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Investigating informal social networks in construction artisans in the Western Cape

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ABSTRACT

Informal social networks among the construction craftworkers from various ethnic groups create barriers of entry to crafts men entering the Constuction Industry in the Western Cape, South Africa. This study aimed to investigage how informal social networks found in three construction sites in an ethnically diverse area, can bring economic exclusions and promote inequality in terms of accessibility to social economic resources. Data was collected using Social Network Analysis (SNA) method, through the egocentric approach. Data analysis was done with the use of the social network analysis program UCINET. Findings from the three case studies showed that the accessibility of job information is through the informal social networks formed among the construction artisans, foremen including construction managers. Moreover, artisans from these sites were mostly friends and neighbours of the same race which suggests that their social relations facilitated the transfer of information concerning job opportunities. These kinds of relations transmit limited information. As much as the informal social networks can be advantageous, they create barriers of entry to those who are not part of these networks or barriers to skills acquisition to those who do not possess craft skills. These exclude those who do not belong to these advantageous networks. Further findings showed that a particular trade was dominated by a particular race. Also, minimal interaction was observed among different races suggesting a hindrance of transfer of information about job opportunites across ethnic groups. It is recommended that the artisans need to interact with others from different races as to broaden their networks and also to have multiplex networks. The government also needs to implement new policies which can enable people to have equality in the accessbility of social resources and economic opportunities.

Keywords: Artisans, Social Networks, Social Capital, Job Opportunities, Supply Networks