

Article

The probable of urban renewal for small medium and micro enterprises: Towards restructuring the spatial-economic makeup of township communities

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Abstract: Hopes for inclusion in economic growth activities were sparked by South Africa's democratic transition. Nevertheless, thirty-four years later, insufficient capability and bad monetary management continue to impede economic growth and development, making it difficult for South Africans to get their just share of the nation's riches. The South African government launched Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises in an effort to address the triple problems of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. With the intention of financing businesses, a few financial initiatives were established to help and alleviate the burden of SMME owners. Even with South Africa's high degree of support, SMMEs in townships continue to face difficulties due to restricted market access. The results show that the primary reason for both low revenue and limited market access is inaccessible operating infrastructure. To compile the body of research on SMMEs, their operational space challenges and the spatial characteristics of townships, the study used both conceptual research design and content analysis. The study makes the case that the majority of SMME failures are mostly caused by the inadequate municipal planning for infrastructure and space of local business township. It goes on to suggest that for the South African government to realize its NDP objectives and support the expansion and development of SMMEs through initiatives such as urban renewal, it must properly and efficiently maintain its aging infrastructure.

Keywords: small-medium and micro-enterprise; businesses; township; urban; spatial planning; landscape; urban renewal; national development plan

1. Introduction and background

Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) are recognized as the economic backbone of nations worldwide (Saah, 2021). Numerous nations have acknowledged the importance of enterprise development as part of youth empowerment interventions and community development. Mahembe (2011) states that SMEs have traditionally been essential for the creation of jobs, inventions, and new products in industrialized nations, all of which have boosted economic growth and vitality. In the South African context, the government has entrusted agencies such as the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) with the responsibilities of fostering and promoting entrepreneurship amongst the youth in various ways including grant allocation (Chauke et al., 2021). In light of this, the government is willing to implement policies, plans, and initiatives that can foster an atmosphere that supports small businesses.

However, in South Africa and around the world, SMEs continue to face several obstacles that impede their ability to expand as entrepreneurs, despite their enormous

significance and contribution to economic progress (Mahembe, 2011). High rates of business failure have resulted from issues like inadequate management skills, financing and credit availability, market access and customer relationship building, low production capacity and appropriate technology, recognition by big businesses, government bureaucracy, and support for their role in economic development (Ahiawodzi and Adade, 2012; Mahembe, 2011; Ntsika, 1999; Thwala and Mvubu, 2008). Unquestionably, the literature currently in publication ignores the space and physical problems faced by SMMEs in favor of concentrating more on the economic ones.

A major barrier to corporate growth and a major contributor to operating expenses is the absence of physical infrastructure. The 2014 GEM South Africa report references the fact that one of the main factors that facilitate the growth of SMMEs is infrastructure. Accessibility and communication ease affordable land or space, utilities, transportation, and infrastructure can all play a key role in helping new firms. Consequently, according to the findings of GEM research, small firms in Gauteng have a harder time locating physical space for operations (Finmark Trust, 2010). In the Northwest, SMMEs reported utility-related issues, specifically disruptions in energy delivery disruptions, which make them unable to organize into collectives to increase their bargaining power due to the lack of infrastructure and space in high-income areas (South African Development Agency, 2016).

Consequently, one of the main factors that endangers SMMEs' lifespan as contributed by lack of appropriate location is their inability to access markets (SEDA, 2016). The National Development Plan (2030) highlights that in addition to investing in new infrastructure projects, South Africa must maintain its old infrastructure effectively and efficiently if it is to meet its NDP targets and foster the growth and development of SMMEs. Infrastructure that is properly managed can serve as the cornerstone of an atmosphere that allows SMMEs to flourish and realize their full potential (Malefane, 2019). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to assess the operating spaces of SMMEs, as well as to suggest spatial planning mechanisms that will foster growth while restructuring township communities.

2. Problem statement

Even though infrastructure is one of the most crucial elements for economic development because it significantly affects an organization's output, income, profits, and employment creation levels in the economy, South African SMMEs have difficulty finding sustainable spaces to operate (Obokor and Goldman, 2016). In South Africa, almost 70% of SMMEs fail within the first five to seven years of operation, according to IMQS (2019). The reasons behind the increasing failure rate of SMME's are noted as low levels of technical and entrepreneurial skills, labor laws, limited access to funding, and a lack of appropriate technology (Ngibe and Lekhanya, 2019). The significance of infrastructure as a backbone for the expansion of both formal and informal businesses, however, cannot be overstated.

The expansion of SMMEs in South Africa is severely hampered by inadequate transportation infrastructure and a lack of public amenities such as electricity, water, sanitation, and telecommunications (IMQS, 2019). Constant power outages provide

an example of limitations imposed on companies when essential utilities are unavailable (Akuru and Okoro, 2014; IMQS, 2019). When infrastructure, such as electricity and good roads, is lacking or insufficiently provided, the business turns to self-provision, which might not be able to completely incorporate into its price structure (Van Heerden et al., 2015). The cost structure and the areas of optimality where businesses maximize earnings subject to cost efficiency are thus distorted by self-provision (Kimuyu and Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 1998). Thus, the goal of this paper is to examine the operating spaces of SMMEs and to suggest spatial planning mechanisms that will foster growth while restructuring township communities.

3. Methodology

This paper used a conceptual research design that is distinguished by a thorough examination of the secondary data sources currently available. Conceptual research falls within the category of qualitative research (Regional, 2015). Inquiry that involves examining and evaluating the available information on a particular subject is known as conceptual investigation (Jakkola, 2020). Secondary data was then collected by qualitative inquiry. Thus, a researcher's previous research and related work are combined to create the article, which describes the events that take place. The paper focused on the nature of SMMEs, the spatial features of township communities, and the space constraints that these businesses face in the townships where they operate. Furthermore, to gather information from the literature, this article used content analysis. To ensure that the data used to produce academic and policy-related research findings are reliable, verifiable, and credible, the authors of this work had to ensure that the data triangulation tool was implemented. A systematic approach was employed to examine and synthesize the existing literature on SMMEs, infrastructure, urban renewal, spatial planning and other emerging factors. This article aims to highlight potential areas for future research while also adding to the body of knowledge already available on SMMEs and spatial planning in South Africa.

Considering the researcher's prior understanding of the opinions and conclusions of other researchers on the subject, the section outlines the procedural steps that must be followed throughout the inquiry. To plan and conduct this investigation, the researchers used a number of important strategies. The model that is shown in **Figure 1** was used. The study used a conceptual research design, which entailed a thorough analysis of the body of current literature. The article opens with an explanation of how the researchers worked together to produce the study's title, emphasising the methods used. The topic that was chosen by the scholars was relevant to their area of expertise. The researchers choose a topic that is presently being studied since it is pertinent to their field of study. The researchers gathered the data by conducting a thorough review of the existing literature, as shown in **Figure 1**. According to Sundani and Mamokhere (2021), the information in this article was brought together by consulting books, government regulations, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, and internet sources.

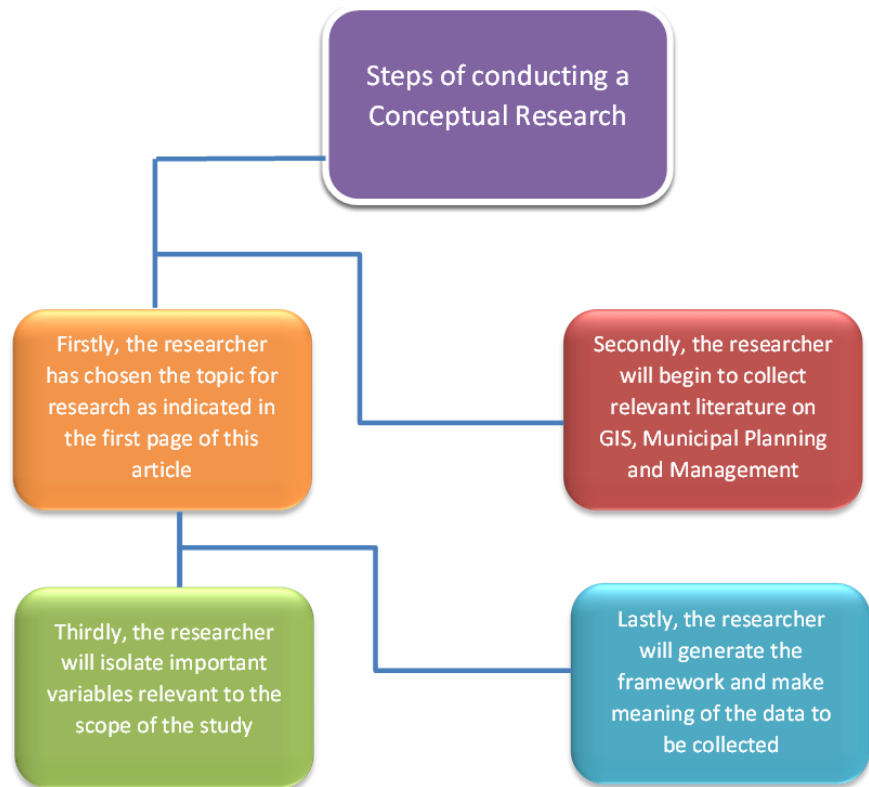


Figure 1. Steps for conducting a conceptual paper.

Source: Mamokhere, Mabebe, and Kgobe, 2022.

4. Resource dependency theory

Resource dependency theory was developed in the 1970s through the efforts of Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik, especially in their 1978 book entitled “The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective” (Hillman et al., 2009). Resource dependency theory developed as a reaction to previous organizational theories that mainly concentrated on internal factors, instead highlighting how external resource limitations influence organizational behavior and decision-making (Aguinis et al., 2024). Resource dependence theory posits that organizations rely on external resources managed by different entities, resulting in power disparities, strategic partnerships, and adaptive actions to reduce reliance. Since then, the theory has been extensively utilized in management, organizational research, and strategic decision making (Marshall et al., 2024).

This paper aligns with the viewpoint of resource dependency theory, indicating that infrastructure acts as a vital external resource upon which SMMEs depend to function effectively and reach markets (Kulkarni and Nayak, 2023). According to Mugano and Dorasamy (2024), when infrastructure such as roads, telecommunication systems, electricity and logistics networks is not available or insufficient, it increases operational expenses, restricts business expansion, and decreases competitiveness. Given that resource dependence theory suggests that organizations rely on external resources managed by other parties, Sibiya et al. (2023) assert that inadequate infrastructure puts SMMEs in a precarious situation. This could result in the failure of SMMEs or impede business growth, restrict revenue generation, and restrict market

expansion. Consequently, government intervention is necessary to establish an effective infrastructure that supports the development and expansion of SMMEs in South Africa, as they are highly dependent on it.

5. The spatial characteristics of South African township communities

The spatial features of township communities are influenced by historical, socioeconomic, and political elements, frequently leading to distinct challenges and development opportunities (Scheba et al., 2021). Numerous townships, especially in areas such as South Africa, were created during colonial or apartheid periods to separate marginalized groups from urban economic centers (Monama et al., 2022). These communities are usually located on the outskirts of urban areas, facing inadequate connections to central business zones, resulting in spatial inequality (Booyens, 2021). These regions are marked by insufficient infrastructure, poor public transportation, and limited availability of vital services such as healthcare, education, and markets. The residential sectors of townships tend to be highly populated, with informal settlements growing as a result of urbanization and migration from rural areas to cities (Booyens, 2021; Monama et al., 2022).

Du Plessis (2014) asserts that despite various efforts and planning tools such as the Integrated Development Plan, the Spatial Development Framework, and the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) “everyday socio-spatial legacies of apartheid continue to be reproduced”. This illustrates the spatial traits of township communities that still face similar problems from the apartheid period. In a democratic environment, the spatial characteristics of South African township communities are defined by multiple aspects. South African townships, such as Alexandra, remain on the peripheries of major cities, often separated from affluent areas such as Sandton by physical barriers such as highways, reinforcing the spatial divide between wealthy white regions and disadvantaged black neighborhoods (Sulley, 2022). Due to restricted land availability, townships often contain tightly packed, often informal housing units with insufficient space between residences (Turok and Borel-Saladin, 2016). The ongoing problem of insufficient public services, such as sanitation, reliable water supply, good roads, and public transport in townships, remains evident (Nkoana et al., 2024).

In view of Mohamed et al. (2022), the arrangement of township communities is often informal or unstructured, lacking integrated urban design, leading to restricted economic prospects and environmental issues. Nonetheless, different researchers such as Dawson (2021) and Masuku (2023) assert that despite these limitations, township communities frequently demonstrate robust social unity, lively informal economies, and cultural strength, which can be used for development. This suggests that social cohesion can promote a stable and supportive business climate, enabling them to reach a broader customer base and develop stronger community ties. All of this will contribute to the ongoing survival of SMMEs in township environments.

6. The nature of small medium and micro enterprises in townships

Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are businesses that differ in size, scope, and economic impact, but possess similar traits of being smaller in scale when compared to large corporations (Maloka, 2013). These businesses are usually categorized according to factors such as employee count, yearly revenue, and asset value, which differ from one country to another (Bhorat et al., 2018). In South Africa, SMMEs are defined by the 1996 National Small Business Act through criteria such as employee count, annual revenue, and total capital assets (Chiromo and Nani, 2019; Republic of South Africa, 1996). As per the Act, microenterprises are usually family-operated businesses that have fewer than five workers and an annual revenue of less than R150,000. Small businesses possess more organized management systems and can hire up to 50 individuals, while medium-sized companies, which function with a decentralized management approach, can employ up to 200 workers (Chiromo and Nani, 2019; Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Theorists such as Maduku and Kaseeram (2021), along with Netshandama (2006), view SMMEs as quite varied, encompassing informal microenterprises in local markets to more organized small and medium enterprises involved in regional or global commerce. SMMEs, as noted by Matubatuba (2022), are frequently embedded in their local communities, playing a vital role in generating employment, reducing poverty, and fostering grassroots economic growth. A significant trait of SMMEs is their flexibility and quickness in reacting to market shifts, although they frequently encounter difficulties such as restricted access to funding, markets, and resources for business development (Nkoana and Mashamaite, 2024).

In emerging countries, SMMEs often function within informal sectors, depending on community networks and local expertise for their survival and growth (Bhorat et al., 2018). These enterprises often do not have the economies of scale that larger firms possess, but their strong customer connections and innovation capacity enable them to meet specific market needs (Maloka, 2013). SMMEs play a crucial role in driving economic development, especially in neglected regions such as township communities, as they promote entrepreneurship and enhance local value chains (Maduku and Kaseeram, 2021). In this way, SMMEs serve a dual purpose as economic engines and social stabilizers, especially in underprivileged areas.

7. Challenges

Among developing nations, South Africa has one of the highest rates of SMME failures, with failure rates in the first and second years of operation ranging from 60% to 80% (Leboea, 2017; Mthabela, 2015). Koryak (2015) is in consensus with Mazzarol (2015) that one of the main causes of SMME failure is barriers to market access. Accordingly, it is well established that corruption, a lack of infrastructure, restricted access to equipment, and global market accessibility are barriers to small business growth (Abor and Quartey, 2010; Bowen et al., 2009; Lather, 2009; Martin and Staines, 2008). Environmental barriers, such the challenging business environment and the status of the economy, may also have an impact on the survival and expansion of SMMEs.

The expansion of SMMEs in South Africa is severely hampered by inadequate transportation infrastructure and a dearth of public amenities like electricity, water,

sanitation, and telecommunications (IMQS, 2019). SMMEs often struggle to find affordable and suitable spaces. Many township entrepreneurs operate from inadequate or informal spaces, lacking the necessary infrastructure for efficient operations and growth. Consequently, the inadequate business spaces are subjected to high crime rates and a lack of visible policing discourage investment and can negatively impact business operations and customer confidence. Poor infrastructure in rural areas can While some SMMEs have access to infrastructure, they are impeded by load shadowing in urban areas and, primarily, a shortage of energy in rural places (Mutula and Van Brakel, 2007). Rolling blackouts that disrupt operations for up to five hours at a time started to make it difficult for South African enterprises to function once more in 2019 (IMQS, 2019). Frequent power outages and inconsistent voltage can disrupt production processes, damage equipment, and lead to lost productivity (Mambula, 2002). Consequently, grocery stores, bakeries, and eateries are forced to discard food, and service providers like printers and hairdressers are unable to meet the demands of their customers (Competition Commission of South Africa, 2019).

Business owners are unable to minimize income losses when they cannot afford alternate energy sources, such as generators, which consequently impacts their capacity to compensate staff. Obokoh and Goldman (2016) further highlight that poor water supply and sanitation facilities can impact hygiene standards and workforce productivity. Therefore, SMMEs may have to invest significant capital in self-providing infrastructure like generators, boreholes, or private transportation, further straining their finances (Mambula, 2002). When unable to afford alternative sources of energy, business owners fail to mitigate revenue losses (IMQS, 2019; Olajuyin and Mago, 2022). The limitations lead to lost productivity, increased operational costs, and reduced efficiency.

The majority of small businesses are situated on the outskirts of cities, which makes it difficult to draw in and retain customers (Kaid and Manjunath, 2020). The areas are typically characterised by inadequate road infrastructure, making it difficult for cars to drive quickly. As a result, bad road conditions and a lack of public transport options make it challenging for both enterprises and customers to transfer resources and commodities, which raises transportation costs and restricts market reach (Sukaryavichute et al., 2021). Consumers lose hope and become less inclined to visit or make purchases from establishments.

8. Implementation of urban renewal in townships to support SMME's

It is crucial to remember that SMMEs require a robust infrastructure to operate efficiently, access markets, and see long-term growth. The absence of such infrastructure frequently significantly reduces its potential and leads to business failure (Gaal and Afrah, 2017). Urban redevelopment programs can now effectively and efficiently solve the infrastructure issues facing SMMEs. Therefore, an urban renewal program can be effective and efficient in addressing the infrastructure challenges experienced by SMMEs. According to Ansumant (2019), urban renewal is a comprehensive plan to address a number of complex urban issues, such as poor, outdated, or inadequate housing; traffic congestion; haphazard land use; inadequate

transportation, sanitation and other facilities; and sociological correlations of urban decay, such as crime.

Urban revitalization will be achieved by reuse and repair of underutilized or neglected regions, such as abandoned township buildings (Qiao et al., 2024). During this process, old structures that already exist in the township are fixed and restored to their original uses. These places may have outdated, dilapidated structures, poor streets and utilities, or they may have none at all, according to Ansumant (2019). In situations where the municipality lacks property, municipal redevelopment authorities first buy private properties in the township area and allocate them to a few chosen developers who use them for business growth (Couch, 1999). The renewal program in a township will concentrate on building and renovating roads and other infrastructure to facilitate better mobility and transportation from point A to point B. Market accessibility will be enhanced, transportation expenses will be decreased, and the allure of the company environment will be increased.

In townships, promoting urban renovation can boost the local economy, help existing businesses and attract new ones, create a sense of civic pride, encourage citizen participation, and lower crime rates (Kayembe, 2022; National Development Plan, 2030). These programs also frequently involve determining infrastructure and mobility requirements to enhance facilities in each location. Reusing property improves community spirit, generates jobs and increases municipal tax revenues, all of which contribute to community rejuvenation and economic renewal (Ansumant, 2017). Reusing and recycling land allows businesses and services to expand, alleviate poverty concentrations, create jobs, and attract new investments by putting these properties to new and beneficial uses (Amirtahmasebi et al., 2016).

Implementing urban renewal as a response to the infrastructure constraints experienced by small local businesses is deemed an effective by a study conducted by Oranje and Voges (2014), the Mandela Bay Development Agency in the city of Port Elizabeth (MBDA) carried out urban redevelopment/renovation strategy within an economic cluster that included retail, residential, office, and tourism/leisure/entertainment. Through a novel approach to urban planning, the city of Port Elizabeth's urban renewal helped to boost competitive local economic development by renovating the city's streets and buildings using true "bottom-up" urban renewal, which was accomplished through implementation methods. The following advantages have been generated for the CBD/Central region and the larger NMBM since 2006 from the MBDA project, new company sales of R185.2 million, 825 new job openings, and an additional R61.5 million in GGP (Voges, 2013)

9. Limitations of the study

The study encountered the following limitation:

Lack of previous research on the topic

Truly little research has been conducted on the subject. There is a dearth of literature on the integration of SMMEs with spatial planning. The majority of writers either concentrate on the debate solely surrounding SMMEs or spatial planning. Consequently, a great deal of research on the two ideas is required because the findings

may contribute to the creation of policies and the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

10. Conclusion

The development and sustainability of SMMEs in South Africa are essential to address the ongoing issues of unemployment, poverty, and inequality in the country. However, despite the different financial and policy measures, these businesses still face considerable operational difficulties, especially in township regions. The insufficiency of proper infrastructure, such as reliable electricity, water, transport, and telecommunications, restricts their ability to grow and maintain their businesses. The elevated failure rates in SMMEs, mainly due to barriers to market access, poor municipal planning, and an unwelcoming business environment, highlight the need for strategic measures. To promote SMME growth and reach the goals of the National Development Plan, the South African government should focus on infrastructure investment, especially in townships. Urban revitalization initiatives, better spatial planning, and improved service provision can foster a more favourable business climate. Without addressing these fundamental structural issues, the potential of SMMEs as an oxygen of economic growth and job creation will remain unrealised. Therefore, a holistic approach that involves government, private sector stakeholders, and local communities is essential to ensure that SMMEs thrive and contribute meaningfully to South Africa's economic transformation.

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