

Smart cities promote best practice in urban sustainability

According to Carshif Talip, expertise leader, Urban Planning and Land Infrastructure at Zutari, a 'smart city' is much more than a city that is digitally enabled and brimming with technology. It is a city that leverages innovation to achieve its desired outcomes, Talip says, and here innovation does not necessarily mean only technology.



Carshif Talip, expertise leader, Urban Planning and Land Infrastructure at Zutari

“A smart city is a city where opportunity, amenity, safety, resilience, inclusivity and prosperity are imperatives, and innovation across financing, design, construction, operations and governance is embraced by all stakeholders to achieve these imperatives,” says Talip.

President Cyril Ramaphosa announced in his State of the Nation Address on 11 February that the masterplan for the proposed Lanseria Smart City had been completed in November last year and is now available for public comment. The project is a joint initiative of the Presidency, the Office of the Gauteng Premier, Tshwane, Johannesburg and Mogale.

Smart cities and sustainability

The fact that innovation is such an integral part of smart cities makes for a natural fit between smart cities and sustainability, according to Talip. The emphasis on digital platforms also enables data collection, and the availability of large data sets is one of the first steps towards optimisation. “While there are benefits in chasing low-hanging fruit, I believe that a more holistic approach is the more appropriate first step.”

Talip asserts it goes without saying that proper planning is the answer to rapid urbanisation, inadequate infrastructure and polarised development. What is equally important is an integrated approach, as with the Lanseria Smart City. “A siloed approach, whether that be across the various spheres of government, the private and public sectors or even within a municipal entity itself, needs to be eliminated if we are to be successful,” urges Talip.

Each stakeholder needs to have their role and contribution clearly defined and have the necessary resources to deliver. Finally, a measure of agility and fluidity needs to be built in, he says.



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16 Mar 2021



Adaptable to change

“Planning, in essence, is designing a path based on a predicted future. If that future changes, and one just has to look at how unpredictable 2020 was due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the plan needs to be sufficiently adaptable to respond to change,” stresses Talip.

In terms of the impact of Covid-19 on future urban planning requirements, one positive outcome has been that flexible working arrangements are now possible, he notes: “The need for large swathes of office space will certainly be challenged, and tenants will demand more flexible arrangements from their landlords.” While there will always be a brick-and-mortar component to retail, there is certainly a move towards online retail, says Talip. These two phenomena could challenge planning concepts like centralising commercial areas, and even the concept of what a CBD looks like.

“This might have a profound impact on what cities look like in the future,” argues Talip.



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Leona Mentz 16 Feb 2021



Supply chain disruption

Another more subtle impact of Covid-19 has been the disruption of global supply chains. What will be interesting to see in the long term is if governments around the world – who anticipate more severe pandemics in future – shift towards self-reliance rather than global imports, he says.

Therefore, governments might consider reigniting primary and secondary economic sectors such as mining, agriculture and manufacturing. “Should this happen, we could expect shifts in urban migration that could impact planning requirements,” predicts Talip.