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Non-Economic Quality of Life and Population Density in South Africa

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between population density, a measure of urbanisation, and non-economic quality of life, defined as quality of life not related to income, such as amenities, education and health (McGillivray 2009). Popular opinion has generally been that population density can be seen as beneficial for economic growth, as it allows for greater productivity, greater incomes and can be translated into higher levels of quality of life (Krugman 1998). More recently though, evidence tend to suggest the exact opposite, in that increases in productivity and incomes are not translated into higher quality of life (Gallup and Sachs 1999). Identifying the correct relationship regarding quality of life and urbanisation for South African metropolitan cities is of utmost importance as it directs future urbanisation planning and policy decisions.

South Africa is classified as a middle income country with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$6800 (current US\$) for the year 2014 (StatsSA 2015). The country's Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.63 pointing to medium development achievements and the Gini coefficient 0.64 – which indicates large income inequality (UN 2013). According to StatsSA the country had a population of roughly 55 million in 2015 and an annual population growth rate of 1.5%. Furthermore the urbanisation rate was approximately 65% (World Bank 2015) with nearly 40% of South Africa's 2015 total population(StatSA 2015), residing in the eight metropolitan cities¹. Urbanisation is fuelled by both internal migration and international migrants, migrating from across Africa, to seek employment in the metropolitan cities. The estimated number of people classified as being urban in 2030 is estimated at 71% of the population (UN 2015). The increase in population and population density in these regions creates many developmental challenges, especially seen against the background of the aim of the Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1996), which is to increase the quality of life for all people in the country.

South Africa's urban policy before the democratisation of the country in 1994, was mainly based on the need to control the inflow into cities of predominantly African people (Pillay et. al 2006). Furthermore, a segregated urban policy that allocated residential districts as per ethnic composition was followed (Oranje and Merrifield 2010). This allocated a differentiated infrastructure and service provision according to different ethnical groups (John 2012), which ultimately disadvantaged all groups except White people. The result of these policies was that urban areas were spatially fragmented with disparities in income and service infrastructure between areas allocated to different ethnic groups. Since 1994 urban policy and planning have been driven by the need to address inequalities and injustices from the past, by removing restrictions on the free movement and settlement of all ethnic groups, removing housing segregation based on ethnic identity, restricting urban sprawl through infill programs and by re-engineering an alternative urban landscape through an apt development framework (Landau et al. 2011). The empirical evidence shows limited change as a response to these policies and the characteristics of the ethnic differentiated development policies are still evident today with inequality of income, high poverty rates and limited access, for certain areas in the metropolitan cities and ethnical groups to amenities services, health care and education still persists (Leibbrandt 2010). Therefore current policy attempts have failed to

¹ City of Cape Town, EThekweni, Ekurhuleni, City of Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay, City of Tshwane, Mangaung and Buffalo city.

address many of the shortcomings inherent to South African metropolises. Knowledge of the relationship between population density (urbanisation) and non-economic quality of life can contribute to the formulation of policy which can address these problems.

In this research, using a panel dataset for the years 1996 to 2014, on metropolitan cities (Global Insight 2014), it was found that in the eight metropolises of South Africa, the population density across the cities is negatively related to non-economic quality of life. This means that as the number of people residing on a square kilometre of land increases, the non-economic quality of life of said people decreases. Our finding supports the second theory on population density and development, stating that increased population density leads to decreasing non-economic quality of life. As regards to causality, the results indicated that population density influences non-economic quality of life. This finding is important as it indicates population density is a determinant of non-economic quality of life and by altering population density numbers the non-economic quality of life of people can be enhanced. If the purpose is to optimise non-economic quality of life of individuals, the based on these results, policy measures should be developed to discourage urbanisation. This is especially true for in-migration to slum areas and informal settlements in cities, which are often the most densely populated areas and the first to receive migrants. Policy options include; the push factors that drives in-migration, such as unemployment in rural areas and areas outside metropolitan cities should be addressed. In order to improve the non-economic quality of life in the cities' over populated areas, for example informal settlements and slum areas, provision should be made for amenities, health care facilities and quality education. The creation of employment in metropolitan cities should also be a vital aim of future urban development policies. These policy measures should allow for a more equal distribution of non-economic quality of life infrastructure and alleviation of poverty related issues in the metropolitan cities.

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