

Kliptown

Kliptown is a unique South African habitat. It is a town and not a township. In 1903, the two townships located in the heart of Kliptown, Klipriviersoog Estate and Race Course were proclaimed. Along with Alexandra in the same year, black people could own properties in this peri-urban settlement 22 kms south west of Johannesburg. There are no formal freehold townships on the outskirts of Johannesburg mainly unclear but it did coincide with the outbreak of bubonic plague in Coolie and Native locations in Newtown and the relocation of people to the Klipspruit farm (later Pimville) adjacent to Kliptown. Kliptown expanded organically from the 30s when migrants moved to Johannesburg to find employment. Some residents of inner suburbs like Doornfontein also moved to Kliptown to get bigger properties in this attractive peri-urban villages surrounded by white-owned farms. The commercial area developed in parallel with the residential expansion. Municipal documents report the creation of an Asiatic bazaar in the early days of Kliptown. Private developers started building housing to accommodate an ever-increasing migrant population. Private speculative rental housing was built without any building permit and control and deteriorated more rapidly than owner-built houses. When the Nationalist party came to power in 1948 Kliptown had become a cosmopolitan town inhabited by Coloureds, Indians, Chinese, Africans and White people. Pimville village, consisting of self-built houses, was growing north of Kliptown. On the other bank of Klipriver, a landowner Mr Albertyn had started slash farming. Shanties also spread to the eastern side of the Klipriver in a place called Blikkiersdorp (Kliptown north). The South Western Townships (Soweto) initial nucleus was a redevelopment program in Klipspruit/Pimville. This soon expanded. Matchbox houses and apartheid town planning developed and surrounded the little town of Kliptown. Until 1990 Kliptown was located outside Johannesburg municipal area and the apartheid laws and regulations were not strictly applied there. Kliptown was administered by the Peri-Urban Health Board. Lasting fame came in June 1955 when Kliptown became the home of the Freedom Charter. About 3000 delegates gathered there to adopt this manifesto of the people's aspirations against racial hatred and discrimination. Kliptown was (and largely remains) a community with a spirit: much like Sophiatown, District Six or Feetas (Vrededorp). Although not demolished there was probably a silent wish that Kliptown, a place that did not fit within the urban apartheid scheme and where all races lived together, would die. In the late 1950s properties were expropriated and Kliptown rezoned as a 'white area' in the 1957. Later Nancefield a white area of small holdings and farms was declared 'coloured' and later developed as Eldorado Park. Kliptown originally stretched from the Old Potchefstroom Road in the North to the Morokaby-pass in the South. Some sections of Kliptown such as "Shit No

More", "No Man's Friend", "Dikatole", "Vaarkejaard", "Paddavlei" were demolished by the previous regime, under the Slums Act and to make place for Eldorado Park's extensions.

In the late 80s, as new extensions of Eldorado Park (9 and 10) were built in its southern part Kiptown's territory shrank. Johannesburg City Council then designed a new layout plan, fortunately only partly implemented. However this layout is still the based document used by consultants. If applied today it would lead to the total demolition of old houses as well as people-driven projects such as the Children's Centre, Afrika Park, the Butchery Movie House. Despite incentives and forced relocations, Kiptown has survived. After the first democratic elections, there were great expectations among Kiptonians that given its historical significance and determined survival the town would become a priority area for development and upgrading. On paper this seemed to be the case. Numerous plans and studies for a very ambitious redevelopment program were reproduced. But Kiptown's redevelopment proved to be too ambitious and costly for a bankrupted metropolitan council which has only provided free emergency services in 1995 such as refuse skips, portable toilets and communal standpipes. In 2000, just before the second local elections, a poll mast (streetlights) were installed. Moreover, the approach to Kiptown's redevelopment has been piecemeal and uncoordinated. There has been an endless succession of project managers, endless non-delivery.

But since the mid-80s shack settlements never stopped expanding. Over three years from 1993 to 1995, Mandela Square grew from a dozen shacks to about 650 structures. Kiptown has reached a saturation point with Charter Square, Angola, Johnson's Stop Chris Hani, Mandela Square, Valentine's Valley and Winnie Camp informal settlements. Most are extremely dense and located in areas unsuitable for human settlement (floodplain, sinkhole, former coal yard). In situ upgrading is therefore neither desirable nor feasible. Only Mandela Square which resulted from an invasion of land that had been already laid out and serviced to accommodate another extension of Eldorado Park and is often called 'the suburb of Kiptown' could in part be upgraded because of its bigger and better laid-out plots.

The total population of Kiptown is approximately 36,306 inhabitants of whom around 90% live in shacks with the older (and lifetime) residents occupying houses built between 1920 and 1960 only accounting for 10%.

Mayibuyes subsidies for the creation of 3000 serviced sites were approved in 2001. Land development and relocation of homeless families will start soon in the northern part of Kiptown. The project manager appointed by Johannesburg Unicity, Housing and Development (HAD) will develop a vacant piece of land, a buffer strip located between Pimville (Soweto) and Kiptown. In later phases the housing program will also include rental housing units financed through institutional subsidies.

Urban regeneration

Most South African developers lack know-how and skills for working in habitats like Kiptown whose residents aspire for something other than greenfield housing development with rows of RDP houses on serviced sites. They want sites with historical value and old houses to be retained and upgraded. It is crucial to respect this social fabric and to conserve some of Kiptown's heritage. New approaches combining technical and social aspects in urban regeneration places Kiptown in a new generation of projects more complex than urban intervention done so far in South Africa. The project calls for more than mere greenfield development or conventional informal settlement intervention/reduction of precarious housing. The developers will have to adopt a totally different approach from orthodox delivery of standardised and uniform units on peripheral land. They will have to deal with real rather than virtual inhabitants and through facilitation of self-started improvements and commitment to community development, release inherent potentials to resurrect a vibrant African town.

Such urban renewal or regeneration coincides with new priorities presented in the 2001 draft housing strategy:

"Emphasis must gradually shift to the redevelopment of existing residential settlements"

"Community participation is regarded as a prerequisite to the successful upgrading of informal settlements".

Housing specialists and the Department of Housing itself acknowledge the earlier development defects:

"The living environments being created through the housing programme continue to be mono-functional, poorly located, lacking in social infrastructure and of low environment quality."

"[The current housing programme has resulted in] development of new residential neighbourhoods which are of a poor quality. [...] Missed opportunities in new mono-functional "dormitory towns" which are peripherally located, contribute to urban sprawl and badly designed..."

In 1994, The Housing White Paper gives its vision of "viable, socially and economically integrated communities, situated in areas allowing convenient access to economic opportunities as well as health, education and social amenities".

Despite its deteriorated status Kiptown has remained an integrated and cosmopolitan community whose wherever residents have convenient access to job opportunities, transport, shops and social amenities. Although it lacks basic infrastructure, many residents perceive it as "our town". If Kiptown may have largely remained invisible on the map and never given a legal existence out with its many shops and formal retail outlets along Union, Bridge and Beacon Streets, a permanent open market, workshops and warehouses, a police station, a court of law, a movie house, a post office, some informal taxi

ranks, an active social life, a rich heritage, history, a river, it qualifies as “our town”.

Urban renewal is defined as

A process in which the obsolete fabric of an urban area is restored, renovated and improved in order to meet contemporary needs or standards. In most cases an attempt is made to retain its original external character, but if this is impossible, a certain amount of redevelopment may be included.

Redevelopment involves the total destruction of all or part of the obsolete fabric before the work of new building, creation of open spaces, possibly new roads, etc. begins. (Longman Dictionary of Geography)

The focus of Kiptown’s regeneration should be to retain its original character and improve at least the old houses – estimated via a recent technical evaluation to number less than 30 houses in the southern section of Kiptown (South of Union Road).

Kiptown has been selected as the eleventh project by the Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) acting as the overall project manager for Kiptown’s project. The Gauteng Premier B. Shiloh has also indicated that Kiptown will receive financial support from the Province through its Blue Q programme. All ingredients are therefore in place to take the project forward and to improve previous practices of urban regeneration.

Apart from political will and commitment, availability of financial resources and appointment of qualified implementing and committed agents (JDA and Housing and Development, HAD), Kiptown’s main qualification for successful implementation of urban renewal is that some residents “tired of living half a life” have already initiated action as development catalysts, carrying out several innovative projects aimed at community mobilisation and at informing all stakeholders about grass roots’ expectations and strategies. They have created the Kiptown Our Town Trust. Unlike the common ‘community participation’ trend which is that local leadership or civic structures quickly take control, acting as gatekeepers/brokers, this Trust reflects and represents actual community aspirations and can play a crucial role.

Contributions to broader academic and action research

- Urban regeneration and renewal of existing settlements is a new and mainly unknown field in South Africa. Urban intervention has so far been trapped in paradigms (mass delivery of standardised housing through a market-driven/developer approach or community self-help housing via the People’s Housing Process) which have obscured the need for interventions specifically tailored to urban regeneration. Tools and implementing agents have to be created to implement a new generation of projects that will deal with existing neighbourhoods and towns. The Kiptown project can learn from Cato Manor, Oukasi and Tamboville experiences. It can also inform and influence current or future projects in Alexandra, Marabastad (Tshwane) and Fingo Village (Grahamstown).

- Townships such as Soweto are evidence of the 'crime against urbanity' that was committed under apartheid and continued via post-apartheid -1994 monofunctional, standardised housing developments. Without any major constraints from the provincial and local authorities Kiptown evolved organically and as a result, is a multifunctional, cosmopolitan town although dilapidated and mainly informal. Its vibrant commercial node provides job opportunities and access to a wider range of shops within walking distance of any section of the town. Despite poor levels of services as well as social problems, residents want to remain in Kiptown -because "cost of living is cheap", "shops are nearby and affordable" and "the train station and taxi ranks are within walking distance". Kiptown achieves what RDP schemes have failed to produce because their locational disadvantages are replacing considerable strain on household economies.
- Urban regeneration where developers work with real inhabitants and not virtual beneficiaries as with RDP greenfield projects requires understanding and knowledge of grass roots' residential strategies and expectations. Private developers have not had to set up such a 'social accompaniment' component aimed at producing relevant data on inhabitants and their housing conditions, nor to inform households or refer to communities before and during project implementation. In a regeneration project, building diagnostic analysis or technical evaluation of the old housing stock, gathering oral histories and conducting household surveys become essential components.
- The poor track record of projects in which 'community participation' equals some buy-in by civics suggests that involving community development catalysts and social entrepreneurs such as those who emerged in Kiptown in partnerships with institutional development agencies would be a useful innovation.