providing adequate housing for citizens is an integral part of a safe and inclusive city. However, failure to monitor and maintain these buildings and spaces will lead to increases in organised criminal activities and the exploitation of people by those with power. Buildings themselves must be built in a way that can limit crime and organised crime.

Economic zones

Unlike many other cities in South Africa where the CBD became degraded and capital flight developed new economic centres, Cape Town managed to maintain and revitalise its city centre through a mixture of strong policing, municipal by-laws and community–state partnerships. The majority of economic opportunity remains in the CBD and a few formerly white suburbs. Renting or

Few legitimate investors are ready to take the risk and invest in suburbs like Belhar, especially in areas perceived to be more dangerous. This makes it easier for criminal groups to invest, because they have the coercive capacity to maintain buildings. Legitimate investors who do invest in these areas have to contend with the spectre of extortionate demands from gang leaders and with the real threat of violence.¹⁵ Thus, while property prices continually grow in the CBD and



CRIMINALS USE CLONED OR STOLEN CREDIT CARDS TO PURCHASE BUILDING SUPPLIES, WHICH THEY THEN SELL AT REDUCED PRICES

buying property in these areas is often out of reach for many.

Transport costs to and from these urban centres remain high, making many parts of the city unattainable. In addition, the development of the economic base in Cape Town has led to increased marginalisation as the services industries and tourism move to the forefront.¹⁷ Service industries often require certain skills and education levels that are not widely available. Tourism, on the other hand, has seen vast amounts of state capital pumped into developed areas that tourism will benefit from, leaving many on the sidelines.

The police have been using heavy-handed tactics that destroy the trust between them and citizens

The failure to include people in the economy can lead to organised crime becoming 'a noxious substitute for decent employment'.¹⁸ In order to increase access to areas outside the CBD and the main economic zones, special incentivisation schemes are required. Research suggests that 'there are emerging trends of bulk infrastructure spending and community-led partnerships that seek to unlock the economic potential; however, this progress has thus far been limited to retail development with no productive industrial development and expansion'.¹⁹ More worryingly for developers, as the Centre for Social Science Research has found, is that in Khayelitsha, concern over crime is the single most dominant perceived hindrance preventing the development of a small business.²⁰ It is therefore essential to make these places safe and protect businesses.

It is possible to gain a number of new insights on the economic and infrastructural make up of the city via the City of Cape Town's Economic Areas Management Programme which was developed to "assesses the market

performance and long-term growth potential of over seventy business precincts across the metropolitan region."²¹ Noticeably, many former non-white areas lack both performance and potential in comparison to former white areas and newer higher income suburbs.

In developing regions there is a trend toward informalisation, with individuals earning an income through unregulated employment, because the formal sector has been unable to provide the necessary jobs. Most employment in the informal sector is legal; however, a number of industries straddle the line between the legal and illegal and are

either ambivalent to or hostile to formal authority. An analysis of micro enterprises in Phillipi illustrates the extent to which illegal shebeens can become a part of the urban landscape. Shebeens occupy a peculiar position in many suburbs and often have an uncomfortable position with the law.

They have become commonplace and can be described as 'social hotspots' in townships. This is a result of historically enforced, unfair alcohol restrictions in non-white areas and the lack of entertainment and social facilities. Standing argues that the 'inability to turn to legitimate authorities to sort out disputes meant shebeen owners required the ability to act violently in order to provide protection against their rivals or to help withstand demands for protection money from local gangs'.²² However, the police have been unable to manage these enterprises effectively, using heavy-handed tactics that destroy the trust between citizens and the police.

Organised crime thrives in spaces where society and the state are dislocated by fitting into a niche position of providing state services, such as security, and goods, such as alcohol. Crime prevention

R1 000

THE AMOUNT NEW ARRIVALS HAVE TO PAY TO 'THE LOCAL COMMITTEE'

strategies should take this into account and further investigate the reason why shebeens occupy such a position. By providing safe public spaces and legitimate, properly regulated alcohol, these crimes could be limited.²³

Large infrastructure projects

Of note, there has been the development of large infrastructure projects across the country with the hope of creating 'top-down' urban transformation. These grand projects include the development of industrial, commercial or residential real estate. However, grand projects of this kind often result in a shifting of the balance of organised crime. One such grand project in Cape Town is Delft,

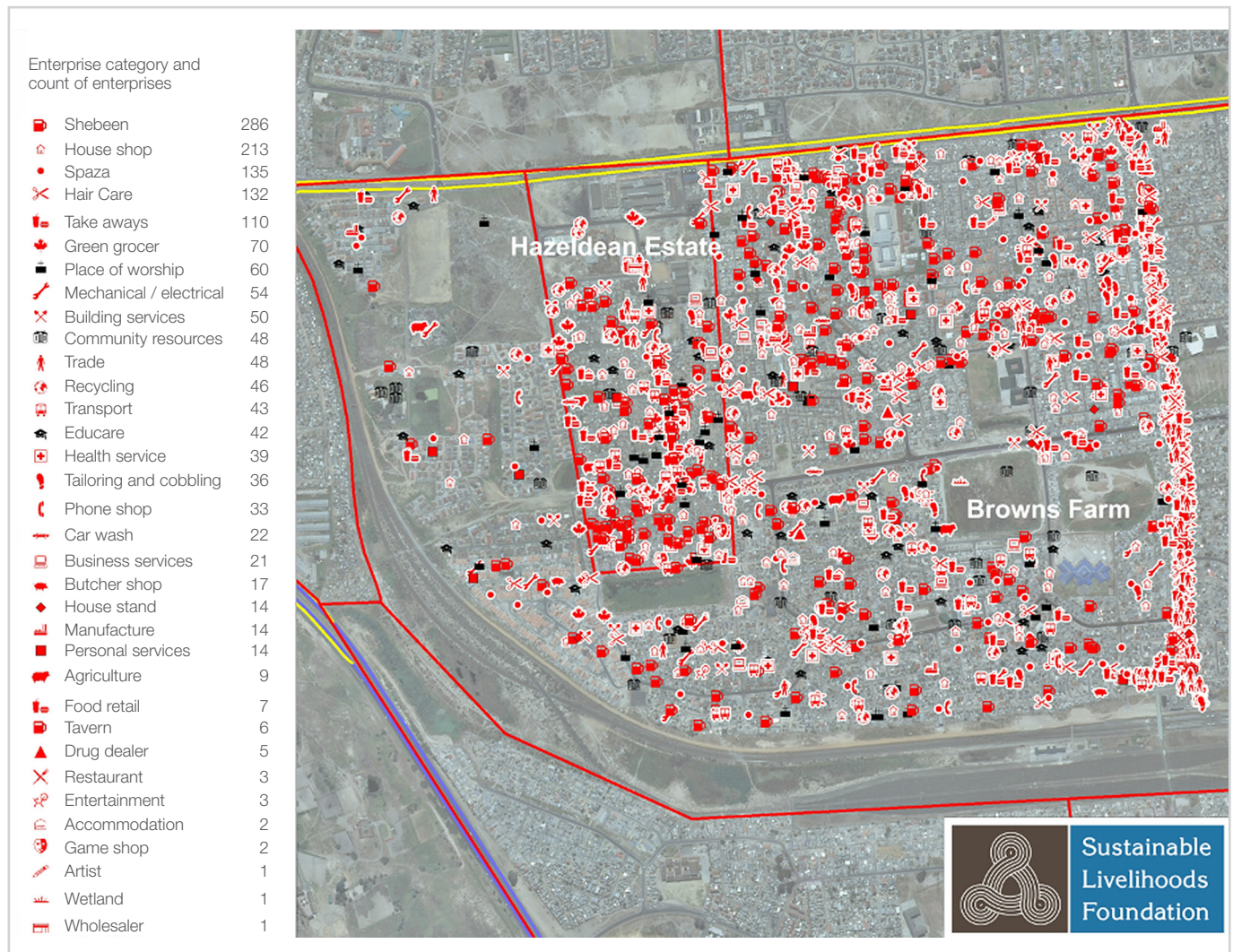
which was established as a housing project in the mid-1990s.

The organised crime that Delft suffers from differs from that in more established neighbourhoods such as Manenberg. While socioeconomic problems and gang-related issues plague both areas, the reasons for these differ greatly. In Delft the violence is often for 'turf' and those at the top of criminal networks are actively involved in the violence. This differs from other established neighbourhoods, where violence is displaced for other reasons and those at the top of the network use recruits to commit acts of violence. New suburbs, therefore, should always be built with

strong social and state capacity to counter organised crime before it becomes a problem.

On a smaller scale, a new mall, for example, will require a shifting of taxi routes and new routes to be developed. Those involved in the taxi industry and drug trafficking, and those who extort drivers will therefore be affected by the new development, which can result in significant violence as they reposition themselves. The police believe that their concerns are not often taken into consideration in urban planning processes and that their increased participation can make a significant difference in limiting crime.²⁴

Figure 2: Distribution of micro enterprises by enterprise category, Browns Farm and Hazeldean Estate, Philippi, November 2011



Source: Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, 2011, <http://livelihoods.org.za/>



It is important that those designing and planning the city consult with crime intelligence over the ramifications of grand design projects. Indications are that the taxi industry, despite being a key component of the public transport sector, is little understood by city planners.

Conclusion

Cape Town suburbs can be assessed according to the structural elements that define them, which can include employment, housing and access to infrastructure. The majority of the informal settlements and suburbs surrounding the city lack many fundamental elements, making them increasingly dysfunctional and rife for the infiltration of organised crime. Should the state take steps to reduce this basic dysfunction in society, there is less reliance on illegal structures because they become less important to areas' functioning economy. The allure of gang culture also virtually disappears as people find gainful employment beyond gangs. In order to effectively respond to these issues of crime, urban design and city planning must incorporate crime prevention strategies into the built environment.

Notes

- 1 'Parallel sources of authority' is a term used to describe non-state sources of authority that provide the citizenry with functions usually reserved for the state. These parallel authorities can include religious bodies, criminal organisations and businesses, among others.
- 2 UN (United Nations) Human Settlements Programme, *Enhancing urban safety and security: global report on human settlements*, New York: UN, 2007, 3.
- 3 'Cape Town was conceived with a white-only centre, surrounded by contained settlements for the black and coloured labour forces to the east, each hemmed in by highways and rail lines, rivers and valleys, and separated from the affluent white suburbs by protective

buffer zones of scrubland' (O. Wainwright, *Designing over Khayelitsha's cracks*, *Mail & Guardian*, 9 May 2014, <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-05-08-designing-over-khayelitshas-cracks>.

- 4 <http://wescapelife.co.za/>.
- 5 R Davis, *Is the future of Cape Town 25km from Cape Town?*, *Daily Maverick*, 16 May 2013, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-05-17-is-the-future-of-cape-town-25km-from-cape-town>.
- 6 <http://www.vpuu.org.za/>. These principles include the following:
 - *Surveillance and visibility ('eyes on the street')*
The design of public spaces that have clear lines of sight and good lighting to ensure maximum public visibility.
 - *Territoriality ('owned' spaces)*
The sense of ownership a community has over its environment that encourages residents to become involved in reducing crime.
 - *Defined access and movement*
Easy access and well-defined routes to and through a public place help develop a pedestrian's understanding of the space and perceptions of safety.
 - *Image and aesthetics (dignity)*
A positive image can be achieved for a place by ensuring a 'human scale' and using appropriate materials, colours, landscaping and lighting to encourage high levels of public activity.
 - *Physical barriers*
The strengthening of building facades and spaces to improve personal safety.
 - *Maintenance and management (pride and ownership)*
Well-managed and well-maintained environments encourage a sense of pride and ownership.
- 7 The VPUU strategy uses specific design 'tools' to implement the safety principles and these include the introduction of a clear signage and way-finding system, creating visual connections along walking routes, ensuring movement routes are as clear and short as possible, designing for the clustering and integration of public activities, and ensuring that the site layout has active edges to increase passive surveillance.

says violence prevention efforts working, but activists sceptical, *GroundUp*, 17 April 2013, <http://groundup.org.za/content/city-says-violence-prevention-efforts-working-activists-sceptical>.

- 8 The city currently has urban development zones with tax incentives, although these are predominately located in the city centre and areas just outside it.
- 9 <http://www.khayelitshacommission.org.za/>.
- 10 Interview with city planner, Cape Town.
- 11 There is a growing body of literature on the subject; see O Newman, *Creating defensible spaces*, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 1996, <http://www.humanics-es.com/defensible-space.pdf>.
- 12 R Schmit and S van Steenbrugge, *Campus and the city: Belhar, mapping and re-imagining a Cape Flats space*, Master's in Urbanism and Spatial Planning dissertation, University of Ghent in association with the University of the Western Cape.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 According to previous research done in Belhar, a woman in financial distress sold her house for R45 000 (approx. \$4 000) to gangsters, who were able to resell it for R280 000 (approx. \$28 000) (ibid).
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 K Gottschalk, *Vigilantism v. the state: a case study of the rise and fall of Pagad, 1996–2000*, ISS Paper 99, Pretoria: ISS, February 2005.
- 17 The city and outlying areas (i.e. beyond the CBD) have, however, begun developing economic centres in many areas. Khayelitsha, for example, now boasts a new R250 million mall and a new CBD.
- 18 A Standing, *Organised crime: a study from the Cape Flats*, Pretoria: ISS, 2006, 238.
- 19 S Ngxiza, Sustainable economic development in previously deprived localities: the case of Khayelitsha in Cape Town, *Urban Forum* 23(2) (2012), 181–195.
- 20 P L Cichello et al., Perceived barriers to entry into self employment in Khayelitsha, South Africa: crime, risk, and start-up capital dominate profit concerns, CSSR Working Paper 300, 2011, http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za/sites/cssr.uct.ac.za/files/pubs/WP300_0.pdf.
- 21 <http://ctcs.capetown.gov.za/Ecamp/>
- 22 Standing, *Organised crime*.
- 23 See Emergent City, n.d., <http://www.emergentcity.co.za/>.
- 24 Interview with a senior SAPS police official.

About the author

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