

# The threat of slow changing disturbances to the resilience of African cities

Edna Maria Peres, PhD Candidate<sup>1</sup> Chrisna du Plessis, PhD<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Construction Economics, University of Pretoria, South Africa, edna.m.peres@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Department of Construction Economics, University of Pretoria, South Africa, chrisna.duplessis@up.ac.za

## Abstract

Within rapidly urbanising South African cities, understanding the dynamics of change and the rate at which change occurs can be used to manage or regenerate parts of the urban system, and may provide effective tools for planning and monitoring 'resilient' development. A 'resilience' understanding may assist local authorities to transition toward cities that are more adaptive toward disasters, hazards and threats within flexible built environments. While most research conducted on the subject of urban resilience tackles issues relating to short-term disasters (pulse disturbances) like flooding, earthquakes, or terrorism, this paper focuses on the relationships between the more persistent issues or slow variables that occur over long periods of time (press disturbances). Examples explored within this paper include natural disasters, rapid urbanisation and urban poverty, environmental degradation, health and safety, crime, informal settlements, and lastly, policy implementation.

While change relating to press disturbances like informality, environmental degradation and urban poverty impacts all countries to some extent, the assumption is that Africa is most at risk since it is experiencing high rates of urbanisation within the context of pervasive poverty and inequality. These city environments may also not have the adaptive capacity to leverage these changes or steer their socio-economic and environmental systems beyond survivalist conditions. This paper tackles these topics from the perspective of an informal settlement called Plastic View in the City of Tshwane, South Africa – a country which has yet to regenerate its cities into integrated environments. It comprises of a desktop study of articles in the press to build an understanding of press disturbances affecting the focal system of Plastic View and their relationships and dynamics. The paper concludes with a motivation toward building a strategy for policy and housing management in the City of Tshwane that incorporates principles of resilience like adaptability, diversity and the acceptance of change as an important component for cities.

**Keywords:** Ecological resilience, Press disturbances, Slow Change, South Africa, Urban resilience.

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