



Stirring the urban pot: The nature and future of mixed housing in South Africa

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There has been a greater call for mixed housing developments all over the world since the beginning of the 21st century. Whether it is characteristic of the growing trend of New Urbanism, in support of creating more diverse places, or part of a larger movement towards more sustainable neighbourhoods and cities, urban planners and designers have increasingly proclaimed the need for mixed housing.

Leading the way in the UK, planners and designers have advocated the many benefits of mixed housing developments. These include their positive social impact, the potential for interaction between different social spheres and income groups, reduced negative area effects (for example, low aspirations and low-level crime), a mix of students from various backgrounds in the local school, attracting and supporting a higher level of services, providing for a change in household composition in one neighbourhood and the creation of additional employment opportunities through higher disposal income in the area.

development, and high levels of insecurity that may impede interventions that are focused on greater integration and diversity.

The interpretation of what is meant by a 'mixed development' can vary, based on the type of mix, whether housing or tenure types, a mix of income groups or a larger sociospatial mix through all of the aforementioned, including a mix of social groups and land uses. People often use these concepts interchangeably, including mixed tenure, mixed income and mixed communities. In addition, mixing can take place on different scales, at

one site and/or in an entire larger urban neighbourhood.

Mixed developments vary greatly in South

Many studies have highlighted the positive contribution that mixed housing can make towards more sustainable human settlements.

As a result, a growing number of countries (including the USA, Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand) have adopted planning and development policies that include a focus on mixed housing.

South Africa is no exception. In line with these planning trends, and especially in an attempt to readdress the patterns of spatial fragmentation and separation in South African cities, current planning policies highlight the need for greater integration.

Government's housing plan (commonly referred to as *Breaking New Ground 2004*) specifically emphasises the need for mixed or integrated developments to allow more people greater access to a wider range of socioeconomic opportunities in closer proximity to their living places.

In reality, however, South Africa faces a number of context-specific challenges in the implementation of mixed housing, such as the tradition of separation and segregated

Africa and comprise a mix of housing or building types, tenure types and land uses, accommodating a mix of income and social groups. As is the case internationally, projects differ in size and scale, ranging from smaller projects such as Brickfields and Carr Gardens to medium and larger projects on very large sites, for example, Wonderpark, or an entire neighbourhood, such as Cosmo City, Pennyville and Olievenhoutbosch in Gauteng.

Take, for example, the Brickfields development in the inner city of Johannesburg. The entire complex comprises 345 units of various sizes, including bachelor units, one, two and three-bedroom and live-and-work units. There are also 21 commercial units. The precinct consists of a mix of building types, including a number of four or five-storey walk-ups and two nine-storey tower blocks.

Another good example is the Wonderpark Estate in the north of Pretoria.

South Africa faces a number of context-specific challenges to the implementation of mixed housing, such as the tradition of separation and segregated development, and high levels of insecurity.



The mix in unit types, size and tenure options also provides opportunities for a mix of income groups to invest in developments.

This development offers 1 480 units, which include bachelor units, as well as one, two and three-bedroom units. The units vary in size from 33 to 80 m² and are arranged in different building types, including two and three-storey walk-ups.

Contrary to existing fears, mixed housing projects do not embody the stereotypical image of European low-income public housing estates or 'matchbox' low-income housing developments in South Africa. They often include vibrant environments that offer a range of on-site amenities and facilities in close proximity to other urban facilities.

The Wonderpark Estate, for example, is within walking distance of the Wonderpark Shopping Centre, various restaurants and fast-food outlets, the Akasia Hospital and clinic, municipal offices and the offices of the Department of Home Affairs. It is also in close proximity to the Rosslyn industrial area, George Mukhari Academic Hospital, Medunsa, Tshwane University of Technology and various crèches, and primary and secondary schools.

Another example is Pennyville, which is located south of Roodepoort in southwestern Johannesburg. It lies along New Canada Road just south of the major railway line that connects the Johannesburg CBD with Soweto.

The project is close to a major shopping centre (the Highgate Centre) and industrial areas. On-site facilities and amenities include sports facilities, schools and a crèche. This enhances greater access to a range of socioeconomic opportunities.

Mixed housing developments are not only restricted to large metropolitan areas in Gauteng, but also occur in the rest of the country, for example, Amalinda in the Eastern Cape (Buffalo City Municipality) and Thornhill in Limpopo (Polokwane). Amalinda is a small development of 598 units with a range of unit and building types. These include two, three and four-storey walk-ups with one, two and three-bedroom units between 31 and 52 m² in size.

Thornhill is a much larger development that consists of different precincts, each with its own character in terms of layout, building types and unit sizes. Thornhill Estate comprises 1 100 households and a clubhouse with a swimming pool, tennis court, squash court, gymnasium and entertainment area, as well as numerous landscaped walkways to all its residents. The village has 188 one-bedroom bachelor units and one and two-bedroom townhouses for rental purposes. Fairview offers 141 simplexes in two and three-storey walk-ups. The Willows comprises 73 units of two to three-bedroom townhouses and 1.5-bedroom lofts.

Mixed housing projects also accommodate different housing models and tenure types. The Pennyville project is expected to deliver 2 800 housing units, of which 1 400 would be RDP houses (subsidised by the government), 1 000 credit-linked units (to be purchased by financial institutions and leased or sold) and 400 apartments for rental accommodation (to be owned by the Johannesburg Social Housing Company – JOSCHO). This illustrates the mix of tenure accommodated in

Pennyville, including private ownership for very low-income households (through subsidised RDP houses), private ownership for low to middle-income households (through affordable credit-linked housing) and rental social housing units.

Cosmo City is another good example of a mixed housing development with a mix of house types, tenure types and land uses, providing opportunities for a range of income groups. The development consists of four housing and tenure types: 5 000 fully subsidised units, 3 000 partially subsidised (credit-linked) units, 3 300 fully bonded houses (market-rate housing) and 1 000 social housing apartments for rent. The different housing types offer the opportunity for a mix of tenure, ranging from owned to rental units.

The mix in unit types, size and tenure options also provides opportunities for a mix of income groups to invest in the development. This can vary from smaller projects that incorporate a smaller range of income groups, to large projects that accommodate a much wider range of income groups, such as Cosmo City.

Based on a household survey conducted as part of a larger project on medium-density mixed housing in 2008, a large portion of the respondents (35%) earned less than R2 500 per month, 16% earned between R2 501 and R5 000, 19% earned between R5 001 and R10 000, and 22% earned between R10 001 and R20 000.¹ Few of the respondents (8%) earned a household income of over R20 000 per month. This probably includes professionals residing in the market-rate housing. Yet, it remains very significant, given the wide range of mix in the development.

¹ *The survey sample included residents from RDP, credit-linked and market-rate houses.*



→ The Brickfields development in the inner city of Johannesburg comprises 345 units of various sizes.



→ The Pennyville development, located south of Roodepoort in southwestern Johannesburg.

Based on subsequent household surveys conducted in 2010, slightly less than 40% of the respondents in Thornhill earned between R10 001 and R20 000 per month, with just more than 40% earning more than R20 000 per month. Mixed housing projects are not restricted to projects that include lower and middle-income households. They also include upmarket developments such as Melrose Arch in Johannesburg. The development has 11 blocks with mixed land uses and a variety of housing units (one, two and three-bedroom units) and tenure types (ownership and rental). According to the household survey (2010), more than 90% of the residents earned more than R20 000 a month.

Mixed housing is slowly starting to stir the urban pot and is allowing greater integration and diversity in South African neighbourhoods and cities. However, in spite of the positive signs, it is not yet part of South Africa's mainstream housing development and it remains to be seen whether it will become one of the preferred models for the majority of people in the country. In order for mixed housing to become a preferred model, the following three aspects will need attention:

- The general perception of mixed housing developments in the country needs to change, and the general awareness of successful projects needs to increase to bring about a change in mindset in the broader society. Due to South Africa's tradition of segregated development, people need to be convinced that mixed develop-

ments can offer great benefits in a vibrant environment. A positive image of existing and new mixed housing projects therefore needs to be created and advocated.

- People need to feel safe and secure to invest and reside in mixed housing projects, especially in a country with high levels of crime and the associated fear of crime.
- The realities of the urban housing market need to be borne in mind. It is necessary to carefully consider the viability of different housing models and price ranges in a single development. One could therefore mix a certain range in one development, such as low income and middle income (for example, Brickfields and Pennyville) or middle income and higher income (for example, Melrose Arch). Very few projects will, however, be able to achieve the wide range of income groups accommodated in Cosmo City.

Stirring the urban pot in South Africa through mixed housing necessitates creative thinking in terms of different housing models, tenure and unit types, aesthetic and pleasing environments, design for safety and grouping, and thresholds of different income groups.

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