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Balancing Urban Regeneration to Prevent Displacement: A Conceptual Strategy for Inclusivity in South Africa

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Abstract

The regeneration of urban areas and neighbourhoods plays a crucial role in mitigating urban decay and enhancing socio-economic conditions. However, conventional urban renewal initiatives often inadvertently perpetuate geographies of exclusion, chiefly through gentrification and displacement. This paper is aimed at devising effective urban regeneration strategies that prioritise social inclusivity while mitigating the negative impacts of gentrification and displacement of poor people. The study employed a literature and theoretical review approach, utilising published articles and documents to assess the impact of urban regeneration programs on poor communities. The outcomes include the identification of shortcomings in current urban regeneration strategies and the need to formulate more equitable approaches. This study's significance lies in its contribution to expanding knowledge on urban redevelopment, particularly in the developing world of the global south. Furthermore, it will inform policy development aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) of the United Nations, thus facilitating much-needed advancements in urban development policies.

Keywords: Displacement, gentrification, inclusivity, urban decay, urban regeneration.

1. Introduction

Most researchers argue that the regeneration of cities and neighbourhoods contributes to reducing urban decay (Cerreta & La Rocca, 2021; Immergluck & Balan, 2018; Levine et al., 2022; Simbanegavi et al., 2021). However, some researchers contend that urban renewal is a euphemism for gentrification and displacement (Levine et al., 2022; Mahlatsi, 2022; Mehdipanah et al., 2018; Schnake-Mahl et al., 2020). In South Africa, the abolishment of segregation laws saw an influx of "black" Africans who were prohibited from living in the cities. According to Mahlatsi (ibid) this increase in population contributed to the urban decay observed in many South African cities, with Johannesburg's inner city being particularly affected. Some of the major factors contributing to urban decay are capital flight, hijacked and abandoned buildings, high local unemployment, poverty and homelessness (Walsh, 2013). Cerreta & La Rocca (2021) stated that Urban regeneration in many instances acts as an infusion of new vitality into declining communities, industries and cities bringing long-term solutions to sustainable economic and social stability. For over thirty years, urban regeneration has been central to the practice of transforming cities (capable of affecting physical and economic development and generating social inequalities and gentrification phenomena). The social impact was for a long time a secondary objective, however in recent years that has changed. According to Levine et al. (2022), urban regeneration influences peoples decision to move out, stay in, or relocate to a particular area. Within these categories, ownership status emerges as a crucial factor in retaining residents. To have a balance between improved cities and inclusivity, urban regeneration strategies that incorporate inclusivity by avoiding gentrification and displacement have become important.

Persistent urban decay has continued to plague South African mega-cities, marked by economic declines, continuous capital flight, escalating crime rates, homelessness and a proliferation of abandoned buildings (Simbanegavi et al., 2021). This shows that urban regeneration initiatives

targeted at addressing these negative externalities through enhancing the physical, economic, and environmental conditions have failed This is because existing strategies often inadvertently lead to exclusion, and displacement of the poor residents and small businesses that existed in the area before renewal (Levine et al., 2022; Mahlatsi, 2022). This paper seeks to understand the landscape of urban regeneration in South Africa and develop effective urban regeneration strategies that prioritise social inclusivity and prevent the negative impacts of gentrification and displacement

There is practical evidence around the world that urban regeneration has been beneficial in improving infrastructure and public areas in decayed cities and neighbourhoods. Not only the physical status is improved but economic and social status of the area is improved. According to Levine et al. (2022), urban regeneration has been beneficial to developers and advantaged population but, injurious to the poor population. This notion supports the claims by Mahlatsi (2022) that urban regeneration strategies in South Africa reproduce the geographies of exclusion, and in South Africa there is an overarching need to re-create urban development strategies that do not perpetuate structural inequalities which were embedded in the past colonial spatial planning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Urban regeneration as a strategic approach to urban redevelopment

By definition, urban regeneration is a concept in urban development where a policy programme is developed and implemented in an attempt to revitalise the decaying neighbourhood, town or precinct. Evans & Saw (2004) describe it as an infusion of new vitality into declining communities, industries, and neighbourhoods by bringing long-term solutions to stagnant urban development and decay. Factors such as economic stagnation, unemployment, pollution, poverty & homelessness, overcrowding, local government maladministration and lawlessness are the major contributors to urban decay. Empirical evidence has proven that urban renewal programs have played a central role in the revitalisation of cities and neighbourhoods around the world. However as highlighted by Cerreta and La Rocca (2021) traditional approaches to urban regeneration often prioritised economic gains over social impacts. In the recent years there has been a notable shift towards integrating social impact considerations into urban regeneration programs and processes. This study aims to significantly infuse the environmental dimension as well. It is partly due to the exclusive focus on the social gains that these programs have produced unwanted effects. Many cities around the world have adopted and continue to adopt the urban renewal strategy to deal with decaying cities and neighbourhoods.

2.2 Gentrification and displacement

The first documented use of the term “gentrification” was in 1964, coined by sociologist Ruth Glass who was describing the urban change that was taking place in London at that time. She defined “Gentrification” as the moving in of the ‘gentry’ into a low-income neighbourhood that is often decaying and dilapidated (Lees et al., 2016). The moving in of the ‘gentry’ is often sparked by the public/government intervention in an attempt to improve the economic status of the neighbourhood (Zuk et al., 2018). The gentry is generally with higher income and education levels and generally possess higher cost lifestyle as compared to their existing low-income residents. Due to improved aesthetics, recreational activities and economic activity associated with the ‘gentry’, the neighbourhood affordability changes. The affordability changes are often defined by the increase in land, and property prices and rentals, bringing in changes in the kind of local goods and services which are not affordable to the low-income residents.

Displacement is always a central concern of gentrification (Blomley, 2019), although it can take place in the absence of gentrification or even prior gentrification. (Zuk et al., 2018) has categorised displacement into disinvestment and reinvestment, they argue that disinvestment from neighbourhood lead to displacement the same way reinvestment does. Capital flight in the neighbourhood leads to decay, economic stagnation, high levels of crime and lawlessness. Because of all these misfortunes, residents and businesses end up moving out of the neighbourhood in an attempt to find a better and more conducive environment to settle in. On the other side of the coin, re-investment lead to general improvements as the economic and social status of the neighbourhood shift, and the affluent move into the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood becomes unaffordable for the low-income residents and they move out as a result. According to Marcuse (1985, 1986), the relationship between gentrification and displacement must also consider disinvestment displacement which created a vacancy for re-investment through gentrification.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings

3.1 Triple bottom line theory

The triple bottom line theory, also known as 3BL, first made it to the body of knowledge around 1994, and it was coined by John Elkington. The theory proposes that investment in general should not only consider the economic gain but also social and environmental gains (Żak, 2015). The theory postulates that despite a commitment by companies or organisations to generate economic value, they get involved in the process of destroying certain values, which are in the main social and environmental. That is why the development strategy for business needs to include the economic, social and environmental dimensions to an equal extent. The urgent call to action by UN member states is a good testament that the stability of global markets depends on the models of sustainable development activities (Żak, 2015). For urban renewal that creates the geographies of inclusion, its implementation has to be looked at from the lens of the 'Triple Bottom Line' theory where not only economic gains of urban regeneration are considered but also social and environmental aspects.

3.2 Planning gain theory and land value capture

Planning gain and land value capture are interlinked concepts anchored around the land value increase that arises from public office intervention or planning permission. Higgins (2019) defined 'planning gain' as the increase in the value of land arising from change in land use rights. Land value increase also arises as a result of infrastructure investments and other forms of public action such as urban regeneration programs. Land value capture postulates that value increases arising from land use rights granted, public infrastructure investments, and public action should be claimed back for the benefit of the public (Simbanegavi & Gethe, 2023). The claim is usually done using different types of Land value capture tools. Urban regeneration programs are an example of public action and there is a land value increase that results from these programs. According to this these interlinked theories, the value created by urban regeneration programs should be claimed for the benefit of the public.

3.3 Equitable development theory

Equitable development theory has been shaped by various influential thinkers, notably Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. This theory underscores the importance of promoting fair and inclusive social as well as economic progress within society. It emphasises that justice, fairness, and

inclusivity must form the crux of all developmental efforts (*17. Philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum - by John M Alexander 2016*, n.d.)

Pineo (2022) supports this notion by introducing the "THRIVES" framework, which asserts that the concept of healthy urban development should be redefined to prioritise sustainability, equity, and inclusion. According to this framework, all decisions related to urbanisation should be guided by three fundamental principles: inclusion, equity, and sustainability. Achieving healthy urbanism necessitates the involvement of all members of society in the process of design and planning (Pineo, 2022).

3.4 Social impact investment theory

Bridging the divide between profitability and societal challenges can yield profound positive implications for communities. According to Cohen (2011), enterprises that successfully navigate the delicate balance between financial gains and social impact have emerged as some of the world's most influential theories in literature. Such success often stems from these entities originating as solutions to prevalent social issues. It is imperative to dispel the misconception that pursuing both social and financial objectives is an inherently conflicting endeavour. The theory of social investment advocates for an approach where investments prioritise both social and financial returns equally, distinguishing itself from traditional investment paradigms that predominantly focus on financial gains (Clarking et al., 2016).

The Social Impact Investment (SII) theory serves as a complementary strategy to government initiatives and philanthropic endeavours by introducing a financial returns component to their investments. Rather than relying solely on government programs to generate social value for citizens, SII suggests that these programs can concurrently yield financial returns. In the context of urban regeneration programs, SII mandates a balanced consideration of two equally important objectives. Stakeholders, including developers, government entities, and investors, should strive to achieve financial returns while simultaneously ensuring that local communities benefit from the program through enhancements such as improved housing quality, upgraded amenities, heightened economic activities, inclusivity, and the prevention of gentrification and displacement. Urban regeneration initiatives should be underpinned by a commitment to value creation, encompassing both financial and social returns, rather than viewing these objectives as mutually exclusive trade-offs (Clarking et al., 2016).

3.5 Public participation and community development theory

Public participation and community development theories are interconnected theories anchored on the involvement of local community members in the implementation of decisions that directly affect them as a community. The theory is deeply rooted in democratic principles. There is a general consensus among parliamentary democracies that in addition to voting for governments, citizens should have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. For example, public participation during town planning re-zoning (Burton, 2009) serves as a pertinent example. Public participation and community development ensure that initiatives respond directly to the issues of the community, it is also a way to ensure inclusivity, fairness and equity. Urban renewal programs that embrace public participation and community development theory will ensure that community members are fully engaged in their implementation.

3.6 Conclusion on theoretical underpinnings

The five theories examined in this study converge on a unified perspective regarding urban regeneration that does not displace people. Central to all theories is recognising the pivotal roles played by social, economic, and environmental factors. These theories collectively advocate for a balanced approach that places equal emphasis on addressing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of urban regeneration initiatives.

4. Methods

This study employed literature and theoretical review to conclude on the conceptual strategies towards inclusive Urban regeneration. A scoping review methodology was done to outline a systematic approach to identifying, synthesising, and analysing literature to put forward a conceptual framework on strategies to prevent displacement in urban regeneration. 36 Journal articles on Urban regeneration and gentrification were reviewed together with related theories.

4.1 Search Strategy

i) **Identification of keywords**: Keywords related to urban regeneration, displacement, gentrification, and mitigation strategies were used to find literature for the study.
ii) **Database search**: Electronic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and PubMed were used to search using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators.
iii) **Inclusion criteria**: Studies published in English that focus on strategies to prevent or mitigate displacement in urban regeneration projects were included.

4.2 Study selection

i) **Screening Process**: The authors screened titles and abstracts of retrieved articles to assess their relevance based on the inclusion criteria.
ii) **Full-text review**: Selected articles were reviewed full-text to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the scoping review.
iii) **Data extraction**: Relevant theories and empirical results were extracted from selected articles to put together the conceptual framework postulated in this paper.

4.3 **Conceptual Framework:** A Balanced Urban Regeneration Social, Environmental, and Economic Gains-Sharing Model

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 posits that a Balanced Urban Regeneration that prioritises Social, Environmental and Economic (BURSEE) will be able to stop displacement of the poor in gentrified places. The BURSEE framework represents a synthesis of theories, concepts, and prior research, viewed through the lens specified theories. Urban regeneration initiatives are proposed to adhere to this framework as a guideline for achieving inclusive and balanced regeneration while mitigating the adverse impacts of gentrification and displacement. It is imperative to establish measurable indicators for each priority areas to assess the attainment of BURSEE effectively.

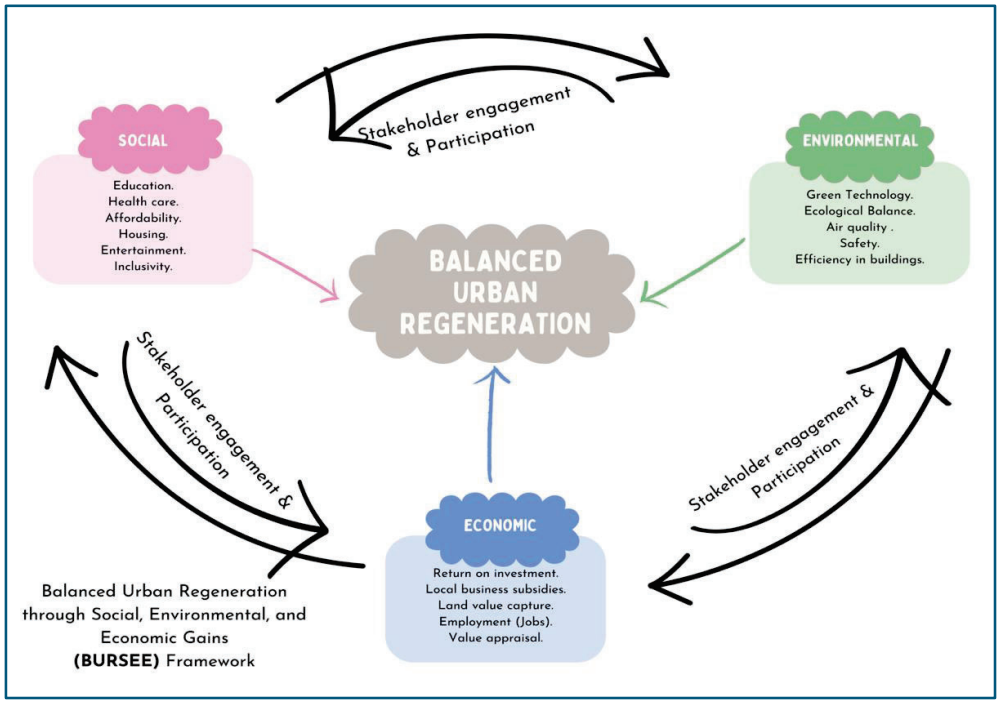


Figure 1*:* BURSEE Framework
Source: Own Compilation

4.3.1 Social gains

Drawing from the theory of social impact investment theory, measuring social gains is often regarded as quixotic and subjective, yet it constitutes a critical aspect of fostering sustainability within societies. The BURSEE framework advocates for the establishment of social gains as one of the objectives prior to the commencement of urban regeneration initiatives. This necessitates collaborative deliberation with members of the community residing in the targeted neighborhood earmarked for regeneration. The participatory process encompasses various social dimensions, encompassing educational provisions, housing affordability, recreational amenities, and community enhancement. Through these consultative endeavors, specific social benchmarks are set to ensure their attainment upon the culmination of the regeneration endeavor.

4.3.2 Environmental gains

Environmental issues have garnered significant attention in today's society, largely due to the adverse effects of unsustainable development practices. Urban regeneration efforts must consider the detrimental impact of environmental injustices on marginalised communities. The BURSEE framework recommends establishing measurable targets, encompassing areas such as green technology, ecological equilibrium, air quality, safety measures, devising effective sanitation strategies, and other relevant environmental factors. By integrating these elements into urban renewal initiatives, communities can strive towards sustainable development while mitigating environmental inequalities.

4.3.3 Economic gains

Urban regeneration initiatives have historically prioritised economic benefits, often leading to the creation of exclusionary geographies, gentrification, and displacement. While economic considerations are integral to urban renewal, they should not overshadow environmental and social objectives. It is crucial to prioritise all three dimensions equally. The BURSEE framework advocates for establishing clear and measurable economic targets prior to program implementation. These targets encompass various aspects such as job creation, real estate value appreciation, developer profits, support for small businesses, and other relevant economic factors. By setting specific goals in these areas, urban renewal efforts can ensure a more holistic approach that addresses the diverse needs of communities while fostering economic growth in a sustainable and equitable manner.

4.3.4 The environment for future generations

By ensuring that economic, social, and environmental considerations are equally prioritised and integrated into urban renewal strategies, cities can move closer to achieving truly inclusive and sustainable urban development. This holistic approach fosters resilient communities, promotes equitable access to resources and opportunities, and cultivates environments where people can live, work, and thrive in harmony with their surroundings.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Through the BURSEE framework proposed in this paper as shown in Figure 1, the balanced urban regeneration (BUR) is achieved when all three targets – i.e. economic, social and environmental gains are met. Through this framework, a balanced urban regeneration that is sustainable, free of exclusion, gentrification & displacement can be achieved.

Through the implementation of the BURSEE framework, cities can work towards creating thriving urban environments that prioritise the well-being of all residents while safeguarding the environment for future generations. By ensuring that economic, social, and environmental considerations are equally prioritised and integrated into urban renewal strategies, cities can move closer to achieving truly inclusive and sustainable urban development. This holistic approach fosters resilient communities, promotes equitable access to resources and opportunities, and cultivates environments where people can live, work, and thrive in harmony with their surroundings.

5.1 Contribution of the study

This paper contributes to the development of sustainable urban regeneration strategies that enhance inclusivity and prevent the harmful effects of gentrification and displacement in urban areas and addresses a significant gap in the existing literature concerning urban regeneration programs, particularly in the realm of preventing the adverse effects of gentrification and displacement. It will also provide valuable guidance for policymakers, governmental bodies, and real estate developers in achieving a balanced approach to urban regeneration that safeguards against detrimental impacts.

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Disclosure Statement

This paper is part of the PhD study of Mr Faranani Gethe at the University of the Witwatersrand who is studying towards a Doctor of Philosophy in Real Estate.

Notes on Contributors

Faranani Gethe holds an MSc degree in real estate and PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand. His research interests include Infrastructure funding & development, urban regeneration, sustainable cities, building development. Dr Prisca Simbanegavi is a Senior Lecturer in Real Estate at the University of the Witwatersrand. She has built competencies around housing, urban economics and real estate market research among others.

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