

Determinants of Urban Resilience: an exploration of functional response diversity in a formalising settlement in the City of Tshwane, South Africa

Abstract

Urban centres in the developing world are experiencing massive settlement growth often in the form of informal settlements with their concomitant informal economies. South Africa is facing similar trends, and the City of Tshwane is no exception. Apart from facing poor living standards and increasing inequalities in service delivery, these urban centres are also vulnerable to global and local economic instability. Improving the resilience of these settlements is one of the main challenges in the process of their upgrading and formalisation according to national and international development goals. This paper explores one of the determinants of urban resilience which is the response diversity in a formalising settlement in the City of Tshwane with specific reference to the function of retail activity provided in these areas. The diversity of responses to this function ranges from, (depending on the scale of operation) an informal trader to a large shopping centre. This paper further examines how the formalising settlement in terms of economic activity responds to the function of retail. This includes the role of the informal sector in the process of adapting to the formalising process. The informal economy is an important role player in South African cities and other developing countries. However, it is often disparaged as a defect in the system which poses a threat to the formal economy and which must therefore be suppressed, if not eradicated. This paper argues that the informal economy plays a vital role in the resilience of human settlements, especially in the face of poverty, unemployment and inequitable access to social services. This will be done by examining various case studies of shopping centre establishments in formalising settlements and field observations. The paper concludes with a model that places the different responses to the function of commerce on a panarchy within the context of a formalising settlement based on certain characteristics. This model can be used as a tool to look at the interdependencies of entire functional groupings within the context of urban resilience.

Keywords: formalising settlements, urban resilience, response diversity, panarchy